

English 180, Second Place; Professor, Dr. Magdelyn Helwig

Hardship & Triumph

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“Hurry up, we don’t have all day, pick it up fat ass.” One would never think that a teacher would be so cruel to one of her students, but life can be cruel. Learning to read and write is an essential component of the education system, and this begins on the very first day of school. Some do not grasp the concept right away, of course, and for some it is easier than others. My story is one of embarrassment and affection, but we’ll get to that later.

I would have to say that I finally forced myself to learn how to read well in the second grade. During this time I had a bit of a weight problem and stuttered every other word while reading aloud. Obviously, any second grader would be mortified if they were being made fun of for their ability, or lack thereof, to read. One would think that the students would be harsh, but this is where they would be wrong. In my very unique situation it was my teacher, yes my teacher, who criticized my reading. Mrs. Brown was so cruel and often had me in tears, always making comments about my weight and intelligence. A shocking example of one of her many outbursts toward me was on the day we were learning measurements. We had to jump as far as we could and measure the distance, and of course with me being overweight my jump was considerably shorter than everyone else’s. Mrs. Brown deemed this unacceptable and kept making me jump even after the whole class had gone on break. How she never got fired is beyond me, but eventually it got to a point where I was tired of the insults and wanted to make a change.

Surprisingly, all of her comments toward me actually made me want to better myself. I would go home and practice reading every day. I remember specifically getting invested into a

series called *Cirque du Soleil*. Any chance I got I would be reading it. It reminds me of how Malcolm X would sit and read into the late hours of the night when he should have been sleeping. Slowly but surely I was making progress with my reading, and it showed. Now and then Mrs. Brown would still make her remarks toward me, but I didn't let that get to my head anymore. I would go home and do what I had been doing for weeks and just read. Eventually, her comments started to dwindle, and I felt like I actually learned how to read at an acceptable level.

Obviously, this was a somewhat traumatic experience, because who actually remembers anything from the second grade? In the long run, her insults actually helped me. I would not go as far as actually thanking her for her services as a teacher because the situation clearly could have been handled differently, but that one experience actually pushed me to be the skilled reader that I am today. I do not use this skill for pleasure anymore, though, but honestly I do not believe a majority of my generation does either. If I do have to read or speak to an audience, though, I have no problem being the first one up to the podium.

When it comes to my journey of learning to write, eighth grade is where it all started. I was a very impressionable eighth grader going through puberty. I had one of the prettiest teachers in the school, Ms. Moline, who had a gorgeous face and a sweet personality. It did not help that every time she bent down in front of me I was able to see her tramp stamp and thong right in my face. For my age at the time that was an awe-inspiring combination, and I was definitely inspired. I was not the strongest writer at the time, and in fact I did not enjoy writing papers at all.

I was determined to master the art of writing papers, and my goal was to write a paper that was so good Ms. Moline would come running straight into my arms. With every paper came

slight improvement, and I would always listen very carefully to any comments she had about my writing. My objective was to be able to finally write the perfect paper without any negative feedback, and the only way I was able to accomplish this was by learning from my mistakes. I took every criticism very seriously and built off of that. Every paper got increasingly better, but I still never got that perfect piece of work back. My writing had improved tenfold, but I started to lose hope on ever being able to write the perfect paper. I kept trying, but had no luck. One day I decided to man up and go to Ms. Moline myself for a tutoring session to reach what I had been striving for the whole year. I do not exactly remember what happened on that fateful day, but it undeniably helped me in what I was trying to achieve. I finally got back the paper that I had been working on since meeting with her. I did not see any feedback on the first page, and at that point I did not know what to expect. I turned the page and my heart dropped: what I saw was a paragraph of red ink at the end of my essay. I could not bear to read what Ms. Moline had to say, thinking it would be something negative. As soon as my eyes reached the bottom of the page, I finally saw the fabled “100%.” She had nothing but positive things to say, and for once I was actually proud of my writing. I was not sure what was coming my way next, and I did not know what to expect Ms. Moline to do, but her telling me “good job” was all the satisfaction I needed.

That is my story of hardship and triumph, how I finally grasped the concept of literacy, and the voyage I faced to make reading and writing second nature to me. Thank those two women, because without them you would not be reading this work of art before your eyes.