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Writing: Confidence of Your Own Creation

I watched the clock as the big hand slowly ticked away the seconds – tick, tick, tick, tick. The last moments felt like an eternity, but then finally, FINALLY, it was time. The part of every day that I most looked forward to. I pulled out my worn, bulging notebook, careful to keep the loose pages from spilling all over the floor, as Ms. Gardner wrote our daily prompt on the white board. The groans of my classmates sounded in perfect harmony with the squeal of Ms. Gardner’s pen, both sounds seeming to me to be a backup to the chorus of elation going on in my heart.

“Ok, class, take out your notebooks. Today I want you to write about a place in the world that you’d love to visit.”

That prompt was perfect! It would fit right in with the story I had been working on all year. Unlike my classmates, who started anew each day with the fresh prompt, I was working on a masterpiece. MY *Little Women*, MY *Moby Dick*, MY *10,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. I wanted to be a writer, craved the opportunity to put my words on the page and have something miraculous take place. I wanted to be the author that impacted the way someone thought or acted, the way so many authors had impacted me.

Robby, the blonde roughish boy who sat next to me in the left wing of the U-shaped desk pattern, snickered as I climbed under my desk and Ms. Gardner turned on “Harp by the Sea.” I hardly noticed him, though. I had writing to do!

My mom taught me and Alyssa, my twin sister, to read when we were three years old, and we learned to write shortly afterward. When we finally started kindergarten, the time Mrs. Costello allotted for writing was more boring than watching paint dry. Mrs. Costello – my young, auburn-haired teacher, newly graduated and in her first classroom – soon realized how bored we were, and allowed me and Alyssa to use the table at the back of the room, normally used by parents who volunteered to come in and provide extra help to struggling students, to create our own little books. Every day at 9:00, I pulled my plastic yellow chair up to crescent-shaped table, my chair legs scraping against the industrial carpet. I cut construction paper into shapes, then cut computer paper to fit inside and create my own, specially-shaped books.

I wrote about dragons and knights inside books shaped like castles and about butterflies and fairies inside books shaped like butterflies. I looked at what I created every day and felt like had accomplished the world, especially when I saw that my classmates were still learning something that I knew I was excelling at. I took my books home every day proud of what I had done, feeling like I could do anything.

Mrs. Carter was a small, mid-30s woman who was the quintessential teacher – she wore dresses and cardigans, had shoulder-length light brown hair, and her voice was quiet, sweet, and still managed to command the attention of all thirty-two students in her classroom. She was my fourth grade teacher, and she taught me more about writing and reading than any other teacher I had before or after. The desks were in a u-shaped formation facing the whiteboard. At the back of the room there were bookshelves teeming with works of every kind. One side of the room

was covered by a sink, a table with the class pet, and cleaning supplies. The other side of the room was set up as a writing lab. There were folders for each student for each stage of the writing process – pre-writing, first draft, second draft, peer review, teacher edit, and final draft. I wrote often and about everything. I lived in my own imagination and tried to make my daydreams live outside of my head, putting my black BIC Cristal ballpoint pen to paper every chance I could. Once I was finished with one of the stages of writing I would staple that stage’s “Writing Checklist”, the feedback forms Mrs. Carter used to review and critique our work, to my writing and place it in the appropriate stage’s folder. Mrs. Carter would have each writing returned to me within a day or two, and I would begin the next stage.

While I was in Mrs. Carter’s class, my best friend got really sick. His name was Kyle. He was blonde, athletic, and popular. He was one of the few guys that didn’t mind having a girl join them for recess games of football and basketball, and was one of my few friends who also supported me in improving my writing and reading. We would read the same books and talk about them, and we would often have the other read our stories before we turned them in to Mrs. Carter’s folders. I did not understand what was happening at the time. All I knew was how I felt. The loss, the confusion, the feeling that the God I prayed to every night must be ignoring me.

I went to see him in the hospital, freshly-baked cookies in hand. They were oatmeal chocolate chip, and I had spent the entire afternoon baking them. The plate was warm in my hand, the Saran Wrap was foggy from the steam rising from the cookies. My mom and I walked up to the desk in the entrance to find out which room Kyle was in, only to find he was no longer there. This was the first time I remember feeling that incredible sense of loss, the hole in my core where a friend used to be.

I didn't process losing my friend very well. I became morose, unresponsive, and turned into myself even more. I was more of a recluse than ever. The kids in my class thought I was even weirder, and without my best friend and champion, I was no longer welcome to play sports with the boys. I had never gotten along well with the girls – I had no interest in flitting around the playground talking about clothes or in jump roping – so I found myself even more alone and unsure of myself than ever. Luckily, I still had my pen and my paper. I wrote more than ever. I filled page after page with stories of the boy and girl knights who lived forever and fought dragons together. I wrote of the boy and girl basketball players who could beat teams with twice as many players who were more than double the boy's and girl's size. Everything I wrote was about the boy and the girl who were best friends who conquered everything they faced together, and it was through those stories that I finally found my peace.

I lay under my desk, listening to the harp weaving melodies through the air, with waves crashing in the distance. I wrote line after line of words about Jamie, the strong female soldier who was alone responsible for the safety of the world. I smiled as I wove the daily prompt into my almost 97-page story, hoping beyond hope that Ms. Gardner would let us go past the 20 minutes we usually had so that I could reach the seemingly elusive 100-page mark.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Ronny and Keith whispering, pointing, and chuckling. I smiled even broader, snickering to an inside joke of my own, as I wrote about how Jamie outfoxed the two oafish male guards that were supposed to be arresting her. Writing had provided me an outlet for my imagination, a safe place to explore my thoughts and feelings, and had given me a confidence I did not see in the other kids my age, especially not the other girls. No matter what those boys did or thought of me, I had gone through worse, and knew I had the strength to get through the rest.