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Literacy Narrative

Unlike most kids, I eagerly anticipated my bedtime routine. My dad and I would pile onto my tiny, twin-size mattress and open that night's book. We took turns reading to each other. My dad would help me navigate the bigger, complex words, and I would help him read the dialogue, creating vibrant voices to bring each character to life. Our reading sessions took me into landscapes of distant fantasy worlds filled with fairies and talking animals. When my dad read aloud, I loved hearing the way the words flowed, smooth and lyrical, picking me up and whisking me away in the breeze of rich and delicious language. My paternal grandmother was an elementary English teacher, so nightly reading was a tradition that my dad grew up with as well. My dad kept an old cardboard box filled with copies of his favorite childhood books. The worn covers and cracked spines enchanted me, and I would rummage through them and select my next read. The creases in the pages were proof of my dad's childhood and our shared passion for reading. My grandma also supported our nighttime reading ritual by gifting me crisp new books every Christmas. When my family would go down and visit her house, she would pack snacks and take me to the library for the day. Nana and I would roam through the shelves for hours and devour books and her homemade cookies on the multicolored carpet of the kids section. My family's support and encouragement in my reading habits as a child not only allowed me to develop my literacy skills, but also brought us closer together. My dad and I still reflect affectionately on our nightly reading and reminisce on old stories we read together.

The books my dad and I read that impacted me the most were the *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis. I felt like I was entering another reality. The words on the pages were like Lucy's wardrobe doors, revealing a magical world on the other side. Books became a place of refuge for me, and I took them everywhere. I was always the kid reading on the swingset, or sneaking glances at a book under the dinner table. I began to read increasingly challenging books throughout school and became obsessed with figuring out the more sophisticated words and decoding the intricacies of language. Books were like a puzzle in which I could piece the words together to create a vivid image.

However, by highschool, my excitement for reading waned the more I was assigned to read. I began to dread my freshman English class, and instead expressed myself in my visual arts class. Being confined to the curriculum of uniform American classics caused me to love the freedom my art class provided me. I felt like I lost the magic I had once found within the pages of books, and became frustrated with words. I started to channel my creativity into my artwork. In my visual arts class, I discovered my favorite medium: watercolors. I loved how color and form, though wordless, could still tell a story. I was captivated by the way the colors spilled over each other and weaved themselves into a picture. I didn't yet know that words had the power to do that too.

In my senior year of highschool, I began to read again. I stayed in my comfort zone of contemporary fiction and classics, just reading whenever I had time. This summer, one of my friends shared her favorite poem with me: "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver. I remember being amazed at how strongly the poem made me feel. This poem mirrored the themes of love and compassion I had felt internally, but struggled to articulate before. It was incredible to find that someone else's writing could evoke the same depth of emotion I myself had felt before. It was then that I discovered my love for poetry.

After reading “Wild Geese,” I dove deeper into the world of poetry. I became ravenous for more, reading new poets and collections avidly, as if each verse held the key to unlock a new realm of expression. I admired how deliberate and intentional each stanza was structured, every punctuation mark carefully and particularly placed. Words acted as brushstrokes, painting feelings and curated human experiences onto the canvas of existence. Poetry reminded me of watercolors, words and colors harmoniously mixing and melding to create an art piece. Once again, I felt like a whole new world was revealed to me. How was it possible to find such a seamless blend between words and the wordless, a form of art that transcended its physical boundaries of rigid and angular letters? It was then I realized that literature is art.

This realization reignited a creative spark within me, prompting me to experiment with my own writing. Reading transformed from an act of consuming art into an act of creating it. I began to write my own poetry and short narratives about my life and thoughts. To me, each piece of poetry acted as a love letter, addressed to nature, my friends and family, and myself. Words became not just a vessel to express my emotions, but a way to connect and communicate with others. Poetry allows me to convey ideas and stories that I couldn’t articulate with spoken words. Writing became a healing process, a way to untangle the knot of emotions within me.

I recently read one of my new favorite books, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong. Vuong is physically everything I am not. He is an immigrant, a person of color, and a gay man. However, I still found a deep sense of connection to his stories and poems. The way he wrote about his relationships inspired me and I began to write more about my family and friends. I found a deep sense of belonging in his work. In the book, Vuong poses a question that struck a chord with me. He asks, “Is that what art is? To be touched thinking what we feel is ours when, in the end, it was someone else, in longing, who finds us?” This made me reflect on how art was a form of communication. A way to extend yourself to others and in

vulnerability, find connection. Reading work across a diverse spectrum of authors has enriched my perspective and deepened my empathic abilities. Because of this, I've grown into a more attentive and compassionate listener and love to learn from people. Through my own writing, answering prompts and probing deep into my internal creative spaces, I've been able to get to know myself better. We all hold valuable lessons within ourselves, and writing is helping me discover and share mine.

As Leonardo da Vinci once said, "poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen." Art, whether in the form of writing or painting, serves as a universal language that surpasses cultural and linguistic barriers. Creating art has been my most cherished practice, and now that writing is a part of it, I am able to find belonging and connection in words. I share my writing with my dad now, a continuation of our relationship through literature. On my literacy journey, I learned that the vibrancy of human experience could be woven into words. In turn, those words become artwork that exceeds the boundaries of the page, reaching the very depths of our souls and touching them with color.