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Reflection Essay – FINAL

My Mother's Voice

I can still remember the sound of my mother's voice as it carried into my bedroom from the hallway at night. All the lights in the house were out except for the bulb that hung low at the end of the hallway. This light was just outside of the bedroom that I shared with my two sisters and was adjacent to the door of my older brother. From that location, we could hear my mother's words projecting themselves right into our little ears. Mom had a way with words. She could make a story come to life. I don't know how she did it but to a young child, it was magical. It may have been the fact that she brought the voices to life. We could feel her losing herself in the story. She had us under her power, and we were quiet. For a rare moment in the day she had silence from all four of her children. Mom incorporated reading into a variety of my childhood activities, and it was these activities that taught me to love reading.

I do not know what stroke of brilliance led my mom to read to us each evening. I do know that we were young and had been full of mischief that summer. Youth and mischief were never ideal when what my young mother needed was just a few moments of peace and quiet. It may have been her desire for that peace and quiet that motivated her to read to us at night. I am sure it was this same desire that motivated her to teach us in so many clever ways. It was during this teaching that she created magic that still sparkles in my life today.

One way Mom incorporated reading into our lives was by giving us cooking lessons. These classes became a daily event at our house, and at least two hours of our days were devoted to eating. Each of us kids had a unique apron Mom had crafted out of discarded dish towels. A rather frilly ruffle had been sewn to the edges of mine, which met at the top and then wrapped around my waist in a perfect feminine bow in the back. We read the recipes together as we measured and stirred our potions. Words were turned into food as we worked alongside each other. There were very few rules that I remember having to follow during those cooking hours, but these three I recall clearly: We had to read along with mom. We had to participate. We had to be nice to each other.

We saw magic performed in that small kitchen. Flour, salt, sugar, milk and yeast were transformed into a gooey dough ball. I would roll out this ball, my six year-old hands covered by my mother's hands as she guided the rolling pin across the yeasty batter. The process would be repeated three more times with my siblings. Then the fun would begin. Mom would open up the cupboards and let our imaginations run wild. Empty cans became donut presses. Melon ballers became 'baby donut' makers. We would form little bears, cars, and heart shapes. Then, one by one, mom would drop our treasures into the hot oil, and we would witness magic once again. Little blobs of bear, cars and hearts became giant puffy pastries. The smell of frying dough, pungent and sweet, would fill the air. Thirty years later, the smell of yeasty bread in the bakery of the neighborhood grocery store brings back that magic all over again. The years fall away and I am six years old. I am in the kitchen with my mother crunching on the most adorable bear bun in the bunch.

Perhaps it was the need to get us children out of the house that drove my mother to our next reading adventure. We pulled out the red wagon from the back yard and would walk seven blocks to one of the most magical places of all. The library became a doorway to a new world for me. It was in the library that I met some of my dearest childhood "friends" as the characters in the books became very real and alive in my little mind. We spent hours listening to the librarian weave her spell of words as she read stories out loud. We spent even more hours choosing at least ten books each to bring home. The adventure continued as we loaded the forty books into the wagon and made the seven block journey back to our house. This journey had the very satisfying effect of wearing us out. We would come home and fall into our beds for a two-hour nap. My mother was very pleased with the magical effect that fresh air and exercise had on us. I know this because I was usually the first one to wake up. I would sneak out to the living room to find Mom completely immersed in a novel. She would look up, see me watching her, and a smile would creep across her face. I was her favorite, you know. "How was your nap, Emily?" she would ask. "It was okay," I would reply. "How was yours, Mom?" I would ask. "Just perfect!" was always her answer, even though we both knew that she had not napped. She had escaped into the pages of a book.

Nap time was followed by reading time, and our adventures continued. We would read to each other on the saggy couches in our living room. We would read to ourselves under a lamp at the desk in the hallway or under the orange chandelier that hung over the kitchen table. We

would act out our stories on the shag carpet in the bedroom or on the cold, hard concrete in the basement. We lived the magic of those moments. Words became action. These actions consumed my young mind, and I was captured in the spell that my mother would weave. She became the master weaver of words.

Years later I asked my mom how she came up with so many creative ways to teach us and keep us entertained during the summer. She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye and exclaimed “Emily, don’t you know I was just trying not to lose my mind? I had to figure out some way to keep you busy. You were all so noisy and full of energy! I had to find a way to bring some peace and quiet to my life.” Her coping mechanism was reading, but it taught me something very magical. Mom taught me how to escape into another world – and then managed to pull me back out with an increased desire to become a part of my own reality.

I grew up in a house where we were taught to use our imaginations in every activity in which we were engaged. It was through reading that my mom taught us to do this. She taught us the magic of the written word. She taught me to love reading. To this day, I have a love addiction with the written word. I love the way words can roll off my tongue like a song. I love the way words can paint a picture so vivid and powerful that I feel as if I am right there with the writer. I feel the gentle breeze on my cheek. I see the sunrise in all its glowing shades of red and orange. I am dancing in the rain as its pelting drops saturate my hair and clothes. I am twirling and laughing as I fall back in a meadow of wild flowers and overgrown grass. I am touching the gentle hand of a loved one as I hold the dear child who just took its last breath. We are sharing something real, the writer and I. My mother started that sharing. She made words come to life. She taught me how to feel the words. She breathed life into them. It began as my mother read to us in the hallway. It continued as she cleverly incorporated reading into all of our childhood activities. She read and she created magic.