



Unit 1: Reflective Literacy Narrative/Final Draft

English 3100

February 21st, 2012

My story begins as blank as the computer screen I was sitting in front of. The endless white vastness of a new Word document and daunting blinking cursor served as a wonderful metaphor for my emotionally empty mind. I was a freshman in high school and all that mattered to me were my friends and boys, naturally. Homework, especially poetry assignments were the low on the priority scale, to put nicely. *Strange*, I thought, and laughed a little remembering a time when I used to love to write. All of that bold ambition seemed to have escaped me and my creativity was failing me as I halfheartedly trudged through another assignment. My usual procrastination methods were robbing me of any creative thoughts that might have miraculously popped into my head—the staring blankly out the window, listening to music, & praying that anyone would call me were only serving the purpose of making what little time I had left to write go by faster than it should have for the lack of work I had to show for it. I started daydreaming to avoid the uncomfortable reality of what was ahead of me at school the next day. The nerve wracking fact that I was going to be standing in front of my classmates reading a poem about my feelings was making me want to crawl out of my own skin. Feelings? No, you do not talk about those, and especially not in front of 30 of your peers. That would just be the epitome of embarrassment. At least, those were the beliefs that I held fast to. I tried my hardest to go back to the time when words and sentences fascinated and inspired me. It had been so long since I had put any of my heart into something I created. Suddenly I slipped into a daydream, envisioned myself much younger, and tried to recreate a memory.

I was a precocious, yet quiet 6 year old and it was around this time that I discovered one of my favorite places in the world to visit—my grandparent's house. I grew up in a small family

as an only child with and parents who loved but neglected me, creatively speaking. Both very busy individuals, if I wanted fun, it was my responsibility to create it. Over the years, it was my grandmother took note of the creative side of me and helped me run with it. I pictured the times we would make up fictional stories to help me fall asleep. She would always start with a random story line off the top of her head and essentially build the setting. After a few lines she would stop and it would be my turn to add a few more lines. We would go back and forth for what felt like hours. I remember loving every second because, even after one of us had finished the last line, the story was never over—we would just add to it another day, and we never knew where it would go. I loved the ideas that popped into my head out of nowhere—the spontaneity of it all. For a second I lamented about how I missed the little kid I used to be when the words “think before you speak” meant nothing and no one judged you for it.

My thoughts drifted to remembering how books had to be literally pried out of my hands as a child. Christmas and birthday wish lists were comprised solely of them and I would usually finish in a few days. Once I started, I could not stop. I had to see what happened at the end as soon as I could, as if it were some sort of race. Then, I received my first journal and started attempting to write simple poetry. My rhymes were simple and a little too “perfect.” I knew what I liked in other’s writing, but such techniques were so above me that I had yet to master the art of imitation. Everything I wrote was as I was—childlike. I saw my world as uncomplicated as I perceived it to be. Then I found out that it wasn’t at all. I was sheltered and protected. At the time, I did not give a second thought to making up silly stories. I wrote about the world around me instead of the one around everyone else. When I began to grow, my writing followed suit.

It was all a whirlwind from those early experiences. I thought about winning a few Young Authors awards, being praised for reading a certain number of books in a week with

certificates, and even winning the school spelling bee in the third grade. All of this made me feel like I was worth something. I was far from athletic the way in which my friends were so I was relieved to find my niche, even if it was just being a book worm and cheesy creative writer. More than a relief however, was the sense of pride it gave me. My parents always gave special attention and praise to everything that I wrote and I could feel that they truly thought I was talented at something for the first time. I began accumulating stacks of notebooks with random phrases, poems, stories—anything you can think of. If I was upset or even just stressed, the first thing I did was reach for a pen and paper and it instantly calmed me. The more others took notice of my writing, the more I wanted to do it. Some of my works had been taped up in the school hallways for all of the students to see, but that never bothered me because as a child, I did not truly know what I was writing about. I had not experienced enough life to contribute something significant or profound. With that thought, my daydreaming shifted.

I am sitting in my grandparent's dining room with my grandfather, a man I absolutely adored. He always sat at the head of the table. Rarely did I ever see him relax anywhere else. I remember he loved playing solitaire for hours on end and he taught me how to play with a real deck of cards before it was "cool" to play on the computer. The cards, puffy from so much use, always smelled like him. He taught me how to shuffle those cards, the art of hilarious and effective sarcasm, and how to be captivated by someone's every word. He was my idol and the very foundation of our entire family. I hugged him, told him I loved him, and never saw him again one day. I was in the 6th grade. It was at this time in my life that I wrote my very first *meaningful* poem about getting to speak with him one last time and the things I would tell him. I was still very much writing with the innocence of a child, but I finally began to start a long journey of journalistic writing from this experience. I wasn't just making stories up anymore.

Something pulled me back to reality. I was again a high school freshman and, of course, “too cool” to keep burying myself in books. As everyone experiences at this age, it is all about the appearance of “cool” even if you have less-than-cool tendencies. I could play the part. I could go out with my friends on the weekends and engage in mindless chatter about gossip and pretend to be the girly-girl-boy-crazy teenager, and part of me was. But that wasn’t the biggest part of me. I had always been more than that and as best as I tried to hide it, it came out every once in a while just short enough for me to play off around my friends. It was at this time that I felt true challenge and struggle with my writing and it occurred in my first higher level English class. Though the passing of my Grandfather was now years prior, it was my only real loss in life thus far and as time passed, it began affecting me in subtle ways. I stopped writing completely because I stopped wanting to give in-depth thought about serious or hard life experiences. I mentally shut everything out when it came to feelings and emotions. I was never without a smile on my face no matter how I was really feeling, but I never really picked up a pen again to write about some of the things I was going through. So it began. I became the girl that sat in the back of the class dodging glances from teachers eagerly awaiting students to answer questions or give their opinions on something. I became protective of my thoughts and feelings which manifested its way into a fear of my own voice. I was a good student, rarely got into trouble, and all I wanted was to blend in with the rest of the apathetic freshman.

I was able to keep up my “too cool” façade and shirk out of doing assignments to the best of my ability until the day that begins my story and the poem that I was expected to present in class. I went home that night and gave a lot of thought as to what I would write about, and even though I knew the answer deep down, it was one that I fought with internally. I could take the easy way out and write about something neutral, just to get by with a passing grade. Or, I could

write about the one true defining moment in my life and let people into a very personal aspect of my life. A sense of blind bravery came over me and I aimlessly began to write another poem about the last real memory I shared with my grandfather. I closed my eyes and let everything out. Every detail, everything I remembered about that day, was now on paper for the first time. When I finished, I drew a huge breathe in and I remember feeling overwhelmingly at peace. I let this satisfaction distract me from the realization that I had not given any thought to my potential audience. All of the emotional relief I felt was quickly dissipated into intense, suffocating fear and panic. I honestly did not know how I was going to present what I had just written to an entire class. The thought of crying mid-way through reading in front of everyone was too much to handle. However, being that I had then ran out of time to write something else, I tried to tell myself over and over that it was not the end of the world, as I so thought.

On the way to school I had such anxiety that, for the first time in my academic career, I lied and told the teacher that I did not have the assignment done when I was called on. I could feel every set of eyes in that room judging me disapprovingly and at that moment I realized it was actually “un-cool” to not do an assignment. Something in my teacher’s face did not believe me and this added to me feeling mortified, but nevertheless I was instantly relieved. This charade went on for a few days as every student presented their poem and the more I realized that none of them were at all personal. I thought that, with a few more days, I might find some courage. Instead, it was more time I spent convincing myself that I could not go through with reading mine. It was then that the whole assignment became “stupid” and I loathed the teacher. It was, clearly, misplaced anger. Finally in true coward fashion, I slyly slipped my finished poem on her desk and ran out one day after class an entire week after it was due. I received my assignment back with a note attached but all I saw was the symbolic red “F” circled. Part of me expected

this, but at the same time that moment stayed with me because it was the moment I realized just how “afraid” of my own voice I had become. I was so distraught about the grade and my own feelings of shame that I could not have just toughened up and did the assignment like everyone else that I almost did not even see the note my teacher had left for me. After reading each word with one eye open for fear of being degraded and chastised, I came to find a paragraph of praise and the last line urging me to have the poem published in our school’s literary magazine of student works. If you have ever gotten yourself into trouble as a child and expected your parents to yell and scream, the moment that they do not is the one that actually makes you feel worse and it was the exact opposite of what I expected coming from my teacher. I felt as though I owed not only her something, but myself as well because of the way I let my fear push everything I had away—people around me and even my own thoughts. The next morning, I submitted my poem for publication with my name on it.