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Autobiography of my Reading and Language Development

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I was born and raised in Beloit, Wisconsin. My mother was a stay-at-home mom, and she used to read Dr. Seuss, Curious George, and Clifford books to my brother and me every night before going to bed. My brother and I were a year apart in age, but he stayed ahead of the game learning and experiencing everything I did as I did. Not long after, I remember going grocery shopping with my mother who was determined to get every edition of the featured Charlie Brown and Snoopy collection. The books she had to have found their way in to a garage sale at some point, but I believe she still has the rest. The next level of reading we had been exposed to was a collection of Value Tale books my mother had ordered by mail. The greatest part of reading these books was learning the importance of famous people such as the creativity of Thomas Edison and his talking dog, the determination of Helen Keller and her imagined leprechauns, the honesty of Confucius and his conscience, and others who would have been too hard to understand without fictitious stories that complement their attitudes and accomplishments. My teachers had probably been sick of seeing me use those as book reports, but I loved them anyways. My mother had just recently given me these books to read to my new daughter when she gets old enough.

In a school setting, I had never liked to read. I remember being placed around the table taking turns reading passages about stories I never cared about. Having little patience in following along with those students who couldn't read at my level, I had spent

most of my time day dreaming. On many occasions, the teacher had to tell me when it was my turn and where I needed to be.

When I was in second grade, my father's employer had assigned him to a ten month project to build a couple paper machines in Millinocket, Maine. The family had the exciting opportunity to go with and live up in the mountains on company expense. The day after we had arrived, my brother and I were disappointed to find ourselves already registered for school.

One of the most difficult adjustments we had to make was getting used to printing styles. When I turned in writing assignments, I was upset to find red marks crossing out the hooks and tails on my lowercase letters. The teacher accused me of being too cute with my writing, an accusation quite hurtful as a boy trying to protect his male reputation. My mother didn't waste any time in setting up an appointment to talk to our teachers. They learned to find out that the teaching styles of printing in the Midwest were very different than the ones on the east coast, so my mother then made phone calls to our school district in Beloit, having them mail out printing lessons that justified our writing behavior and introduced the teachers to some alternative concepts. Justified or not, my printing behavior had been forever changed because the other boys in the class wouldn't have understood. Had I been in older, I don't think the teachers would have cared about my writing, but they were expected to teach what they felt were good writing habits.

Adapting to accents in language never happened. The way in which people talked was as annoying as listening to the scraping of a chalkboard. I can still here the neighbors yell, "Cynthier, take this bucket of watta out with you and warsh the cah!" A's became R's, and R's became A's. I had introduced myself as John, but everyone called

me Jawn. My father used to tell me that our accent was more proper because one could compare it to professional news reporters.

When I returned to Wisconsin, I found myself behind in my abilities to read long paperback books. The teacher always selected books that were about horses, the depression, the Salem Witch trials, orphans and other boring and depressing subjects. I had faked many book reports in my days.

I had found myself reading again in my late high school years. I enjoyed the opportunity to break away from the stresses of every day life by engrossing in adventure fantasy novels such as Lord of the Rings, the Three Musketeers, the Swiss Family Robinson, King Arthur, and other series by Terry Brooks, and Terry Goodkind. I needed the excitement of fighting knights, wizards, flying dragons, evil sorcerers, etc. to keep my attention. I needed to expand my imagination beyond what could happen every day. The speed of my reading to this day is still very slow at times because I find it difficult to imagine scenes, sense smells, tastes, sounds, fears and textures when reading fast. The only time I have ever been able to place the speed of my reading into higher gear is as the story calls for haste of the characters or when taking an exam. When taking a reading exam, I have always felt under stress and sloppy in my work.

In college, my interest in reading newspapers increased. Working a nightshift all by myself at the local gas station had left me little to do other than relieve my curiosity of what had been going on in the world around me. Reading about current events had given me ammunition for discussions and debates with my customers about politics, and I have realized how important it is to read not only for one's self, but for the instruction of others as well.

Looking back throughout my life on the changes in my reading and language skills, I know that I have the ability to improve, and there are many more improvements to make. I know that I enjoy learning; and until college, I never thought I would enjoy teaching. My current goal is to increase my work discipline, avoid procrastination, improve my ability to locate and use materials, and be able to present the material I acquire to my students in affective stimulating ways.