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### Reading through time: A Literacy Narrative

As a child I loved books and reading. Perhaps that started when I was young, too young to remember my mom or dad holding me in their lap inside the yellow and white check rocking chair that once belonged to my great grandmother, sitting next to piles of picture books on the shelves in my childhood bedroom, the twilight peeking through the blinds on the window, my eyes drooping with sleepiness. We would read all kinds of books but my favorite two were by Sarah Bonynton. The corners are worn from little fingers holding the book over years and years. I have them not because I would need to read them (I have them memorized), but because they were the tactile treasures of my childhood.

I continued loving books as I grew a little older. I remember our dad taking me and my sister to the Cobb County Public Library. We would browse for hours on a cold Saturday among the stacks. The library made me feel a sense of security and coziness. When my dad would ask, “are you ready” our arms would be full of books. We would ask each other, “Did you get any *Cat Who* books for Mommy?” because we knew the cat mystery books by Lillian Jackson Braun were her favorites. By the end, our crinkly reusable shopping bag would be filled with *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*. It would be full of craft books from the nonfiction section which we felt so adult picking books from. It would be filled with gardening, landscaping, and knot tying books for my dad. Once we got home, we would put the piles of our books on the ottoman in our living room. We would sit and read on the blue and white diamond

rug. The wool was scratchy on our legs, so we would often spread out a quilt on the floor and drag a fleece blanket downstairs to crawl under and enjoy our books for hours. I would sometimes read a whole book in one sitting. Oftentimes, I would read different passages of a few books, flipping through the pictures. I would do whatever I wanted, with no constraints or expectations. I felt so much excitement and curiosity when leafing through the pile of books. Books were an inspiration, opportunity, and a source of ideas. They made me curious and creative. I think that I felt this way about books because they were my main source of media consumption as a child alongside watching cartoons on PBS Kids.

Once I got to elementary school, and got to the point where I was in second or third grade I was exposed to new types of media. I remember the first time that I checked out an audiobook from our school library. It was *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George. The audio book was not a cassette tape or a compact disk, but a little black and orange plastic block on a lanyard. I was delighted with the newness. The device was simple. There was a headphone jack, a play button, fast forward buttons and a little window which displayed the time stamp. I loved listening to that book over and over again. It transported me to a different world.

Among the delights of audio books, I was also met with literacy that I did not like in the least. In English class, we were given little writing assignments whether they be short books or poems. I enjoyed the story telling part of the process, and I still do. Writing down our stories on paper was not so bad either. The part that I didn't like came next: going to the computer lab. We would walk in a line down the hall to the basement floor of our school. There we would go to the sterile white room full of desktop computers which seemed huge to our little selves. We would stare into the expanse of the huge monitor. We would slowly be guided through the steps to open a word document. We would then slowly start to peck at the keys on the keyboard to spell out

our stories in a digitized format. I never understood this. Why, when I had spent so long writing and rewriting my story on pieces of paper, did my teacher make me turn around and write it on this stupid device that did not make any sense. A device where you had to search for letters on the keyboard which for some reason was not in alphabetical order. In the moment, I would have told you that it was easier for the others who were used to using computers, that I was bad at it, and that I did not understand why typing up our stories was important. Of course I could tell you now that it is very important to learn how to use computers because it is a translatable skill. I am even using my computer skills at this very moment, pouring my story into the computer screen at 54 words per minute.

Later, once I had mastered the art of touch typing I faced other challenges. I was frustrated by the superficial concerns of my peers, and I wanted to have real experiences and interact with real stories. I valued feeling and trying to understand the human condition. Books were a way to explore the human condition more. I wanted to feel some kind of spark in contrast to the sterile Catholic high school which I attended. The school where everyone wore the same outfit, where the walls were crisp white, where the patriarchy and institution were stifling. The school where everyone had the same ideas and did not question anything that anyone ever told them. I wanted to hear other people's stories and perspectives about the world so I questioned everything. I needed answers to everything. I consulted the books. The writings of JD Salinger taught me about the fragility of humanity, Oscar Wilde taught me about love and greed and society, the transcendentalists taught me about nature, and John Gardner and Shakespeare taught me about context, and paradigms. I wanted to soak all of their works up and to be exposed to another world. They provided me with an escape from the reality of the pandemic. At one point, I read Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows in one day- that is twenty-four hours. I would sit

during my online class meetings with my book on my desk just reading, and not really listening to class because I had done my homework and I understood what was going on, so I needed something else to distract me from my own boredom. This became a habit which I continued even once I came back to school in the form of pouring through my textbooks during lectures when I was bored. I would think to myself that technically I was paying attention because I was studying the correct subject matter.

I would like to think of books as my companion. I have always liked reading them, and for a while I would take them wherever I went. Books and storytelling provide a form of nostalgia for me. They have been reliable throughout my whole life. My beloved high school biology teacher once told me that books are the best friends that you can have. Books and writing- the ability to express myself and to connect with others have always been there for me. They felt- and feel like a safe place to turn to. They occupied me and taught me so many things. That is why I will always love books and reading.