Professor Danielle Carr

ENGL11000

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Library- Wild Jungle of Dreams

I grew up in a small southern Polish city, sharing a room with my eight year older brother, Rafal. Our father built us bunk beds to save some space so we could have a piano and desks in our room. My bunk bed was my magical, private space full of dreams. The ladder I had to climb to it, was covered in a tape in every single color of the rainbow. On the ceiling I had a six plastic stars that would shine during the night. I remember I couldn’t wait to go to sleep. During the weekdays my mother would come back home and see me peeking at her from my magical hideaway. I would scream “ Maminka (short from Mommy in Polish) I’m ready for a story!!!”. Even though she was tired and didn’t have a second to put the groceries away, she never said no to me. She would climb upstairs and tell me a different story every night. It was always a story about a little girl named Ewelinka. A smart and a brave girl which I wanted to become one day.

My mother, Violetta, never graduated college. After high school, she got married to my father, Marek, and shortly after they had my brother. She chose to become a librarian, because she loved to read. It was a great opportunity at that time and she enjoyed every day spent at her job. In my city, people go to the library not only to read but also to talk to someone about their lives due to their loneliness. My mother very quickly became a publicly known person, loved by everyone in our city. People would bring her apples from their garden, freshly made pierogies (traditional Polish dish) and baked goods in exchange for a good conversation and smile. She never turned a soul away even if it was a time to close her library branch. It would not be surprising if I told you that her passion is collecting different types of angels. She has a million of them, from drawings and paintings to toys and sculptures that are filling up our cozy home in Poland. Every year she sends me more to make my American home full of love and protection. To this day she is my idol and a huge inspiration. On top of our mother daughter relationship we have a strong friendship that is a really special bond.

When I was a little girl, every week she brought a different book home that she would read to me at loud. I don’t remember how I learned to read, but I am pretty sure my mother had her part in it. I remember going to work with her every summer break and spending the entire day there. The library had different rooms – for children and teenagers, adults, magazine section and an archive section. I started my journey from the children section, going through every single book while sitting on the green, rough carpet. There were a lot of different huge plants around the bookshelves that made me feel like I was in a jungle. Sometimes I was scared I won’t be able to find my mom, and sometimes she was scared that she had lost me because I would sit reading in complete silence for hours. We could never afford to buy our own books so every time the library would get new deliveries, I would run, grab all of them at once and hide in my little corner on the library floor. It felt like a victory to be the first person who could read them. It felt like they were my own brand new books.

At some point, I read every single book in my age section. I didn’t know what to do. I felt like the entire world collapsed. I remember vividly asking my mom in tears “ Maminka, there’s no more books to read, what should I do?!” She laughed, took my little hand and walked with me to the adult section where she would show me Encyclopedias, books about animals, music, dance and art. It was a cold room with big windows, very bright lights and a tiled floor. You could hear every step people took. Spending my time in the adult section was exciting. It felt a little bit forbidden as all the adults would look at me with a question mark, what is this girl doing here? I never knew what I would learn. I would walk blindfolded and count to ten in my head. Whenever I stopped that was my destination. One day I stopped at the thriller section. I was so terrified that I remembered exactly where not to go again.

My favorite section was autobiography. I loved real stories about brave woman who were trailblazers fighting for their dreams. My favorite one was about Rut Laskier, Jewish girl, who was born in Bedzin, the city I come from. It was published 60 years after World War II ended. It showed a real pages from her diary, where she described what happened to her family members and how terribly they were treated. She died when she was 14, in Auschwitz-Birkenau. I remember I felt united with her positive and fierce spirit. Those stories were really important to me as many Holocaust survivors were saved by people from my little city. It made me proud but it also helped me to see my life from a different perspective.

When I turned 15 years old I started writing for a newspaper. I had my own column where I presented book reviews every week. I would pick those books myself from the adult section. My mother was so proud that she framed my first article. Later in life, when I decided I wanted to be a helicopter pilot, the spirit and lessons from my mother helped me learn about mechanics, physics and more. I would spend all days in the library reading different books and publications, not giving up even it was difficult to understand. When I decided to move in to the USA and I didn’t speak English, I did the same thing. I joined English library in Poland, where I could rent National Geographic in English and an English dictionary. I would read through the magazine, write the words I didn’t understand, learn them and read it again.

My mother had a huge influence on my literacy. She never turned any of my wild dreams down even if she didn’t believe in them. It baffles me that her powerful spirit still sends the light even though she lives in a community of pessimistic minded people unlike her. She encouraged me to read, write, imagine and live the life I want. She taught me that you can learn anything if you put your heart into it. Literacy influenced my life in an extraordinary way. It helped me see things in a different perspective, as a brave, independent and creative woman. In the same way it was a tool for me to learn everything about the USA, it was also a way to connect with my roots and culture while living in a foreign country. Reading and writing is a very important part of my life. It defines who I am, and where I am going. It helps me to understand myself, to become a better person and to express myself. I will be forever grateful for this gift I received, and I will never stop giving it back to the world, by sharing my light and enthusiasm, and encouraging other people to read.

OUTLINE

1. Childhood - Growing up in Poland.
2. Listening to stories told by my mom as the first influence on my literacy.
3. Daily visits at the library, where my mom worked at.
4. Reading every single book in the children section.
5. Writing for the newspaper as a teenager.
6. Adolescence
7. Choosing my career.
8. Studying aviation related subjects at the library.
9. Learning English on my own through reading.
10. Moving in the USA
11. My current stance on literacy.
12. Being grateful for the gift my mother gave me.
13. Inspiring other people to read and do things they love.

Reflection Piece

The purpose of this literacy narrative is to describe my story of literacy but also to inspire any woman in the world to be strong and fierce. My mother had a huge influence on my reading and writing experience. She taught me to read daily and stay open-minded. In this literacy narrative I described her as a person, as my mother, and as my sponsor of literacy. The genre of the work I'm reflecting on is a literacy narrative. The feature characteristics of this genre are to describe my story of reading and writing. Exigence which made me write this narrative is the strong urge to understand who I am, what made me so curious about the world and why it is so easy for me to learn new things. My audience is Professor Danielle Carr and the students in my class who I have the pleasure to share my story with. As my literacy narrative is telling the story about a two strong women, it could be also read by any woman who needs an inspiration to believe in her dreams and never give up. As a media, I chose paper, to make it easier for anybody to read. My stance is being proud, to be who I am today, grateful for everything that my mother taught me and curious about everything else I will learn in my life time. This literacy narrative assignment helped me use and recognize different genres I have never encountered before. I am able to explore and analyze them as well, which is one the Course Learning Outcomes. Another outcome I obtained is the great skill of composing text, writing a draft and collaborating in a strategic way. Collaborating by showing my work to other students and having them analyze it and show me their perspective on my narrative was helpful and changed my writing process, which was another skill from the Course Learning Outcomes. These skills are crucial to be a great writer and make me very grateful to be able to take this class.