

## Eric Jenks Literacy Autobiography

This paper will look at the development of literacy in my life. If we are to look at that development the first stop is with my parents. My father is a Lawyer and my mother is a teacher and as great parent do, they made their children's educations a premium. I am the oldest of six, five have gone on to college at Michigan State University, the youngest a 4.0 student is a senior in high school and will be headed to college next fall. For whatever reason, maybe because I was the oldest, or maybe because I would much rather be out playing sports with my friends, but out of us six, I struggled the most when in school. At one point my parents even took me to be tested for dyslexia. Despite it all, I have gone on to earn my college degree and am now a teacher myself with just two classes to go until I obtain my masters.

As far back as I can remember and also having the luxury to watch my brothers and sisters grow when I was older and my memory was better, reading was extremely important in our family. We had hundreds of books at every age level from baby books with no words and just pictures to books with one or two words per page, to elementary books with sentences and short paragraphs to middle school books to adult books. My mom still most of those books stored in different locations all over her house. Countless times I have watched my mother and father sit with a younger sibling as they worked on teaching them the basics of pronunciation and reading. I might not remember this myself, but having watched my parents with the younger siblings I know that they did the same with me.

My earliest memories of reading are books like the Bernstein Bears, Curious George, Polar Express and Where the Wild Things Are. Funny story about Where the Wild Things Are, after my mom read that book with me, it managed to scare me so much, that I refused to ever read it again. As an adult I still not only don't want to read the book, I refuse to even pick it up and there was no way I was going to go see the movie that come out a couple of years ago. The Bernstein Bears and Curious George are another story, I loved those books. I can remember the excitement of going to both the school library and the local libraries and finding a book in the series I had never read before and then reading the stories with my mom or dad.

As my reading abilities progressed so did book selection. The next series of books that I can remember liking were the Swiss Family Robinson(kids addition) Boxcar Children, The Hardy Boys, Encyclopedia Brown, and Sherlock Holmes stories(the short kids versions). Looking back this is when I found my two favorite genre of reading, the adventure/mystery/crime or problem solving. Today I still read the same types of books just the adult versions with a little more violence involved, more to come on this later. I liked all of these series for a couple of reasons. First, the antagonist always won or came out with the right answer. I also found myself drawn to them because I like to try to figure out who was the bad guy or what was really going on before the book gave me the answer. Most of the time I found that my guess wasn't the right one and when the book would show me the truth or give me clues as to why that is the case, I would actually go back in the book and look for the those clues to see why I didn't

pick them up. With Sherlock Holmes, I was never was right, but that was part of the addiction, maybe the next time I would be right, maybe from reading this story, I would understand what clues to look for as I read then next.

It was also during this upper elementary and early middle school period (grades 5-7) that I started reading the sci-fi books that allowed you to pick your own plot. Basically you read the page and at the bottom you have a number of options to pursue, you make your choice and flip to that page. I am 100% positive that I never followed the "right" path. I always seemed to choose the way that would always end up with the character dead, dying or the book ending, I would go back and try a different way with the same results. Once in a while I will see kids in my classes with those same types of books and laugh to myself about my own experiences with them.

7th grade was the turning point in my reading career. Up until this point all the reading I did, was because my parents forced me too. Yes, I ended up liking the books, but I never read for pleasure and I really didn't read very much. Two things happened in 7th grade that changed everything. First was the book *Where the Red Fern Grows*, which we read in my Language Arts Class. My mom told me I would like the book, but I really wasn't into reading so I didn't really listen to her. Then we started to read the book in class. My goodness did I like that book, everything about it, Old Dan and Little Ann, hunting Raccoons, a young boy growing into manhood, helping the family, spending nights hunting out in the woods, I was hooked. I finished the book way ahead of the rest of the class and I still can remember finishing it. When we were talking about it, my mom tried to

warn me that it was sad, but I didn't believe her. I went upstairs and decided I was going to finish it. As I read about Old Dan being mauled and the way Little Ann refused to eat and died, I literally cried. A book had never done that to me before and I was a tough, "I don't cry kid." We finished the book in the spring, and that summer while on break the second event that changed my reading took place. My mom wanted me to read more, I refused, and so what she decided to do was pay me to read. The deal was the book had to be of decent length, she could say no if it was too short, and when I finished the book she would pay me \$5. At first my reading was slow, but then I discovered that the books were great. They took me on adventures, and to other times I lived with the characters as they were fighting enemies, living off the land, surviving on their own. Before I realize it, I was reading every night. I was finishing two or three books a week and my mom kept up her end of the deal and would pay me the \$5 with each book. Some of my favorites from that time period in my life include, *My Side of the Mountain*, *Swiss Family Robinson(advanced version)*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Robin Hood*, *Hatchet*, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, *Let the Circle be Unbroken*, and *The Sword in the Stone*.

As I progressed through high school, what which continues today, reading was for pleasure was more of a summer time activity. During the school year we would read novels in Language Arts classes and I was playing three sports and had a ton of homework so during the school year there was very little time. During the summers is when my reading would really take off, and to be honest it still goes like this. I read more on the weekends or during vacations, I am much

to busy during the week. This past summer is a prime example. I was able to read a ton, but that wasn't necessary a good thing. I broke my left leg in early July so I really had nothing else to do on my summer break. My little brother was reading the *Games of Thrones* Series so I decided to give them a try. Due to the fact that I had nothing but time on my hands I was able complete most of the series, now that school has started I am lucky to finish a "chapter" a week. My reading as slowed down immensely, mostly for lack of time.

It was during college that my mother influence arose again. She discovered a couple of authors that she thought I would enjoy. She was reading their books and told me I had to read one. She was right. Clive Clussler and the Dirk Pitt series was the first. *Atlantis* was the first Cussler book I read and by the end of the summer I had plowed though a good portion of the rest of the series. Clive Clussler writes American Adventure Thrillers, his books started with one main character but he has diversified and now as a number of different series all of which I am addicted to. The other Author is Wilbur Smith who writes Historical Fiction and Adventure books about Africa and Ancient Egypt, just like with Cusslers books I have read every single book Smith has ever published. .

From the time I started reading Clive Cussler books to now, my reading habits and tendencies have been the same. I become obsessed with that author or the series the author has written. If I pick out a book I like I will go back and start with the first book and work my way through the series. I will stay with that same series or author until there are no new books left for me to read. When the series is over I almost become depressed. I check on author's websites to

see when their next books are coming out, wait and buy them then fly through the new book. Nothing is better than reacquainting yourself to the familiar characters you know and love from previous adventures. Like most readers I have even gone back and read my favorites numerous times, enthralled by the story as if it is the first time reading it all over again.

Other authors that I have become obsessed with and read most of their works include Daniel Silva, Matt Reilly, Bernard Cromwell, Ken Follett, Martin Cruz Smith, Tom Clancy, Michael Creighton, James Rollins, Stephan Hunter, R.L. Tolkien, George Martin, Steve Berry, Robert Ludlum, Jeffery Deaver, David Gibbons, Preston & Child, Khaled Hosseini. As for my preference in books, as you might have been able to tell by the authors I listed, I hardly ever read non-fiction books for fun. Autobiographies or the latest tell all books do nothing for me. I do have subscriptions to both Sports Illustrated and National Geographic, but when it comes to books I am strictly a fiction reader. I read enough online news agencies or with newspapers on what is going on in the world, I read for enjoyment.

What is amazing is that even though I love to read, I find that reading can also be painful, boring and tedious when it is not something you chose to read. Between my undergrad and masters classes I have to read enough books that I do not want to or find interesting and a lot of the times I don't read them. Instead I skim through, finding the parts I am supposed to read. Often times I find myself day dreaming and even falling asleep.

Looking back I can basically attribute my reading enjoyment to my mother,

not only did she get me reading, by paying me when I was young, but she is always introducing me to an exciting new author or series that she comes across.