

Daddy's Little Ladybug: Maxson's Model of A Literacy Autobiography

Dear Ms. Maxson,

In my life, I have sailed across the sea with a tiger in my life boat. I have watched my father defend an innocent man in the Jim Crow South. I survived the Hunger Games and civil war in Sudan. I have traveled up the Congo River to find Kurtz and killed a man outside the village of Than Khe. I have spent several lonely days in New York City before entering an insane asylum. I married Mr. Darcy. . I have written of bullied nerds, struggling teachers, and date rape on campus. At one point in my life, I seriously considered becoming a writer—and have had a neglected journal near my bed since the age of twelve. But my writing life---and particularly my reading life has not always been so illustrious.

“Red Ladybugs, please go with Mrs. Martin.” Sister Muriel announced. I knew even then that I was in the “dumb” reading group. I knew because we didn't get to stay with the “real” teacher, in the “real” classroom, nor read the “real” books. I knew because Holly Eakin was in my group and Michelle Lounibos and Elizabeth Maloney were in the Blue Birds. I could have remained a red ladybug. I still have red ladybug tendencies. Becoming an English teacher might be what one calls classic overcompensation, but I still loathe reading aloud. Particularly something I have never read before.

When teachers would assign each of us a paragraph to read, I would diligently count, recount, and nervously read *my* paragraph silently. I would imagine myself reading aloud, choking on the one word I didn't know: my face flushed, my throat tightening. The whole thing would unravel from there. Every time, some cocky, know-it-all, teacher's pet would read an extra paragraph. “Oh, oops. I read too much,” they would say. The panic would envelop me. But I survived...even thrived. Thanks to Mrs. Schoelder who put up a reading worm circle for every book I read. And Sister Laurian who rewarded my efforts with a fuzzy rock named Goober. And most importantly, my father who not only modeled reading for me every night after dinner, but handed me great books like *Animal Farm*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

But by high school, my interest in reading (writing and all things schooling-related) had fallen away and replaced with flirting and socializing. After all, who had time to read when I was waiting for a call *from him*. I was immature and didn't know how to manage my time, so I did the perfunctory work of just getting by—just enough to graduate on time and keep my parents off my back. Until Senior year.

I had signed up for an expository writing class—after all Maureen Thom was successful in that class and how many PE classes does one need Senior year. But this was a different class all together. We got to chose what to write about. We were in writing groups that met each week. We were writing for our peers rather than for the teacher. So I began to write. I began to see an effect on my readers; they would laugh and cringe at all the right places. So then I began to care about what I wrote—which words to use; which sentence structure to organize...

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