

## SCATTER BRAIN

ENG W131: FIRST PLACE

**Jay Lee**

Many parents read to their young children to help prepare them for reading adventures that are ahead of them as well as learning to love and appreciate reading at a young age. Well, unfortunately, I have no early memories of being read to as a child. The only times I remember reading outside of school was when my sisters and I would visit my great uncle John. He taught music lessons down in Mexico while his wife, my aunt Marilyn, taught young children in our church.

Reading for me has been a struggle since a young child. However, writing for pleasure has always played an active role in my life. I kept a notebook all throughout my high school years just to simply write down my thoughts, feelings, and experiences. My mother loved to write in a daily prayer journal, as well as letters to relatives. Writing has always come easily to me simply because I write as I talk—of course, more grammatically correct. I write as if I were giving a presentation and the words flow naturally.

In fifth grade, my class was required to write in daily journals and write about whatever topic we were presented with. I think what would make my writing unique is that I would jump around topics. I would easily become distracted by the sound of someone getting out of their chair to sharpen a pencil or the crinkly sound of a peer opening a bag of chips. Even when I would read chapter books it was hard to concentrate because I would become easily distracted and would read ahead a few sentences. I would jump from A to Z and find all possible topics that would somewhat correlate with the reading. However, in my daily journal entries, I would write down all my unfiltered thoughts and just keep writing. At the time, I did not know I was doing Desperation Writing. Since learning the Desperation Writing technique, my writing is messy, but it is me. I'm not wasting time just sitting around and not

writing anything, but instead, writing drafts and formulating my ideas into well-thought-out stories and experiences.

I related a lot to Rylie Gearhart's essay, "Indeed, Blondes Can Read." She talks a little bit about society's views on blondes and how they can be perceived as dumb. I had a similar standard growing up as well. Growing up in a conservative county while being Indian can be hard. People seemed to judge me for everything. From a young age, I can recall numerous times when I would struggle taking tests or I would ask too many questions in class, and it seemed to annoy my peers as they would then proceed to make snarky comments about my intelligence. I started receiving low scores on tests and often couldn't understand and comprehend what I was reading. I remember overhearing a few girls sitting behind me in my science class whispering, "There is no way she's actually Indian. She is not even smart." After hearing this, I began to let that statement control me and my academics. I would still do my work, of course, but with little effort. I remember crying after almost every history and science test I took because I would constantly score 50 and 60 percent on them.

Up until the end of my fifth-grade year is when I really began to struggle. I struggled tremendously with reading comprehension. My scores were at a fourth-grade reading level. My mother was concerned that I wasn't reaching my full potential and was upset with the school because they weren't doing much to help me improve. I always felt like I was another burden of stress for my teachers. My peers and I would get together in small reading groups and once we finished reading, as a class we would come together and talk about what we just read. My teacher would publicly humiliate me by making passive aggressive and snarky comments on how "Jay probably wouldn't remember anyway." She only said it one time—but it hurt.

My mom pulled me out of that school and decided to homeschool me from the end of my fifth-grade year until the start of my eighth-grade year. It was more of an independent study, as my mom wasn't home often because she was working the third

shift. Homeschooling made me dislike school a lot. I would be stuck figuring everything out on my own without an example to follow. I can recall one time when I was reviewing material over different types of rocks. Towards the end of the summer, the school had sent me a box of science supplies. This box included science textbooks, goggles, different sized tubes, and rock samples. Well, one of my assignments was to look at a few different types of rocks and label their type. I did not understand what I was supposed to be looking for, what the characteristics of a rock were, and honestly, I did not care enough to put in the time to research rock types. After what felt like hours, when in reality it was only five minutes, I gave up on actually doing the assignment on my own. I began looking up the assignment online. I would copy and paste the questions into Google in hopes of finding the answer. Gearhart (2020) described students learning how to outsmart the system (p. L-7). It was even easier being homeschooled because no one was looking over my shoulder. I don't think I read a single book for at least a year. It made me dislike reading even more than I already did. I wasn't learning. I was just completing assignments.

I felt so isolated and alone. I would spend a lot of my solo time writing. It was like a stress reliever of some sort. I would write my notes on my phone, or on physical paper with a pencil. I went through four 70-page notebooks that year. I still have them all. The fun thing with writing is not only being able to go back and read what I wrote but looking at how I wrote as well. I would go back to those pages and see the sloppy and rushed handwriting if I was in a hurry at the time. There were other pages stained with tears—I must have been upset. Others with the bottom of the pages ripped or crumbled up or missing—I must have been mad. Writing just to write is something to do and that can be fun at times.

At the beginning of my eighth-grade year, I returned to public school. I feel like I missed out on so much of my middle school years—not just socially, but also academically. I didn't know what MLA format was, I didn't understand or learn how to add and subtract negative

numbers in math, or even basic algebra for that matter. I struggled on finding books that I enjoyed—I didn't even know what I liked to read because I was never forced to throughout my schooling.

My classmates and I were required to submit 10 Accelerated Reading (AR) books each quarter. I would try to pick the easiest books judging on the animated covers that would consist of short chapters. I would pay my sister and friends to take the quizzes for me so I could pass. I would still worry about having them take my tests for me. I was worried about what would happen if they didn't pass one and I would get caught. Luckily for me, I guess, I never actually got caught. However, when we would do in-class reading chapter books, we would take quizzes over them, and when my teacher, Mrs. Darras, noticed that I wasn't scoring as well as she supposedly thought I was compared to my AR quizzes, she confronted me, and I turned myself in. I simply broke down when explaining to her why I wasn't performing well, that I wasn't even taking them, and how I was just too dumb to earn a high score on my own.

My tears fell like bullets, hitting the papers on Mrs. Darras' desk. She didn't scold me, as I thought she would. She simply embraced me into a hug. It was at that moment that I realized I had a teacher who genuinely cared for me. I remember it was a short hug because it was still earlier in the year, and it was warmer outside. I felt hot from that hug. Mrs. Darras let go of me and told me to grab a blue chair and bring it to her desk so I could sit. She sat down with me, and we had a long conversation about how cheating is never the answer. She explained to me that I am not dumb, I just might learn differently than others. She introduced me to possible symptoms of having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). After getting tested and diagnosed, I received the help that I desperately needed. Mrs. Darras sat down with me before tests to help review material and strategized new study habits. She introduced me to audiobooks, highlighting and underlining tips while studying to better break down any material in a subject that I struggled to understand. She helped me realize that I didn't have to be

a fast reader to be a good reader. I could read at my own pace.

Mrs. Darras would sit down with me during Academic Assist (AA) which is essentially a twenty-minute study hall, and we would read, reflect, and review what we just read. We would take it paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter. Slowly, but surely, I was starting to understand what I was reading. One of my friends at the time, introduced me to a comic book that she was reading, *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier. Now, these books didn't change my life in any dramatic way, but I loved reading her books because I could relate to them. A lot of her comics were about her love triangles in high school, her traumatic experience while in braces, and her on and off again relationship with her sisters. I loved these types of books because they had mini-illustrations, comics, so that I could physically see what the character was doing. By the end of the year, I started to enjoy reading again. I realized that

I didn't need to compare myself to my peers and their reading levels. I needed to get out of my own head, and metaphorically, put on the horse blinders and read what I wanted to read—what made sense for me. Towards the end of my eighth-grade year, I realized that reading is a process of growth, and that reading can better improve my writing. Reading can open your world and change your perspectives while creating a more well-rounded, intelligent, polished, and authentic human being. ■

## REFERENCES

Gearhart, R. (2020) Indeed, blondes can read. In. E. Wardle & Downs (Eds.), *Writing about writing: For Indiana University East* (4th ed., pp. L.5-L.9). Bedford/St. Martin's.

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