

THE LITTLE GIRL THAT COULD

ENG W131: THIRD PLACE

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Abstract

This essay is a personal narrative about the author's experiences with literature. Being able to have access to books at a young age helped shape her future success. Without reading, she would not be where she is today.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. When I was younger, I would always get a new book from this organization. This organization was for little children ages one to five. Each month you would get sent one to three new books to read. One book I remember getting was *The Little Engine that Could* (2002). One of the most famous quotes from that book is: "I think I can, I think I can" (Piper, 2002). My mother would always tell me that I could do it, whether that was reading, riding my bike, or trying a new sport. Of course, as a child, you fear anything new. During my years in elementary school, I would go half a day in the mornings. I was always a morning person as my brain was more active then. Some basic skills that came quickly were remembering my home phone number and my address. One thing I do remember was popcorn words. Whenever you got them all correct, you got your name added to the "popcorn bucket." By remembering those simple things, I was able to read. I was reading numbers and letters, sounding out the words if I did not know them yet. Therefore, I became the top reader in my class. I always remember getting to sit in my teacher's rocking chair during story time in kindergarten. If she needed to go to the office

quickly, she would have me continue reading the book to the rest of my classmates. When she came back to the classroom, even though I was not finished reading, she would just let me finish as she knew it was a good way for me to learn.

Summer of 2011 rolled by, and I was in first grade. I do not remember too much from first grade but if I did remember something it would be the Scholastic Book Fair. Whenever it came to reading, I was always the top reader in my class. During indoor recess, I remember sitting in the corner with the beanbags and reading instead of playing. I loved to read and would whenever I had the chance. I wanted to get a new book, but I was not sure which one. My first-grade teacher thought it would be a promising idea to read *The Rainbow Fairies*. At the time I was reading at about a second or third grade reading level. If this book did not make its way into my life, then I would not be as creative as I am today.

Having an inventive mind as a child played a huge part in my childhood. My mother put me in every sport possible: soccer, basketball, volleyball, softball, and dance. Out of all of them, I stuck with dance. I watch videos of younger me playing dress-up and making up random dances all the time. I wanted to be able to picture myself as a fairy or princess in a book. Everything was just magical, creative, and make-believe.

A few years pass and I was in eighth grade. The high school drama department was having auditions for *Grease the Musical* and allowing middle schoolers to be a part of it. Remembering the quote "I think I can, I think I can" helped me act a lot. I was shy then; I did not like putting myself out to a huge audience or even to my classmates. Knowing that the little engine could do something even if he did not think he could reminded me that I could do something even if I did not think I could. Some days pass and the cast list was posted. Unbelievably, I got cast in the ensemble. I gained a bit more

confidence. In one of the rehearsals, the director asked me to do a voice-over part for one of the scenes. I had to voice three distinct types of characters, so I got to be creative with how I thought they would sound. Ever since then, I have been performing in theater. During high school I was in about six different shows. During my junior year we had a break from musicals and did a straight play. It was a nice break from having to balance music and lines.

I strive to have an inventive mind and being able to read helped me a lot. Being in theatrical performances, you must be able to understand the character you are playing. You need to understand what they mean by how the words are written in the playbook. The biggest thing in theater is that you must memorize the script so when it comes to show day you are not walking around stage with a book in your hand. Now, there is a big possibility that you could forget the line and you would need to improvise something to make everything seem “normal.” For me, this would happen occasionally. I would just try to think of something that fit what the characters were talking about.

During my years of theater, my favorite role was a skid row urchin in *Little Shop of Horrors*. This character was the narrator of the show. I got to play an older maturity-level character. For the skid row urchin, you had to have sass and, let me tell you, I had plenty of that. I knew how to be sassy because of the books I read when I was younger. One book that helped me understand how to be sassy was *Junie B. Jones*. Junie was the girl who would always have some sort of attitude. It was not a bad attitude; it was more of a funny one. I knew I had to channel my inner Junie to help this character to live. One thing is for sure: it worked. The sassiest line I had was, “We’ve been together since the fifth grade, then we split.” Everyone in the audience laughed. When saying this line, I had a newspaper in my hand and tried to pitch my voice up an octave to give it some sass.

Being able to act in front of a huge audience gave me the

confidence to do more things in life. One thing that I thought I would never do was compete in public speaking. During my senior year of high school, around February 2023, I had the opportunity to compete for my Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) class. My teacher asked me if I would be willing to compete in public speaking. Honestly, I was speechless. I was thinking to myself, "Public speaking?! I could never." I then thought about it and decided to do it. My mom always told me to try new things if I had the opportunity.

Writing my speech was the worst of all. I am more of a reader than a writer. In my English classes, I never got the best grades on written essays. If I got a B minus, I was content with the grade as I knew how strict my English teachers could be. Thankfully, my homeroom teacher was the public speaking teacher, so I had a bit of an advantage since he could help me. The first few days of trying to figure out what to write and how to put it in a speech and make it flow was difficult. The more I kept working, the better the speech got. As Brandt (2020) writes, "literacy is sponsored by people, institutions, and circumstances that both make it possible for a person to become literate and shape the way the person actually acquires literacy" (p. 244). For me, my JAG and homeroom teacher helped me become literate in the world of knowing of how to write a speech and then go on and present it to a group of people.

A few months passed and I was asked to attend JAG Nationals in Orlando, Florida. One of the most exciting things about this experience is that I had the opportunity to perform the National Anthem in front of about a thousand people. Having a background of theater and competing in public speaking helped me focus on what I was doing and took some of my anxiety away. The time came that I got to perform, and I was nervous. I just remembered, "I think I can, I think

I can." I could, and I did. I sang the national anthem in front of over a thousand people.

Coming back from nationals, I felt like a whole new person. I gained a lot more confidence and it showed. I was more talkative than usual. I was not afraid to speak up for myself, and overall, I just felt like a better version of me. If this opportunity were not available for me, I do not know how I would be today. The opportunity changed me for the better because I knew I could do a challenging task, whatever it was.

Today I am thankful for new opportunities in my life. If my mother did not sign me up to be a part of the Imagination Library, then I would not have a stronger background in reading. Reading gave me multiple opportunities. Without reading, I would not have been able to be in choir and know how to sing music. Theater would not be a huge part of my life; if I did not understand how to read a script and understand what the character was feeling, it would be weird to bring a character to the stage.

Most importantly I am more than thankful for my teachers, as they taught me how to read and what books I should read. Without those important books telling me motivational statements or letting my inventive mind run, then my life would not be as interesting as it is. If I could tell my younger self something, it would be that I got to play those strange and fun characters that I dreamed about becoming. I got to wear the costumes, I got to perform on stage all because I learned how to read at a young age.

Just like the little engine said, "I think I can, I think I can," (Piper, 2002). That quote was the most important thing in my reading history. Knowing I can do it makes my future so much better. Who knows, one day I might be authoring those books for little girls who aspire to be the fairy or princess on stage. Just maybe I will be performing in front of

the little girls and being a role model for them. All because “I can,” and I did.

Today I feel more confident in reading and writing, having a background of different genres of stories. Knowing how to read and write will greatly shape my future as I will be able to help my own children one day. For whoever is reading this, just know that it is never too late to start learning something new. I am thankful for the opportunities I was given to try new things so I could pick and choose what I fully enjoy and want to continue doing in the future. All because of the quote “I think I can, I think I can,” I have faith that my future will be bright. ■

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