Why I Write
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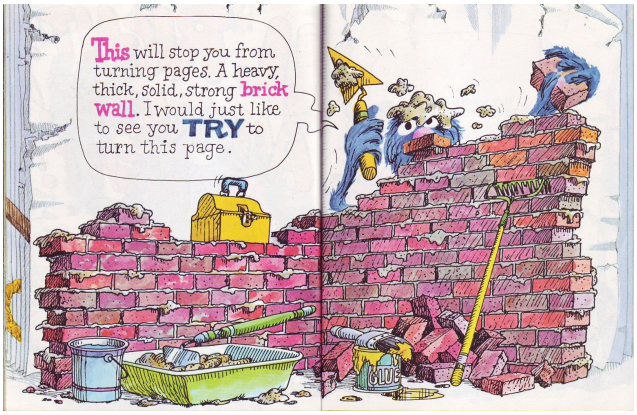
Rough Draft 3

My parents like to tell people that I was born with a book in hand and that I haven't stopped reading since. I don't think my mom would like me as much as she does if I came out with a sharped-edged book, but maybe I'm wrong. Anyways, every night growing up I would bring my parents at least five books to read before I went to bed. They would finish them and sometimes it still wouldn't be enough to satisfy my craving. So I'd choose a few more, and, no matter how tired they were, they would read until I was ready to fall asleep and dream up my own stories. My favorite bedtime book was, and still is, "There's a Monster at the End of This Book" by Jon Stone. I was obsessed with all of the images of Sesame Street's Grover trying his hardest to keep the reader from turning the page and finding the "monster" at the end of the book.



They had such lifelike qualities, and I felt like Grover was actually coming out of the book to keep me from finding the monster. The way the pages were drawn into the actual image made the experience more interactive. I loved the pictures, but the words made me keep coming back as I grew up. I could hear Grover's silly pleading

voice in my head, trying to stop me from turning another page. I loved feeling like he was my friend and that we were having a conversation. The characters in books were some of my best friends, starting with Grover. Whenever I think back on that book and the happiness it brought me, I know I want to give other children stories that can do the same for them.

I really don't enjoy writing about myself at all. I'm a lot better at taking my experiences and weaving them into fiction pieces than writing something solely about me. I had also never considered why I write until this class. My initial thought was because I was told all through middle and high school that I was good at it, and everyone likes doing something they're good at. But I knew that wasn't enough to keep me writing for as long as I have been and for taking on a project as daunting and challenging as writing a children's novel. There had to be some deeper reason for my relationship with writing.

A lot of times I begin writing because I have an idea in my head that I can't work out without getting it down on paper. Writing it down is a process of discovery; I usually end up with a completely different purpose or thought by the time I draft and edit my initial thoughts. I very rarely end up with a piece of work that had the same purpose from conception to finish. My ideas fight like puppies while they're in my mind; there is a lot of scratching and clawing to see which one will win out, and sometimes it turns into a vicious cycle that leaves me drained and upset and unsure of which to choose. When I funnel my thoughts onto a page, I can feel them calming down and waiting more patiently for their turn. The thought that I

play with first does not always become the one that I take home and raise; sometimes the one that would rather play with its toy alone in the corner of the kennel is the one that I connect best with and the one that gets to take its place on my page. It all depends with the batch I'm working with. That's why I need my writing process: to find out which thought works best with me and for the purpose I want to achieve.

I feel a tugging at my heart when I feel inspiration. It moves through my body, into my fingers, and I know I have to write to stop the tugs. I want others to see the beauty and feel the emotions that I do. I love creating something using all the feelings and inspiration that bottle up inside of me. I've played piano since 3rd grade and always enjoyed making new songs, even if no one would ever hear them. Creating a song that exuded what I was feeling — especially all that teen angst — made me feel better without having to talk to anyone. As high school went on, I found myself with less time for piano but I could write anywhere I was. I didn't need anything except for a writing utensil and something to write on. I've gotten busier as life has gone on, but I always have time to jot an idea down and work on it in my free moments of the day. If I leave my emotions pent up for too long, they start to take a toll on my daily life and I feel like I'm going to burst. Writing gives me the outlet I need to relax and bring me back to reality.

When I'm frustrated with my writing, I wonder why I don't just talk about what I'm feeling, but I soon remember how much I struggle with articulating my thoughts through speech. I sputter and talk myself in circles until no one, not even me, is quite sure what I was trying to say. It happens to me almost every time I open

my mouth in class. It's why I have the reputation of the shy girl in any class I've taken since second grade. I turned to writing because I needed some way to communicate all my passions with the outside world and my voice didn't give that to me. Writing did, though; it's my best way to communicate now.

My first memorable experience with writing was in sixth grade. I could have enjoyed it before that, but this year was the first memory I have. My reading and language teacher was Ms. Hecht; she played a huge role in my love of the English language. She was a tiny brunette woman with a huge personality; the first day of class we read a story about a girl who got her neck caught on a rust chain hanging from a tree. It was her. She amazed us all from that day on, and gained our respect not only for her confidence and personality, but also for her skills in storytelling. There were two assignments we did that I clearly remember spurring my romance with words.

Our first project was to work with a group to develop a mystery story and get in the spirit of Halloween. My friends and I wrote about the stereotypical haunted house, but it turned gory quickly, especially for a story written by a group of preteen girls. Normally, the sight of blood from a paper cut makes me nauseous, but I love going back to that story to see all the details we created and entwined together. We described the blood-filled bath and the severed legs in such detail that friends I show it to now cringe and don't believe I helped write it. If I hadn't been there, I wouldn't believe it either. That story may have needed a lot of work — like indenting for new dialogue…or indenting at all — but we were good at the details.

That was the most fun I had with writing; I liked the clear-cut purpose we had from the beginning. Today, I don't always get a clear purpose for my assignments, but that is part of why I write as much as I do. Each new draft gets me closer to my purpose and helps me find clarity in my work.

The last project set me on the path that I'm still following. We had to work on our own to imagine, write, and illustrate a children's book that we would read to kindergarten classes at neighboring elementary schools. I came up with a story that involved a class turtle escaping and exploring his school for the night, meeting all kinds of creatures he had never seen before from the inside of his tank. The drawings were simple (after all, I'm a writer, not an artist) and the plotline was straightforward, but working from conception to completion of a full project left me with the knowledge that I could, in fact, complete a whole book myself. That's what I'm doing now; last winter, I wrote a children's book about a koala on a journey, similar to that of the turtle but more developed. Now I am writing a middle grade novel about two kids discovering a mystery connected to the famous Chicago gangster, Al Capone. That feeling of satisfaction I got from completing a novel drives me; I'm hoping to take it farther this time and publish something for children. I loved seeing the kindergartener's face light up over the mischievous turtle and I want to do that again.

There are so many reasons I write today. Mainly, I do it to give back, to relax, to communicate, and to find clarity, but I write for one more reason as well. I write because it is who I am and who I have always been. From my toddler years with

Grover, to my middle school Halloween horror story, to the creation of my first children's novels in college, I love working with words any way I can. I've tried to find other paths in "more stable" areas such as math and science, but in the end I always come back to my words. Writing is part of my essence; I write to be true to myself.

Questions I Have

1. One of my group members on Friday mentioned that I could take a metaphor and keep referring to it during the whole piece to make it more coherent. Do you think this will work/do you have any suggestions on how to do it? I tried to when I started this draft and I couldn't get it to work at all.
2. I like my picture on the first page with Grover but I'm not sure if it is too random without any other pictures in the piece. Does it work okay alone or is there another spot you would suggest adding an image?
3. Are the order of the paragraphs and the white space working okay?
4. Is the conclusion too cliché or cheesy? I wasn't really sure how to tie it all together well.