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Eng 101

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Influences and processes: Writing Reflection Self-Portrait

My parents made the decision to homeschool when I was a very young child. From kindergarten through the eighth grade, I learned from home. It is a decision for which I will be eternally grateful. First and foremost, it taught me that I am responsible for my own learning, but it also gave me an opportunity to explore writing with unparalleled freedom and support. Both of my parents actively read to my sister and I on a daily basis. They read in English. They read in Spanish. They encouraged us to read to one another. To this day, my sister and I still read to one another when we take road trips. My parents cultivated in me an affection for the written word that carried me through law school.

Both my mother and father have been huge influences upon my writing, though they themselves are very different writers. My father is direct, brash, and spends little time in any outward preparation or revision, though I suspect he has an internal process spanning days. My mother is meticulous and precise. She cannot abide grammatical mistakes that inhibit the clarity of the piece. They have read all of my work from stories I wrote as a child, to legal essays I have written as an attorney. They have always been encouraging and kind and helped me find ways to grow and I believe that active effort on their part has helped me to avoid many of the barriers that plague many people with regard to writing.

My sister, two years my senior to the day, has also had a huge impact upon my writing. When I entered college as a first-year student. She was entering her third year. We shared a major, though we attended different universities, and frequently exchanged essays and wrote

emails about our classwork. Her eye to detail is similar to our mothers and she pushed me to pay more attention to sentence structure, word choice, and the rules of historical writing. It was uncomfortable, and at times discouraging. She has all of our father's directness and all of our mother's editorial abilities. But I grew so much with her help and still ask for her to look at my work when it does not violate confidentiality.

I was a running start student and so completed English 101 and English 102 while I was still in high school. My professor English 101 was the first professor to help me realize that writing was not an inherent talent, but an acquired skill, though he was not the last professor to influence me as a writer. I was also deeply impacted by my experience in my first legal writing class. As a writer, I had always done well. Given the opportunity to explain myself with the written word, I could normally achieve a good grade, or a shared understanding with my audience. However, I received my first ever C grade in my Legal Writing class. I was devastated. I was actually so ashamed, that I failed to speak up in class for an entire semester (many classes in law school are a year long), which only made the problem worse. I lacked peer interactions, which are discouraged in law school due to the sensitive nature of legal work, and now I lacked interactions with my professors.

The mishmash of interactions and influences from the positive to the negative, have caused me to develop a strange amalgamation of writing systems, which are even now changing and growing as I begin my graduate program at CWU. Strategies that were successful as an attorney are less successful now. Though, I am beginning to refine my process in a way that is transferable from one field to another.

After some retrospection about when I enjoy writing and when I do not, I have realized it comes down to time. Do I have the appropriate amount of time to accomplish the goal? In law,

the answer is often no. Lawyers are usually under a tight timeframe set by the courts, particularly in criminal law. Even worse, they sometimes have to come up to speed quickly on legal issues that are foreign to them and, in some offices, they are discouraged from asking for help. This means they are writing to learn and writing to communicate in a compressed timeframe. It is not fun. However, I have noticed when I have time to first write to learn and then write to communicate, I quite enjoy legal writing. I love drafting wills and briefs and memos.

No matter how much I know about a topic I now have a process that I think will work across curriculums. First I consume information. Then I create an outline, which often involves thinking out-loud, talking with friends, and sketching out different potential structures and key points. Then I write. I do not care where I write or when I write. Thanks to the pressures of practicing law. I can write almost anywhere and almost anytime. I prefer to draft and then revise and then draft and then revise several times before editing.

I am still sifting through the effects of my different writing influences, and the results of an extensive education and membership in a very specific discourse community, but the further I investigate my own processes, the closer I get to developing an identity as a writer.