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### Honorable Mention - ENGL 1000 Literacy Autobiography Contest 2020: Why I Learned

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Masen Ervick

Professor Laura White

English 1000

This one's weird for me. "Literate" has always been a dirty word for me, like "herbal tea." All it means to me is that you can read and understand a language. I'm literate in English, and semi-literate for languages like Spanish and German, and completely illiterate when it comes to stuff like Japanese and Cantonese. Most people become literate at like, what, age 5? To top it off, I am vehemently forgetful; I remember effectively none of my younger years, with only a few snippets coming to mind. I barely remember yesterday most times, though that's probably due to sleep deprivation more than anything. My original essay more or less talked about overall intelligence than literacy, since I'm never really asked the question "how are you so literate?" After feedback, I've decided to tear the whole thing down and rewrite it from scratch, more or less. Knowing my work, it's probably worse, but not much I can do about that.

Masen Ervick

Professor Laura White

English 1000

9/18/19

### Why I Learned

Literacy. The ability to read and write. It seems to be a safe assumption that if you are reading this, you're probably literate in the English language. It's one of those things we take for granted; how many people just in the U.S. do you think are illiterate? The number is likely deceptively high. Even higher still are those who are only semi-literate, those who can read but can't write, or at least write well. Maybe they can read but can only understand about half of the words. I guess that just goes to show that I'm lucky. A fair number of people have sung their praises about me. Me being smart, or a good writer or narrator. I think that's only because I got a lucky start in life, with my mother being a school teacher.

She teaches second grade, still to this day. She knew that education was important, especially with my father only having a high-school diploma, and nothing more. I don't remember much of my childhood, or of anything really. I do remember my mother drilling into me about getting good grades, with her bringing me the materials used to teach the course. I was grounded for anything lower than an A. Looking back on it now, I also think I got lucky with the education system. I got out of primary and secondary schools just as the administration was rolling out changes that would've completely crippled me, let alone all the other students enrolled. Combined with the fact that kids nowadays don't get the same support that my mother gave me, I don't think they really have a chance in this world. They'll flunk the moment they

reach high-school, and they'll never move further. It's easy to seem literate when the next-in-line can't do basic addition in third and fourth grade, I guess.

The rest of my family helped, but not in the way you'd expect. While mom enforced the rule of the phonics textbook, I saw what other paths lay open to me. My dad, as mentioned, never made it to college or even a trade school. He'll have to work in a retail store until the day he dies, unable to retire or move anywhere in life. My brother, the eldest sibling, got to slack off and not eat his vegetables. Over a decade later, nothing's changed on that front. Being the oldest child gave him far too much freedom. My parents agree they were too lax with him, and didn't discipline him enough. Sure, he works a good job in tech support, but he also failed his college classes nearly half a dozen times and drained the family coffers with the fees. We all are fearful of when he leaves the house and if he'll be able to stay afloat on his own. My sister, the middle child, was forced into books. She's damned smart, for certain, but she's also way snarkier than I am and rather rude. She was very strictly taught. Forced to do well. My parents were very hard on her and it shows. She'll make it far in the medical field, but has developed serious problems such basically being alcoholic and severe sleeping issues. My mother needed a middle ground. She gave me something that nobody else in this world seems to have anymore; a desire to learn, effectively by forcing me to learn at first. She knew, being a teacher, how important it was to learn, so she forced me to study more than my brother, but not more than my sister. Whether or not this experiment provided a desirable result is not my decision to make. I'm just the guinea pig.

I ultimately went into elementary school wanting to learn, to know more. I grabbed as many books as I can off our library's shelves. I was consistently six grades ahead of my class's reading abilities. Whether or not that was because I was good, or my class slacked off, I don't

know. I don't even remember what I read. I don't remember a lot of my past. I prefer it that way. I mostly read stories, I know. History and facts didn't concern me back then. A lot of the times they still don't even to this day. Why read about the past when I could think about the future? That, and science. Science is what really drove me to learn. I blame the Mythbusters for it. I saw you could blow things up using science and I was sold. I remember one particular moment, and I don't know where it took place, but it was of me picking up a magazine. It was a tech magazine, probably long out of business now, and I was reading about the advancements Sony was making for the upcoming PSP. I didn't know how it worked or what it did, I just knew it was cool, and I had to learn more. Learning, I've found after many grueling years of lectures, is far more fun when applied. I suppose that's what kept me afloat. I found ways to make learning fun, and fun helps you learn. That cycle just isn't there anymore for kids these days. Like I said, I feel bad knowing they won't have the chance I did.

I was no slouch when it came to English, but science became my hope. It reinforced my want to learn. This is obvious when you look at my preferred media: science fiction. My favorite book is *Ready Player One*, and I would *kill* for a *Cyberpunk 2077* PC collector's edition. Fantasy is nice and all, but why look at the past when you can look at the future? I'm sure I was reinforced by this considering most of my English teachers I've had pretty bad experiences with. It's my view that a good English teacher must debate the merits of their favorite literary works with the students, rather than forcing them at gradepoint to agree. These teachers single-handedly killed my will to read. I went from reading for fun to reading out of spite. I haven't picked up a book in a few years thanks to them. I've since supplemented that fully with the last thing that got me to where I am: video games.

There's a lot of stigma to video games. So many people think that they'll rot your brain and turn you into a zombie. Only sometimes does that happen. For me, I've been playing games since I was a tyke. If I couldn't play it because I wasn't old enough, I watched my brother play it. I did a lot of strategy games, trying to find the best way to bring down enemy bases. I never did the tutorials either; everything was self-taught. I did plenty of puzzles, and RPG games to help spice things up. While it's clear I never fully understood them, it's also clear how they impacted me as a kid. 11 year-old me may not have fully grasped the concepts in *Fallout: New Vegas*, but they no doubt helped forge me into who I am today, and why I think the way I do. I think I even did a few management games too, not sure. There's a surprising amount of reading in games. Did you know that *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, has 309 books in it? I think I read at least half of those during my play time. Most of my vocabulary was probably stolen from digital generals giving speeches or bards singing ballads. Even now, no matter what tale books have they are hardly a match for video games. No book can tell a story quite the way the *Witcher 3* can.

What's never changed is my hand-writing. My hand-writing is awful. You know a doctor's handwriting? That, but multiplied by dumbass. It's like a whole different language. It will never improve. I've been told I can orate like a master if I try, and the stories I can weave are unparalleled, but I can barely write my name neatly. Isn't it funny how that works? I honestly couldn't tell you why my hand-writing is so bad. It's been terrible long since before my accident. Cursive or manuscript, it's all god-awful. Well, there was one of those ancient chemists who had to dictate his PHD thesis to his mom due to his awful hand-writing. Maybe I'm not hopeless. Still, I can't hand write or draw. I'm like 90% sure that doesn't count for literacy, right?

In the end, I was brought here. An 19 year-old who knows a bit more than his peers, and has controversial opinions about everything. I personally don't consider myself to be all that

smart. I am smart enough to know that the opportunities that lead me here simply aren't there for younger kids now. I'm smart enough to know that they are screwed because of it. Hopefully there is someone out there smart enough to use my story to give other kids a chance of writing their own.