

## The Value of a Good Story

By Emma Schroer

Literacy, to me, centers around my experience reading and loving books. Even though my reading has not always been consistent, I always knew the value of a good story.

My parents taught me to love and respect books. My mom, a former English major, loves to read books across genres and reading levels. My dad, a History professor, can often be found on the couch reading nonfiction for his courses. I began to love reading through them, even before I could read much myself. My mom often read to my sister and me before bed, and she put on books-on-tape to listen to during long trips in the car. I have many fond memories of listening to *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in the car with my mom on the way to visit my grandparents, or sitting around the living room with my whole family as we all cried at Dobby's death in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Reading and sharing stories with my family created some of my best and clearest childhood memories.

I was a voracious reader once I started reading on my own. I spent my allowance on new books at Borders, and once I was finished with them, I wanted everyone else to read them, too. I loved talking about my favorite characters and stories. At dinner, I would often say "That reminds of this part in *The Sisters Grimm* where..." despite the fact that no one else in my family had read that particular series. I asked my friends at school to read my favorite books, too. My best friend's mom, who was very competitive about the Accelerated Reader books we read for school, thought that my frequent book recommendations was a ploy to stop my friend from reading books that would count for school. I thought that was hilarious, because all I wanted was someone else to talk to about my books.

I continued reading as I went through middle school. Like many girls my age, I got caught up in the paranormal young adult craze started by *Twilight*. I read a lot of supernatural-style romance books that looking back now I never would have picked up, but that I thoroughly enjoyed at the time. At the same time, I came across some amazing books that I still love today. A major stand-out for me was *Daughter of Smoke and Bone*, a young adult fantasy that took place in Prague. This book enchanted me with its quirky, mysterious descriptions of the city so much that I remembered the distinct atmosphere when I visited Prague during my study abroad, more than six years after I read the book for the first time. While much of what I read in my young-adult reading phase was not memorable, there were a few books like this series that became life-time favorites.

Although I read frequently all throughout middle school, I started to slow down once high school started. My freshman year was the first time I had ever had to read books for school, and reading became more work than fun. The only time I had read a book that was a struggle to get through was when I read *The Lord of the Rings* series, as a part of a trade to get my dad to read *The Hunger Games*. I was glad to have read most of the books we read in my high school Literature classes, but reading three or four books a semester while having to analyze and remember a lot of specific details sapped me of my desire to read for pleasure.

This lull in reading continued through the first few years of college. While I didn't have literature classes anymore, my international affairs degree meant that I was reading constantly for all of my classes. When it came time to relax, I found that I didn't want to spend my energy investing in a new story that might not be good, but instead do something easier like watching Netflix. I wanted to read more than I did, consistently setting New Year's Resolutions to read six books, eight books a year, downloading books onto my Kindle app so I wouldn't have to

invest in the physical copy. While I did read a few books, I wasn't satisfied with my progress until May 2019.

After school ended in my junior year, I came across YouTube videos of people talking about books. I became hooked. I found myself watching video after video and becoming more excited about books and reading again. I soon had a list of all the books I wanted to read, and I found that I was ready to read them. Not only did I have more time to read during the summer, but I had gotten over my fear of not being interested in the books. With access to a lot of recommendations, I looked forward to reading instead of being worried it wouldn't pay off. My reading increased even when I started school again. I had less time, so my pace slowed down, but I never stopped reading completely. I finally had found a way to fit reading back into my schedule.

I got back into reading around the same time I started as a consultant at the CommLab. I soon found a connection between these two activities. My reading would affect how I thought as a consultant which would affect my reading. Because my parents had instilled an appreciation for good writing in me as a child, I was aware of the writing style of the books I was reading. I could recognize beautiful—or awkward—prose and the flow of ideas throughout the story. This skill helped me as I trained to become a consultant. I felt like I could recognize good writing and either praise it or suggest alternatives. I also was aware of the general structure of a piece of writing. I found myself referencing having a “beginning, middle, and end” when discussing personal statements or even the merits of a strong topic sentence. This technique was definitely influenced by my knowledge of typical story structures.

As I grew as a consultant, I also found that I was a more discerning reader. As I trained to pick up on things like organization, word choice, and flow when reading documents for the

CommLab, I began to think about these ideas when reading in my free time. I was more in tune with the writing of my books than ever. In turn, I used that experience again as a consultant.

Reading has been very helpful both to me personally and in my work at the CommLab. I know that my reading has changed in every period of my life and will continue to do so. I just hope that, even if I go through times of less reading, I can always find my way back to the comfort of a good story.