

Student name

Professor Barnes

ACR 150

Date

Oral History Project

What was your experience with literacy growing up?

Transcript

Cherry: Hi Robert, today we are going to interview you to get some feedback on your experiences while at school during your kindergarten years up until high school. How do you feel about that?

Robert: Works for me.

Cherry: So, before we get started, can you give me some background about yourself?

Robert: I'm 51 years of age, white male European decent, Irish and Italian. I was born here in America in the Kalamazoo, Michigan. I attended St. Augustine's Catholic Grade School and then Monsignor Hackett High School. Upper middle class working as an attorney for a Wall Street hedge fund.

Cherry: Thank You Robert. Now tell me, what was it like in your household with regards to reading and writing? How did your parents treat you?

Robert: My mother was a schoolteacher, and my father was an attorney. So, both were very high on education and literacy given their respective professions. My parents were not very involved in my education, rather educational excellence was an unspoken expectation. This was because at an early age they could see the potential in us and had provided us with all the tools and best training and support to meet those expectations. All we had to do was provide ourselves with the work ethic needed to achieve.

Cherry: Wow that's great that you came from such a strong family background with both parents being educated and highly literate. You mentioned that your parents weren't very involved in your studies, so how did you motivate yourself because I know kids don't really want to go after school to study or read a book. Most times we rush out to play with our friends. How did you stay focused?

Robert: As a grade schooler, the praise or the disappointment of my parents was enough. However, like any adolescent at some point that motivation waned. As high school approached my father could see this; he sat me down and made me an offer. He told me that if I could get the grades, he would pay for me to go to any college in the world that I wanted to attend. So, I transformed from a B average to a straight A student, took my 4.0 GPA to number one spot in my class and graduated to attend Harvard University.

Cherry: Oh Wow! That's such a great offer. It seems that you were really trying hard to get your parents' approval and aspired to be like them. But I wonder Robert, was it a lot of pressure to follow in their foot steps? Did you really enjoy reading for leisure or was it just simply a chore?

Robert: My father was a voracious reader. I was not. I read through my education purely out of necessity.

Cherry: Hmm, ok. Are you telling me there weren't any fictional novels or comic books that you enjoyed?

Robert: I enjoyed reading about sports and politics.

Cherry: That doesn't sound like much fun for a kid but hey to each their own. Did you experience any challenges?

Robert: Yes, writing! It is hard to learn to write well if you do not like to read. My father suggested I read Hemingway and learn to write the way he wrote. So, I did and while my writing improved markedly so too did my appreciation for reading, especially pure writers like Hemingway.

Cherry: Now that we've covered your parents' expectations, how was your learning experience at school?

Robert: It was a positive experience because I had the work ethic to make sure I succeeded.

Cherry: Yes, we figured that by now. But how were your teachers and their methods, their enthusiasm, their support, the book that they assigned, tools used?

Robert: Generally, they were helpful and interested in my success. However, one teacher who happened to be my English literature teacher was a liberal piece of sh*t who wanted me to stumble. The problem was I was smart enough not to. All in all, decent educators but I feel like they did not prepare me well enough for the next level which was college. Long before any of that, the two most effective tools used for reading and writing were SRAs and Phonics. SRAs were a specific type of literacy system in grade school that was a graduated, color-coded set of cards that tested reading comprehension and vocabulary. I don't know if they are still used today. The second effective tool was phonics which was a system of spellings and pronunciations through memorization and an understanding of the sounds of the alphabet. I believe it is still in use today.

Cherry: Those tools you described sound pretty effective, but you said your teachers in high school did not prepare you for the next level, what would you change if you had the opportunity?

Robert: I would teach students a clearer structure and discipline in writing i.e. Hemingway. I enjoyed his style of writing because he wrote in a manner that anyone, regardless of their literacy level, could understand, appreciate and find enjoyable.

Cherry: Hemingway is truly one of the greatest writers in history. Robert, thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Any final thoughts on literacy?

Robert: To me writing is the single most important means of communication and first impressions that any person can make. More emphasis should be placed on learning to write properly in schools.

Cherry: Thank you again for taking the time out of your busy evening to speak with me. This now concludes our interview. Thank You.

Reflection

Listening to Roberts experience really gave me some insight as to what learning was like some 20 years ago. Given his socioeconomic background he had a strong support system at home and also at school. He attended fairly affluent and prominent schools with decent infrastructure, apparatus, curricula and most importantly teachers who provided a healthy and positive environment for learning. With that being said, Robert's and my approach to literacy is similar but very different. His learning seemed fueled by his parents' strict expectations. My parents expected and wanted me to do well also but I developed a passion for reading on my own. I read a lot of novels for pleasure. Roberts schools and mine were very different in terms of money. The one commonality is the enthusiasm and support that we received for our teachers. My schools were not in affluent areas and did not have significant budgets, but the teachers made sure to nurture our learning, something that all students should benefit from regardless of socioeconomic status.