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ENG 11000-E 26428

Literary Narrative

Learning to Read and Write

The sun is setting on the bay as I drive down the highway. On my right, I see the residents carrying their fishing gear and surfboards, disappear into the overpasses from their houses into the beach. The damp smell of the sea weed, and fish hit me, and the summer breeze hits my face.

The highway slowly caves into a regular avenue, and the shop-shacks pop-up on both sides. Ahead I see the top of my destination, the Montauk Lighthouse, the edge of Long Island. I drive up to it as the last tourists leave. I park my car in a corner.

As I exit and lock the car, an elderly slowly walks up to me. Jimmy is in his sixties, wearing rimmed glasses and a bucket hat. He smiles and waves at me, “How’s it going there? Back to paying respects, eh?”

“You already know Jimmy”, I replied as I took some things from my Jeep. A bouquet. And a book titled “The History of Montauk”

Seven years ago, my family migrated to this small town from the Middle East. I don’t remember much from my time there, but I remember it was very hot. And because of the heat, I didn’t go out much, but I preferred staying home and doing my homework. I used to read a lot too, and I could owe my grades to that.

However, moving to Montauk was an entirely different story. When I started school here, I was taken aback by the very foundation of the US schooling system. I had to go to each classroom, and English was considered a major subject. Back in Riyadh, the teachers came to the students and English was the least important subject. Everyone got an A in it.

In my freshman year, one of the books assigned was The Outsiders. Even though I loved the story of Ponyboy Curtis and his gang of Greasers, I had difficulty doing my assignments. I failed almost all the tests and my home works mostly thrown into the trash. I could not comprehend it, and sometimes I secluded myself in places that no one would bother looking for me. One of those places was the Montauk Lighthouse. It was a tourist place, but the beach had its solidarity back then. I would often hide by the cove, immersing myself in books borrowed from the library.

Once, when I hid myself away from the world, an attendant of the Lighthouse found me. He was Mark. He was very elderly with white hair and a skin that was salt-tanned from his years at the sea and rimmed glasses so close his nose that it would fall anytime. “Hello there!” he greeted me, and continued, “you know, I am a reader myself, but I read in a place where it is not cold.” He took me to the lighthouse and showed me a stack of books that I could read if I come to the lighthouse another time. And that’s how I met my first friend in Montauk.

I soon became a regular visitor of the lighthouse. The stack of books that Mark showed me had almost every bit of knowledge in them. They ranged from history to politics, engineering, fiction and non-fiction. As a reader, I finished these books in no time. I found solace in the lighthouse. However, my grades did not reflect my reading habit. Somehow Mark learned about this, and he brought it upon himself to teach me. Pulling a chair next to me, he asked, “Danny, show me how you read.” I read him a chapter from one of the books. He told me to close it, and he quizzed me on the chapter. I could not answer most of the questions. “Ah! I see the problem now. You are a passive reader.” He instructed me to read the chapter again, but this time, he wanted me to pause at each paragraph, asking me to make small notes about it.

This way he taught me how to read, a feat that I thought I accomplished only to realize I merely took the first step only. He taught me symbolism, repetition, setting, paradoxes, juxtapositions, rhetoric, and much more. I was never a reader, but merely a person who only looked at the boarder picture, not paying any attention to detail, and passed for the next appeal.

When I moved to New York City, I found myself in a barrage of diverse cultures. Throughout these experiences, I learned to pay attention to detail. I took my surroundings seriously, learning the location and impact of everyday objects. Even in the fast-paced environment, I saw my setting had a purpose (like the halal cart on Amsterdam Ave after you exit from NAC on the west side).

For the first time in my life, I had this sense of accomplishment that helped my self-esteem. I was able to communicate much better with the people around me, and I was finally able to see myself progress. My time in Montauk helped me realize that I have much better potential, and I do not have to close myself from the world anymore.

I owe my love for learning detail to Mark and Montauk. I started paying attention to details and this made me a better writer and reader. I realized reading isn’t just about skimming through pages even though that can be a part of prereading. Those experiences in Montauk gave me the strength to take my weakness as a challenge and to go forward with it. And because of constant practice, I got to be a better reader and writer. Learning to read and write is an ongoing process. I also understood that paying attention to minute details, taking notes and rereading the passages are some of the key elements for me to succeed in understanding a piece of writing. The small steps that Mark helped me to take had a significant impact in my life, this gave me the confidence and strength to work hard and succeed with my reading and writing skills.