

Writers Autobiography

Someone Someone

English 106i

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## Writers Autobiography

Curiosity is at the heart of every writer, it is what challenges you and provides the initiative to learn more and therefore create from your experiences. As a child I was always curious about newspapers. Seeing my father every morning unfolding great pieces of paper resulted in me imitating him as soon as he put it down. My mother's favorite childhood picture of me was when I was 3 years old holding a newspaper upside down and pretending to read; the picture captured the first few times I was exposed to letters.

My first concrete exposure was through my grandmother prior to my academic life. When I was a child both my parents had jobs, so my grandmother used to take care of me when my parents were at work. My grandmother spoke to me only in Sindhi, the language of one of the four provinces in Pakistan, which resulted in me picking up the language through her. At this point of her life my grandmother was working on her project to translate Sindhi poetry written by a Sufi Saint into Urdu, which was the national language of Pakistan, uniting the four provinces by providing common ground and the ability to communicate with each other. Through her work she allowed this Sufi poets work to surpass the boundaries of one province and infiltrate the rest of the country. As she worked on her project she gave me assignments, one of them was to repeat poems after her. I never understood the complexity of the poems I was reciting but I learned the language relatively quickly this way. After picking up Sindhi, Urdu came to me naturally as both were similar. After Sindhi and Urdu, English was the third language I learnt.

Most of my academic life I was enrolled in a school that had adopted the Cambridge system of education after sixteen years I transferred to an American school in

Pakistan. Since I attended schools that had adopted foreign systems of education I was taught English from day one. Memorizing the ABCs to joined handwriting, to reading, analyzing novels and poetry. I always had problems with English however, Urdu and Sindhi being the first two languages that I learnt my thought process would always be fluctuating between the two and I would have to write my thoughts down in English. It was as if I was carrying on the translation project that my grandmother was working when I would recite the poems back to her. This resulted in me writing out my thoughts in English but nobody being able to understand me clearly.

This turned into a somewhat traumatizing situation as some teachers, instead of helping me understand my mistakes and guide me to write better, would read my essays out aloud in class trying to mock certain sentences I had written. If it was done in a more private manner maybe the criticism would have been useful, however the embarrassment and humiliation I felt in front of my classmates made me start hating my English class and English as a language. I would avoid speaking it or writing it, and whenever I needed to do so it would always be in a very non-serious effort, I had basically accepted the fact that English was not meant to be a my strongest point.

When I transferred to the American school, to my relief I realized many differences between the two systems of education. The biggest difference and the one most important to me was the way each viewed writing as a subject. Whereas in the Cambridge system a writing style was not one that was adopted it was passed on to you. This resulted in a lot of students not being comfortable with what was expected of them as far as writing papers was concerned. I was one of these students. The American system offered me the guidance I required to take my ideas and express them in a more comprehensible manner.

The American system was also more advanced technologically they required all their papers to be typed out on computers. This was like a breath of fresh air for me. As I could write in three different scripts my handwriting in turn was compromised when it came to English, as it was the last of three languages I learnt. In the Grammar School my terrible handwriting was the reason for my failing English in the eighth grade. This was because it was difficult to understand my handwriting and my teacher told me clearly that she did not have the patience required to try and understand what had been written. Once again I felt my ideas were restricted only to Sindhi and Urdu and therefore could not reach a certain audience. The unclear handwriting was due to me being much more comfortable with the script used for Sindhi and Urdu. Both these scripts are very similar finding their roots in the Arabic and Persian scripts. However the English script is extremely different, and it was due to this that my formation of the English letters suffered. This was very frustrating for me and I often thought about the project my grandmother had carried out, how the fact that she knew more than one language enabled her to communicate ideas to a nation whereas prior to her work these ideas were restricted only to a certain people. In the American school I had an opportunity with the different approach the faculty took towards their students I grabbed it and worked hard to improve and develop my own writing style and concrete ways to express my ideas.

This expression was further developed with a writing course in the eleventh grade with the title of 'Creative writing'. Through this course I was introduced to the concept of free writing and allowed to develop my style of writing, a style that suited me best. Whereas in the Grammar school, whenever you wrote an essay you were provided with

what I used to call 'the roadmap.' This was handed out with the topic, and it basically functioned as a guide as to what each paragraph should be about. Most of the time I wanted to put in my own thoughts and ideas into the essay, however this would always result in the essay becoming unclear and me wavering away from the 'road map.' For me writing was personal, no matter what the topic, an essay should always reflect the writer it is this reflection of identity within the words that save different essays on the same issue from becoming generic. This realization came forth when in the American system writing was used to express individuality. Creative writing especially allowed you to take the topics given and interpret them in the way you understood them and not how you were expected to understand them. Also the teachers were open to ideas and encouraging towards their students, whereas in the Grammar school your weaknesses were discussed in front of the whole class in the American school your privacy was respected and therefore allowed for a much closer student teacher relationship. This environment made me feel confident about seeking help when I needed to instead of just feeling humiliated and not doing anything about the problems I had. With a greater incentive to do well I started reading many English books, which ultimately led to a reading obsession.

Even though knowing three languages provided me with some challenges I would not want to give up the chance of learning more. I have realized that the ability to write is a way of passing on thoughts, ideas, questions, answers and breaking boundaries. When one is passionate about doing this then it is important to adopt as many means as possible to do so. Languages are the means through which writing can infiltrate many people from different backgrounds thus providing a means to unite people all over the world through ideas. Today, it is this thought that drives me to learn as many languages as possible

within my capacity. It serves my curiosity to learn and understand people from other cultures and be able to pass on my ideas to them. Trying to learn another language and going to foreign countries is my goal for now, even though I have not taken any foreign language courses in Purdue University as yet, I still plan on going through with this objective.