

My Story, My Truth
1st Place Stuckey Contest Winner
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I've been asked many times to write my story. From the PICC lines (peripherally inserted central catheter) to the procedures, people think I've got a good allegory to tell. In a small town where everyone knows everyone's name and life story, everyone in this town indeed knows me. I'm "that sick girl" who gets asked a million times a day how I'm feeling. I'm the teenager who knows every single pharmacist by name and every person in this town who can draw blood. So sure, others might think I have a good story to tell, but for me it's a book of truths too tragic to be told. I'm fearful of telling my hard reality because once my words touch air, I can never take them back.

The truth. It's hard to share. To tell facts is to take a tiny segment of myself and place it on every line. It's telling a perfect stranger everything. The truth is to bare my soul and to give myself away; its reading about my own life and crying. And when I cry over a book, I feel the brokenness of the author as she places her specific words on the page. For that split second when I feel the emotion of the writer, I too feel the urge to tell my story. It terrifies me, but if the author is able to place her life in the hands of a stranger, then maybe I too can put pen to paper.

Although I fear telling my story, I know the truth one day will come out. As I consider writing my story, I continue to read others. Reading gives me a connection between truth and fiction, between right and wrong, and between the author and myself. As I open up the pages of the *Poisonwood Bible*, I become a missionary. I travel with Tim O'Brien to Vietnam, and become the person who watches in despair as his friend sinks into the depths of a "shit field." In that moment, I feel that I am really there. I am the schizophrenic in the *Prince of Tides*, weeping over the bloody dogs that aren't even real. I put myself in the author's story and even though these novels are fiction, I know that they have truths threaded throughout. I know that each author had to air his or her truths to create something meaningful. Their strength gives me the courage to share my story.

I want to tell my story because I am a reader. I know the significance of a novel in a reader's life. I love the truth that appears throughout a story. I know what it's like to feel such a connection with a character that I start to see the world differently. I know what it's like to sit in a bathroom during lunch rather than socialize with friends, so I can spend alone time with Harry Potter. It's not that I have no social life; I just adore the connection that I feel with certain novels. One day I want someone to feel a connection with the story I write. I desire to move somebody with the words I place on a page, as so many authors' words have moved me.

Truthfully, the desire to read wasn't one I've always had. While I've always enjoyed reading, sometimes being considered cool was more important than being smart, and that meant not reading. So for several years, I put my admiration for reading on the shelf. I took up other hobbies: ones that my fellow classmates thought were worthy of a fifth grader's praise. I

disregarded how easy it was to pick up a familiar novel and remember it like an old friend. I put my trust in my fellow friends and fell prey to their belief that reading was lame.

For about a year, I thought reading was something popular people did not do, so I tried not to read at all. I only read enough to keep a good grade in English, but no extra. The truth is that I didn't have the courage to be placed in the same category as "the nerds". However, my love for reading just would not go away. Every time I stepped into my elementary library I felt so much excitement that I knew I belonged. I couldn't leave the library without a book tucked in the crease of my elbow.

My truth is that I loved reading then and I love and appreciate it even more now. I decided after fifth grade that reading was not "nerdy". I realized that reading was something that I should be grateful for and not embarrassed by. Reading is a gift that I have that not everyone possesses. I appreciate it and love the thrill that comes of it. To read is to push myself into places I am not comfortable. It's running from my owner as a slave in *Copper Sun* or crying over my dead sister in *The Sky Is Everywhere*. Reading places me in positions that I have never had to go or will ever get to. It gives me the desire to feel smarter. It creates an ambience of a good love story and the sensation of finishing the last page. It's excitement, a drive, a force that continues to push me. It's what every reader does. I hurry to finish the book, to find the resolve. Yet, when I finish the story, I lose my once easy companion.

Companionship and truth are the beautiful things that only readers understand. I become the characters, and their lives become mine. I become Anna in *My Sister's Keeper*, stressing over situations too large for a young girl. I engulf myself in the novel's plot, searching for the answers only Anna understands. I see both sides and, at the end, I realize that there is not a right or a wrong in any story. It's my interpretation as a reader and what I want to believe.

I believe that, as a reader, I have a beautiful gift. I might be in the hospital receiving formula through a stomach tube, but the moment I open up a novel I am someone else. I see the truth the way I want to. I am taken to a place that only the author and I know of. I keep the secrets of the pages and immerse myself into whichever character's life is better than my own. I become someone new, someone better, and someone braver.

Being brave is difficult. As a girl with auto-immune disease, I want to read about everything but sickness. I don't want to use my great escape to read about someone else's hell. But as a reader, I desire to expand my boundaries. So this year I read my first book about a girl with a disease. The book was *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, and it was a book that I will never forget. For as long as I've been sick, I have had people suggest books for me to read about other sick people. I just have never been able to lose myself in another story as painful as my own.

I live the life of a sick person; reading about another sick girl with cancer was not an enticing opportunity. I did it though; I immersed myself in the novel, and that book has touched me more than any other because as I read that novel, I wept. I don't have cancer and I am not going to die. But every single word placed on those pages pierced my soul. When the main character went on her Make-A-Wish trip, I thought of my Give Kids the World trip to Florida. When she puked, so did I. I understood her story, and that was the most painful part. I realized

after finishing that novel that one day, maybe not today or even soon, but some day, I will write my own story.

One day when I'm stronger, I will write. I will put pen to paper and tell the story only I can tell. I will cry over myself. I will allow someone to examine my story, to live my history. Hopefully that reader will see the world a little differently; the reader will understand me a little more clearly. I will become free then because I will have finally let go of the past, and all of my truths will be examined. My story will change the perspective of those who dare to open the pages. They will see my truth and change as I have changed, for the better, by the words of other writers.