New Life, Who’s This?

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I’m going to just put it out there that there’s little I dislike more than having to reflect on my childhood. Ninety percent of it is a blur, and the other ten I usually suppress because it’s irrelevant now in terms of my ability to function. That said, let’s talk about my elementary school experiences. In five words: surgeries, average grades, few friends. Ready? All aboard the Pain Train.

Oh, elementary school. Not a day goes by that I don’t wonder what I would’ve been like minus the medical trauma and undiagnosed A.D.D. I was an average student but I had an attention problem that follows me to this day in the form of overdue assignments, skimmed fine details and procrastination with a heavy dose of anxiety. My mom can attest to the fact that all my report cards and interims read “Whitney struggles to stay on task” or “Whitney needs to work on time management,” or something of that likeness as young as first grade till the day I graduated high school.

My favorite subjects were, as I could recall, always art or English because both used a lot of bright colors that kept my attention. But – and this is really weird – I hated writing anything. Loved reading. Couldn’t get enough of that. Writing about it, though? Like, a full paragraph? Five whole sentences? Yikes. I’ll go back to my Crayola, thanks. That is, until my teachers would bribe me with something from the incentive box until I turned in my work. Apparently, there were a handful of other kids in the class that needed that kind of help, too. I still find it baffling that throughout twelve years of the same issues from me, no one ever thought to get me tested for A.D.D. Ever. See? I’m already off topic.

When my teachers could bribe my work out of me or I found a topic particularly interesting, I got As. Bs if I didn’t try. There is an absolute need for me to find a subject at least somewhat interesting for me to do well in it grades-wise. I tend to hyper fixate (obsess) over subjects I enjoy, such as mental health or English. As a result I’m usually well-versed on those subjects on my own because as the years have worn on I’ve come to love reading. I think this also reflects heavily in my writing ability: after reading a variety of things over the years, I’ve come to appreciate a broader spectrum on how writing is used and adapted it into my own writing ability by picking up patterns in the style. Unfortunately, the same talent and quality can’t be replicated in math for me.

Math is evil. Mental math is torture. Please, please, do not ask me to give back change. I will stare into space for a few seconds while panicking internally before hastily shoving approximate change at you, while kicking myself for the rest of the day over it. It’s happened at work. I don’t know what it is, but something about numbers and operations is typically a lot harder for me to grasp than virtually any other subject. I spent nearly every summer in classes making up for the lack of understanding for the rest of the year. Since that was the only subject I’d have trouble in, no one tried to hold me back for a year. Turns out, I just needed a tutor throughout a lot of it. With my propensity to not ask for help ever, though, I only utilized such resources way after elementary school.

I’ve had plenty of good teachers over the years, but the only good math teachers I can recall happened far later in my school career. I do recall being in a second/third mixed class and doing long division with as much enthusiasm as a dental patient getting a root canal with no pain killers. I remember struggling over fractions and multiplication tables. I remember struggling a lot. There was one teacher in fifth grade who I’m still half-convinced is a demon sent to torture kids and the last I heard he was arrested for manhandling a kid during a fire drill. He got fed up pretty easily with me because of my disability and my inability to be prepared for class (I’d ask for pencils everyday and then cry and hate myself because I’d always forget or forget to write it down). He yelled a lot. I did really poorly in his class and just barely scraped by with Cs even in the classes I was good at because he was simply an intimidating presence to me and never seemed to actually care about the students. I guess he must’ve been the age I am now back then and didn’t have the patience for it. A fun little fact: I actually changed the way I wrote certain letters to try to get him to like me more, because somewhere in my tiny child brain I had thought that assimilating to his style of writing would help me survive how he taught. I suppose, ultimately, it worked.