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09/14/2015

 **From pen and paper to computer and internet, a young man’s growth into the digital era**

 Abstract

Technology of all sorts has helped in my growth in intellect and curiosity as well as how I engage with the world. Throughout my life I’ve learned to master utilities as simple as a pencil or marker to more advanced equipment such as a computer in order to learn, create and engage. My paper begins with the earliest of my days as I picked up a marker for the first time to share with the world my first stories. It moves on to a description of people in my life, how they’ve influenced me and their means of communicating with society. Then after some intake on my views of speech and writing I discuss my experiences with literacy in school and during my personal time. The paper then moves on to my interests in television, video games and music and how these early interests lead to my fascination with technology and my early experimentations with editing programs. I conclude with my experiences with social media and how I occasionally feel overwhelmed by the digital world.

When I look back to my earliest childhood years I can’t honestly say I can remember an interest in trying to form words through scribbles. My interests were in illustrations I was a big fan of cartoons and power rangers and I would try to make a story with crude drawings of characters from various cartoons. This was my earliest form of storytelling of trying to communicate something to people. I loved markers these colored utensils were my equipment for making a world on paper. Much like ancient Egyptians with hieroglyphics I didn’t need letters to tell a tale. What might have looked like different colored stick figures with big heads and spiky hair to adults was an epic battle or an adventure to my eyes.

The most oral people I know would have to be the grandparents of my girlfriend. In their world the language of texting and emailing is foreign if they want to tell you something they’re going to make sure you hear it. The idea of sending a text message and waiting for a response is ludicrous to them. Why sit there and wait to receive a message when you can pick up a phone and have immediate contact with someone? This is their way of thinking (patience is also a virtue they lack). They are also very opinionated people, her grandmother especially. To say she has no filter to her words would be an understatement , if she means to express her opinions on a matter or individual, good or bad you best be prepared to hear it. These were people of another time of course, in their youths the technologies we use to socialize with today such as computers and smartphones were nonexistent so verbal communication was more prominent. When I see how they struggle with some of the devices we take for granted and their annoyance of how much our smartphones and computers have become a part of our lives it reminds me of postman’s description of the conflict of two worlds when he states “two opposing world views…..coexisted in uneasy tension.” (p.48)

When I think of orality I somewhat think of my father. My father is an Arab born in the Middle East but at a young age his family migrated to Venezuela. Through his parents he learned how to speak the Arabic language but because he went to schools in Venezuela where they taught in Spanish he never learned how to read and write in Arabic. To look at a book in Arabic for my father were to be like looking at a book in French for me. To have a communication with someone in Arabic my father would prefer speaking on the phone with them. When someone sends him a text in Arabic he usually turns to my mother to ask what the message says and asks her to type his response.

In many ways writing makes life a little more convenient than merely speaking. Writing eases the stress of needing to remember or memorize something rather than hearing it verbally. We are humans and as humans it is easy for us to be forgetful now and then which is why we jot down notes as reminders. With writing we are able to record the history of our species and learn lessons from the past. Writing also has a way of triggering emotions. When you receive a card from someone special with every word you read you an emotion of joy and days months or years later you may look back to that card to read those words and feel that emotion once again. When something is said to us it is said and that is the end of it. The only record of what was said is your memory and many times our memory may alter or forget pieces of what we hear verbally. However with writing context and dialogues are more permanent and reliable.

As important as writing is to holding words and information in a physical form it sometimes fail to capture a feeling the way speech does. I’m sure most of us are familiar with Martin Luther King’s I have a dream speech. Do you think it would have made as much of an impact in 1963 if people read it rather than listened to doctor King’s speak? The passion the emotion with which the speech was delivered was just as important as the words themselves in catching the attention of the entire country. Let’s talk about something more relevant, texting. I am sure almost everyone has experienced at least once a time when a text message was sent or read that was misinterpreted. A guy may have texted his girlfriend something as a joke which she took as an insult. A message may seem as though the person who sent it is upset when really she is not. With words it is sometimes hard to know how a person is feeling but in a verbal conversation a voice may get raised you may laugh a friend will sound upset. Emotions and expressions are easily recognizable through tones and manners of speaking.

I learned how to read like most people by going to school but it was my mother who first trained me in knowing the alphabets and learning sentences. Thinking back at it now those were not exactly fun times. My mother was not an easier teacher and isn’t a woman of much patience. There was a lot of yelling and frustration, frustration on her as to why I was having a hard time with reading in the beginning, frustration on me for feeling like I was disappointing her. I even remember crying a few times but I know she just wanted me to do my best. For my parents my siblings and I being literate and well educated was very important. They knew all too well the struggles of living without an education and the opportunities having one might bring us. My father began working when he was 12 and decades of hard manual labor have taken a toll on him. My mother was the only girl from her village to attend and graduate for college since people of the village didn’t see it as important for a young girl to have a college education back then. Young women were instead expected to be married and take care of the husband and kids at home.

Growing up I mostly read comic books and the Goosebumps books. I am a horror story enthusiast always have been but what really enticed me about the Goosebumps books was they allowed the reader to choose how a story went. You would read the book up until a certain point and then the book would give you two choices on how the story continues and it was up to you how to advance. At the time I never read anything like this. I was use to the books they made me read in school which had a single beginning middle and end to read never before did I feel that I had a say on the destiny of a main character of a book. Comic books are something that until this day I enjoy as I have collected hundreds of them over the years. They are tales of these characters of great power who can do what we cannot much like reading tales of Greek mythology. They are also relatable and have many human traits. Through reading them one can identify with struggles of a hero and say that in your own way I am superman or I am spiderman. It is a world easy to escape in to and one that continues to grow and change for years to come.

How I experienced reading and writing was different depending on where I was. In school reading and writing felt more forced and not enjoyable. Writing mostly compromised of taking notes and writing essays rather than being expressive and I wasn’t free to choose what I was going to read I was limited to what my teachers assigned to us which most of the time I found dull and boring with the exception of a few novels such as *Of Mice And Men* and *Lord of the Flies.* School was also the first time I experienced language on computers. In grade school they had Macintosh computers and I experienced transitioning from writing to typing for the first time in computer class. Rather than have us save our work in a notebook the teacher would have us save it on a floppy disc it was an odd experience at first especially since I did not have a home computer until I began middle school. On weekends my mom would take my brother and I to the mosque where we would learn how to read and write Arabic from the sheik. This was the most unenjoyable of my literacy learning experiences as I often struggled with reading and writing in Arabic and the sheik was quick to be loud and frustrated.

Some days after school and on weekends I would go to the library. There I would have the freedom to read whatever I choose, a liberating freedom after enduring the old world language of books teachers forced me to read in school. My days at the library would usually end with me going home to with a stack of graphic and children’s novels. At home my best friend and I would write down ideas for comics or fan fiction stories , some of which have survived until this day and we enjoy looking back at them from time to time.

Although I don’t watch much television now back when I was a child I was virtually glued to the TV screen. My televised programs mainly consisted of cartoons so nickelodeon and cartoon network where my go to channels. These were my 30 minute interactions with characters of another world and I almost felt like I was in the episodes with them. Television programs were not the only thing that drew me to my TV so were video games. It was through video games that I believe I first had an interest in seeing technology advance. From the Nintendo to the Super Nintendo to the Nintendo 64 I was amazed and drawn in to the advancements in graphics and game play experience every new console had. With each new generation in video games I was intrigued to see the improved visuals of the games how the characters began to have more and more depth and definition. I began buying game magazines and surfing the web to discover what new features the next generation of gaming would have. Never before had there been an aspect in which I was so interested in seeing its technological progression. These games have helped me grow in the aspect of thinking ore strategically and learning that patience and resolve will in the end be rewarding.

I didn’t have an interest in music until I was about 10 years old. I’m embarrassed to say the first song I ever enjoyed listening to was Blue (Da Ba Dee) by Eiffel 65. Later on I became a big fan of Linkin Park when they released their first album and then I began listening to hip hop. As I grew music became a part of my identity and my taste became more diverse. In middle school my cd player was just another limb of my body and now I have almost 2000 songs on my phone. From music came my passion in video editing. In high school I would dabble around with different editing programs and I would take songs and clips from various sources and make music videos. From there I became interested in video editing and aside from several projects of my own I would edit videos for family members and friends.

The hobby of video editing and making music videos is what introduced me to the digital society we are now a part of. In the begging most of the songs I used in my music videos were files I downloaded from limewire. At the time limewire was probably the most popular file sharing program as I didn’t know anyone who wasn’t using it. I discovered YouTube when I was trying to find a site to upload my videos on to share with the world. Through YouTube I received feedback on my videos and discovered a community of individuals who also shared an interest in this hobby. They helped me learn new techniques we worked on projects together and even competed videos against each other in order to keep that fire under our behinds going. This led me to MySpace and Facebook because I wanted to have a location where I could connect and socialize with these likeminded individuals as well as share my videos with friends and family.

As time went by video editing took a bit of a back seat and I’ve lost touch with most of the community on YouTube I made videos with and social networks became a place where I could see what’s going on in the lives of my friends family and acquaintances socialize and discover pages dedicated to things that interest me. Facebook and instagram have allowed me to reconnect with old friends and classmates I have not seen or spoken to in years. This aspect of connecting with the world making it feel smaller of having friends thousands of miles away be right next door online is one feature of social networks that I have always been fond of. Of course with the good there is always the bad. I don’t particularly partake in arguments online. Even if something is said that would annoy me I usually ignore it because I find these people who are only brave behind a computer to be ridiculous and not worth the effort or energy. I have however seen friendships destroyed and arguments play out on Facebook pages such as when a friend of mine who had begun dating a man and learned through Facebook that he was also seeing her cousin. That’s the danger of social media you are out there nothing is private anymore.

I’ve had my on and off again love interest with technology. There are times when it feels as though I am no longer in control that I am plugged in just like the computers I use. It is so that we live in the age of technopoly. Our culture as postman said, has been submitted “to the sovereighty of technique and technology.” (P.52) We have willingly allowed ourselves to be subdued by machines. For that reason there are times where I do away with my Facebook page (which never lasts) shut off my phone and go discover the world on my own again or pick up a pen and paper and focus on my work. I have grown with technology and I will continue to grow and although I’ll get sucked in to it at times I’m still capable of breaking away from the digital world to find peace of mind in the real world.