

One Smart Cookie

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"I'm home!" I yelled as I raced up the driveway and burst through the front door. "What are we doing today?" I asked my Grandma, who I fondly refer to as my Grammie. She raised her rolling pin in acknowledgment to my question, and continued to press the freshly mixed dough flat to the table. "Yes! Grammie's Special Chocolate Chip Cookies!" I squealed in excitement as I tackled her in a hug. It was an unspoken tradition of ours to make cookies at least once a week after school while I was in first grade. We would spend hours entrenched in the white mountains of flour and sugar, wearing the trademark powder splashes common to bakers. The smell of vanilla extract enveloped us, and we constantly inhaled the delicious smell of baked cookies wafting from the kitchen. While Grammie occupied my young mind with baking after school, my mother would seize these precious moments to relax in our big recliner chair and curl up with one of her favorite mystery books. Mom always made time for reading, no matter where she was. She could be stopped in traffic while driving, or in line at the grocery store, and still manage to pull out a book from her purse. I did not understand how she could spend so much time staring at pieces of paper bound together with cardboard, but it appeared to make her happy, so I decided not to question it. This continued for a while, until one day when I felt particularly adventurous.

I approached my mom in her big, comfy chair, and asked her the question that had been on my mind. "Mom, why do you read?" I asked her. "You could be doing other things in the world, instead of just looking at a book." She finished the last page she had been perusing, looked at me, and contemplated an appropriate answer.

After she had thought about it, she responded, "Well, I like to read because it takes me to other places where I could never go physically. Each book takes place in a different setting, tells a unique story, and incorporates interesting twists. I enjoy reading because it's fun to get lost in the impossible." These

words intrigued me, and I wanted to know more about reading so I could enjoy the same worlds my mother spoke of. My mom picked up on my interest, and answered my questions to the best of her knowledge. She recognized my intentions to learn, and went out to get me my very own book later that week. When she showed me her gift, I was excited to delve into its pages and discover the secrets of literature it held. The book was called “Mike's Magic Cookies”, and looked exciting to my adolescent eyes. Mom picked it out for me because she knew of my love for baking, and thought it would encourage me in my goal to read. As usual, she was right, and I set out to conquer this book. Grammie cheered me on from the comfort of the kitchen as I flipped the paperback open to the first page, and began my odyssey.

Almost instantly, these simple pieces of paper transported me into a land of growth for my young mind. The book had a picture on each page coupled with a paragraph of what I used to think were advanced words. It told a story about a young boy named Mike who journeyed into the forest in search of some cookies for his family's cookout, but found an evil wizard instead. The wizard gave him cursed cookies that turned the eater into an animal. People changed into frogs, chickens, pigs, rabbits, and cats. Eventually, Mike learned his lesson about trusting strangers and simultaneously returned his family back to normal while defeating the evil wizard. At the time, I did not understand the morals of the story to completion, or even the entire storyline, but I was enthralled with the descriptive words. My imagination made a forest from a blade of grass, a solar system from a rock, and a desert from a grain of sand. Although the book was not very complex, it allowed my imagination to explore possibilities it had never encountered before. Through this book, I attempted to make up my own stories, with original plot lines and endings. I wanted to share this new-found knowledge and entertainment with my friends at school, so I took the book with me on the upcoming Monday.

My classmates thought the cover looked decently enticing, and they were excited to find out what I was raving about. I sat down with one of my close friends, and handed the book over for her to explore. She looked at it, and tried to read it out loud, but was moving slowly and stumbling through the words. I

could tell my friends were growing tired of this book that they thought of as being too hard for us, and decided to take matters into my own small hands. I politely asked my friend if I could have the book back and start it from the beginning. She happily passed it over, relieved to be through with her attempt. I thought my classmates might understand the treasures stored in the book if it was read at the proper speed with bigger exclamations. I took the initiative, and started to read in a clear voice to my friends. They loved the book, and I entertain the thought that through my voice, they were united with the literature that I had grown accustomed to reading. Their enthusiasm for the book encouraged me to grow in my reading skills, and I enjoyed sharing my knowledge with friends.

Storytelling allowed me to grow as a reader, and appreciate the skills I accumulated when I was young. My mother continued to obtain books attached to my interests, which encompassed a vast amount of stories for young people including animals, baking, princesses, and inspirational pieces. Grammie and I started reading books while we waited for the delicious cookies to bake in the oven, which stayed consistent throughout the weeks. I kept reading and grew with each book I took in. My teachers realized that I enjoyed it, so they would recommend novels for me to dive into. They would talk to me about the importance of books, and discuss their favorites with me. I became a reader in the AR program, and was second in my class for points on the scale in the library. That library became one of my favorite rooms in the school building, and I found new books containing fascinating stories every day. They captured my attention, and did not relinquish their hold until I turned the last page. I never would have recognized these unknown worlds and opportunities if not for my mom's wise words or Grammie's influence.

My mother instilled in me an early love of reading by setting an example when I was little. Without her pushing me to be my best at a young age, I never would have discovered my love of books and natural abilities to read well. I excelled with my talent, and went on to read bigger and more well-known books. Since this experience, my love for reading has helped me in school by increasing my vocabulary, and allowing me to follow long and difficult plot lines. Reading a simple book allowed me to become who I am today, even though I was initially interested in "Mike's Magic Cookies" for the

scrumptious baked goods and compelling magic behind the story. My Grammie started my appeal for baking and made me excited to read a book about my favorite activity, while encouraging me to read along with our regular practice of doing so while waiting for the oven to ding. She was a large influence on my abilities throughout the process, from beginning my interest to rewarding success. I learned a lot from a small question on a day when I felt particularly curious and bold. Had I not asked, I do not know where I would be today as far as my English skills go. I am thankful for having a curious and innocent child's mind that wanted nothing more than to learn what her mother was doing in the time she spent reading. I came to find out that she was experiencing a magical, fictitious world with each turn of the page.