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### **Literacy Narrative**

Growing up, I was always read a bedtime story. The stories would expand my wondering mind, giving me access to fantastic worlds, setting me off to have magical dreams. As my taste matured quickly, my stories got more involved – what started off with *The Monster at the End of this Book* quickly evolved into chapter books such as *The Magic Treehouse*, and eventually grew to *The Hunger Games*, and now classics such as *Little Women*. Being raised as an only child led me to developing an over-active imagination to keep me occupied, which eventually grew into a relationship with writing.

I found myself quickly writing my own stories, finding almost as much comfort in my own characters as I did in my favorite books. In seventh grade, I decided to join my teacher's weekly writing club he was hosting for the first time. I was eager to be surrounded by like-minded students, and ready to receive feedback (especially since the teacher is a published author). I was involved for two years, as vice president and then promoted to president in eighth grade. The space was mostly centered around the act of writing, with daily writing prompts at the ready, and books to read when you needed inspiration to strike. The only downfall was the feedback; at the end of every session, we would take time to allow students to share what they had written. This turned into a competitive environment, where students would be nit-picky about the edits they would suggest. I would offer what I felt was useful feedback, focusing on the entire plot of the story and the character development, rather than sentence structure or repetitive tendencies. Despite this, I still loved writing and knew a safe writing space existed. Like hooks explained, "many students still seek to enter feminist classrooms because they continue to

believe that there, more than in any other place in the academy, they will have an opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom” (hooks, 15), I wanted the opportunity to experience writing in my own ways, no matter the setting or those surrounding me.

In high school, I didn’t join the writing club, I just focused on classes and attempted to become involved in theatre. My sophomore year though, they added a new class to the schedule: Creative Writing. I eagerly joined, waiting to see what a *structured* writing space would be like. The class focused more on what I was interested in, overall plot structure and character development across different styles. It was designed around multiple assignments, which we shared aloud on the due date. It was *incredible*! I wrote my first serious piece, about an imaginary friend who is fading away from their child, and received great encouragement. My friends were impressed, and my teacher encouraged me to continue writing. This class was the first time I ever considered writing as a potential career path.

I joined Yearbook my junior year, and became the Head Writer my senior year, which exposed me to more journalistic writing and how to be succinct in writing towards a broad audience. Those skills were valuable as I started applying to colleges, as I needed to learn how to write about myself, even though I’d rather write about characters in far off lands. Those two years revealed an aspect of writing I had never considered before, editing. Editing my team’s work opened my eyes to how much I enjoy reading other people’s work. To be able to see a “plot hole” and to offer advice on what the story needs to thrive, was a rewarding experience. I had always thought writing would be a fun career path, but the fear of reality always made me hesitant. In my years in yearbook, I started dreaming of an in between world, in between writing my fantasy lands and working a nine to five job – editing.

My senior year of high school, I was eager to explore the different universities and their creative writing courses they offered. I distinctly remember watching the presentations at each school, as they advertised their wonderful programs and how proud they were of their diverse student population. The following slide or scene in the video would show a fairly diverse group of students smiling as they gathered around a table in the library. Everyone in the audience with me seemed satisfied, they all felt represented. I did not. There was never (and I mean *never*) a student shown with a physical disability, of the ten schools I toured in person, I was never shown. A feeling started to bubble within me, and I didn't have the words to describe it until I was at a scholarship interview here at DU.

The Puksta Scholars Foundation selects 4 incoming freshmen, giving them financial aid and opportunities to create meaningful relationships within their communities while they pursue their own individual Puksta Projects. When I was interviewed to become a scholar, their questions centered in on what social justice issue area I would like to focus on, and why I found it important. In the interview, I recounted my college tours, explaining the lack of disability representation and how it's missing in mass formats such as media, and how that affects future generations. I found myself vocalizing concerns I had had for a long time (probably 17 years, give or take a few months of awareness), and they were all coming to me in words that made it sound important to *everyone*, not just me.

I received the scholarship, and that's what allowed me to attend DU. Now, I am an English major concentrating in Creative Writing with a minor in Theatre. In the Puksta program, I meet with my tight-knit community every other week, and we discuss our communities and projects, always offering a helping hand when we can. While my project started out focusing on disability representation in the media, it has evolved into encouraging young adults with

neuromuscular diseases to pursue independence and/or higher education. That sentence alone has intense vocabulary, and so does the work involved in it. I interact with students in their junior or senior years of high school (usually via social media) and answer as many questions as I can that they have regarding college, hiring caregivers, applying for Social Security – all things that I had to navigate on my own. My goal with this project is to create something tangible, something that students can turn to online to read and learn from my journey. I am working on this tangible *thing* now, and will continue to update it throughout my years in higher education and while I navigate the different systems and their hoops I'm forced to jump through just to live. I am trying to create a safer space for young disabled adults, to make the idea of independence less intimidating. As Faison and Treviño said, "My writing center exists as a place of possibility for me, a place where I have decided to be brave, purposefully creating a braver space," my goal is to make independent living a brave and exciting space for the next generation. By explaining my own hardships and trials and errors, I will make it an inviting world where anyone can pursue independence and/or higher education.