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Finalist

Creative Nonfiction Category

2018 Emerging Writers Contest

The Horror Behind My Love for Reading and Writing

I would say growing up, my childhood was far beyond normal. I have one older brother that is a decade older than me, and the age gap definitely did not stop me from looking up to him. The ten percent of the time he was home (with the other ninety being spent at school, sports, or with friends), I would beg him to let me hang out with him. My brother shaped a lot about my personality you see today, but this isn't about my brother. He is the one who introduced me to the horror genre. Looking back, if our mother found out I was down in his room at eight years old watching horror films with him, she would have had a conniption. Since my brother was so into the horror genre, anything and everything I could get my hands on that was considered horror would be my focus for the next hour, two hours, sometimes even a full day. Since of course, I wanted to be just like him. Then one day, as I vividly remember, I found the book of my dreams. *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* by Alvin Schwartz became my obsession for the rest of my elementary school years. *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* was a movement for me; it was the turning point of recognizing that I myself had a love for horror and wasn't just trying to impress my brother. Not only that, but this book has influenced my reading preferences and my writing throughout the last decade of my life.

Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark is a book composed of several short stories. Schwartz is a genius about separating these stories into different categories, depicting most subgenres within

horror, but what's even more outstanding is the idea of having a section of "horror" (stories that involve horror characters and themes, but have funny/nice endings) so readers are able to go to bed at night. Back in the second grade, I was the biggest fanatic of Alvin Schwartz and to realize there were two more books in the series was the epitome of my elementary school years. A few years ago, I received the *Scary Stories Treasury* as a gift, and since then I have stayed up every night rereading the masterpieces that Schwartz retold.

So, let's talk about the mastermind himself. Alvin Schwartz's life began in 1927 in Brooklyn, New York. Schwartz grew up to serve in the Navy, and later attend several universities, finally finishing his degree in Journalism at Northwestern University in 1951. He was able to hold down a few jobs with his degree, but in 1963, he quit his job as a director of communications because as he said himself, "I couldn't stand [the job]" (Marcus). He then began to free-lance write. When he first began writing, he wrote about social issues back then, like inner city decay and the gap between generations. He later made the game-changing decision to retell short stories about, as Schwartz said, "things that would be folkloric," (Marcus). He went off to any library he could find and asked neighborhood kids about any stories he could get his hands on. He then retold these stories in his beginning books, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* and others.

To me, *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* was very impactful because it helped me find my own muse of what I liked to read and write about. I'm not exactly sure as to why I am so interested in everything horror, but the fascination is so drastic that I'm planning my career around it, Criminal Justice. This book, that I had just happened to pick up as a little girl, is the reason for this infatuation. Other than the obvious transformation it made to my spirit, this book

and the horror genre in general impacted my literature and composition range. It was the first book I ever learned to love, while also inspiring me to write my own stories.

Ever since this fixation began, I've tried to watch any scary movie or TV show I could find (though horror stories are my preference). *American Horror Story*, *Criminal Minds*, *Ghost Adventures*, any horror or crime TV show you can think of, I've watched it (or it is sitting in 'My List' on Netflix). Horror movies are my specialty. Are you thinking of watching a horror movie but not sure if you'll like it? I am the person to ask. What I love to get my hands on the most though, is a scary story. Though I have not read too much into horror books, I'm still on the lookout for the perfect one. Out of all the books I was assigned to read in high school, I would have to say *We Have Always Lived in a Castle* and *The Crucible* were the only two books I actually liked in high school. I'm certain the reason for not liking assigned books throughout high school was because *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* set such a high expectation in general for books. Other than reading preferences, this collection of stories inspired me to write my own stories.

Anytime an idea popped in my head, I would write it down in this notebook I had. Sometimes I would even write an introduction of a story to create a beginning to continue on later. Sadly, I never found the time, and by the end of my elementary school years I had a notebook full of story ideas and introductions that never got acted upon. This passion followed me into my middle and high school years though. Any essay I could incorporate horror into would land me a one-hundred in the gradebook. A horror story I wrote in the eighth grade was so impressive I got writer of the month, and for an eighth grader who was not so good at composition, this was a big deal. To this day, I would love to complete stories I think of, but can never find the time. Yet, I still dream of the stories I could write.

I owe my brother thanks for the influence he has had on me, but this book has influenced me beyond imagination. Not only has this book helped my find my muse, but has helped me find a passion within literature and composition. Though I don't prefer literature and composition, this book has been my source for inspiration. I will forever be thankful for this book and the enormous impact it has made on me today.

Works Cited

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