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Me, Myself, and My Muppets

by Sara Jones

I'm sitting in the back of my family's Chevy Suburban on a long ride to our next vacation destination, likely Bald Head Island off the coast of North Carolina. As the screen in front of me turns black, I methodically pop the next disk in the set into the DVD player strapped to the beige, leather seat back. The disk loads, I press a few buttons, and a familiar chorus of joyous, felted creatures fills my ears as the episode begins:

It's time to play the music

It's time to light the lights

It's time to meet the Muppets on the Muppet Show tonight!

It's time to meet the Muppets for the millionth time, and I peacefully settle into the next seven hours of sitting, napping, and pee breaks with the Muppets' friendly voices and silly gags as my soundtrack the whole way there. Much like Fozzie and Kermit in the 1979 *The Muppet Movie*, we were movin' right along.



The Muppet Show's Intro Arches

There never existed a time in which I did not know who the Muppets were. I practically came out of the womb knowing Kermit’s kind and encouraging demeanor, Oscar the Grouch’s canned snarks, and Gonzo’s zany and often unsuccessful “feats of lunatic daring!” I have deduced that my mother must’ve been the one who introduced me to the Muppets, as she enjoyed them as a part of her childhood. She was an avid *Fraggle Rock*, *The Muppet Show*, and *Sesame Street* viewer and a loyal *Sesame Street Magazine* reader. She would read her favorite edition of *Sesame Street Magazine*, the July 1977 “Down on the Farm with Sesame Street!” edition, in her highchair at mealtimes until it became tattered and torn with love. Just

like her, I was, of course, hooked. It’s safe to say I watched *Sesame Street* a good bit longer than the intended age range, and I obsessively watched every piece of Muppet media I could get my hands on as a young child, ranging from *The Muppet Show* and all the Muppet movies

to *Labyrinth* and *Fraggle Rock*—you name it. Vivid memories come to mind of watching Kermit strum his banjo, laughing as Miss Piggy threw a bitch fit, or listening to the Electric Mayhem jam out to a groovy tune. Some of my fondest memories from my childhood

involve the Muppets. From the ages of nine to eleven, I attended three week-long summer camps at the Center for Puppetry Arts.



Me at Age Nine at Center for Puppetry Arts’ Summer Camp



Me and Kermit at Hollywood Studios in Disney World

For most kids, this week was a much-needed break for their parents with kids out of school. For me, this was my personal manifestation of heaven. Throughout the week, we would learn something new about the history of puppetry, tour the puppetry museum, see a professional show, or go backstage where the public couldn't normally access. I felt so privileged as a lowly little girl to be inside the inner workings of a place that created puppetry magic. Every year, groups would come up with stories, build puppets to accompany their stories, and perform puppet shows for parents at the end of the week. Some show years were



Me at Age Eleven at Center for Puppetry Arts' Summer Camp

better than others, but by the end, I had created three puppets: an alien, a fur-clad posh lady, and



Me at Center for Puppetry Arts' New Museum Opening 2015

a hippie girl. Now, these puppets weren't all felt and fur—they were more like Styrofoam, air dry clay, yarn, and fabric scraps, but nonetheless, building and decorating the puppets was always my favorite part. I can still smell the hot glue and singed fake fur. I was so obsessively in love with this puppet camp experience that after my first year attending, I became the poster child in the brochures that were sent out in the mail advertising the camp for the next two years. My mom and I were even formally invited to the exclusive opening party of the new museum at the Center for Puppetry Arts after its renovation in 2015. I attended wearing a simple formal

black dress with a Kermit enamel pin fastened to my shoulder with pride.

My mother is an excellent gift-giver, the type of gift-giver who knows exactly what you would want before you even do. The most cherished gifts from my childhood are also some of my most prized possessions to this day. Upon the release of the Disney-produced *The Muppets* movie, a slew of high-quality Muppet plushes were released just in time for Christmas of 2011. I own all of these, except Pepe and Rizzo, as they are extremely expensive and ridiculously hard to come by for some reason. I loved them all of course, but Kermit was by far my favorite of the bunch. Receiving my first Kermit the Frog plush at the tender age of seven was momentous. I could now take my best friend, mentor, and idol with me everywhere, and you bet I did! Kermit traveled on countless vacations with me over the years, until I decided to better preserve his form by proudly retiring him to a shelf where he watches over me, protectively, in my room day in and day out. Since that Christmas, I've acquired somewhere around thirteen Kermit plushes total, if my count is correct, but something is still so special about that first Kermit.



Me and My Kermits 2014



**Me and My First Kermit
Plush Christmas 2011**

The most thoughtful gift I have ever received was a Muppet-themed quilt for Christmas of 2014. My three siblings and I all received quilts that year, but mine was especially unique. My mom’s in-depth Muppet research and communication back and forth with a talented quilter on Etsy led to the creation of a masterpiece featuring Kermit, Miss Piggy, Swedish Chef, Rowlf, Gonzo, Animal, and Beaker in their individual, carefully themed, respective squares. The center holds my all-time favorite Jim Henson quote, “Life’s like a movie, write your own ending. Keep believing, keep pretending.” The whole quilt is bordered with rainbow-striped fabric symbolic of Kermit’s infamous “Rainbow Connection” song. There is also an accompanying pillow with Janice from Electric Mayhem across its front. I have never slept with this quilt, and never will, as it’s such a heartfelt, thought-out work of art I will cherish and hold close for the rest of my life.



Christmas 2014

As you can very clearly tell, I loved the movies, the television shows, and collecting



Sam and Friends Cast Featuring Jane and Jim Henson

memorabilia, but the Muppets fascinate me on a deeper level than just skits, songs, and tomfoolery. The Muppets have been a part of people’s childhoods since May 9, 1955, when the first ever episode of Jim Henson’s debut show, *Sam and Friends*, aired. They represent a love of learning, a focus on joy and laughter, preserving the value of friendship, and having the boldness

to be oneself and accept others' uniqueness. *Sesame Street* encourages kids to be kind to their neighbors and to continue to learn even when they may mess up. Kermit and the rest of the crew always have each other's backs at the end of the day through all the chaos and confusion. Nobody in the Muppet cast is ever an outcast despite how different they may be. Gonzo is literally a "whatever" from outer space, but when he does something risky, his friends always dust him off and pick him back up. Fozzie is an absolutely shit comedian, but his friends still support him in his dreams and cheer him on when Statler and Waldorf get to be too critical. The Electric Mayhem band supports Animal through his anger issues by giving him the outlet of playing drums to express himself through music in a healthy way. These wildly different creatures, animals, and monsters all find ways to connect and help one another, and it's an excellent message they've spread to past generations and future generations to come.

The Muppets have given me an outline to live my life by since I was very small, and I am still enamored with them today. Growing up, I didn't have many friends as an introverted, anxious kid, and the Muppets felt like something I could turn to when I was down. I still use



Muppet Dance Party (Elementary School Age)

them to this day as a comforting, coping mechanism that nurtures my inner child and reminds me to take myself a little less seriously sometimes. Today, I am an artist and creative pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Kennesaw State University. Jim Henson's Muppets and the creative team behind them inspire me in my work.

There are a plethora of drawings I've made dating far back into my childhood of Muppets meticulously hand-copied from online references, media,

and books. My art is no longer solely focused on Muppets; however, they often show up in my sketchbook doodles when I want to cheer myself up. I have a quite large, ever-growing collection of Muppet-related memorabilia ranging from a variety of vintage to current items.

These items are proudly displayed in my room, car, wardrobe, and other places in my life.

Overall, the Muppets taught me to believe in myself, chase my goals, stay creative, never give up, embrace my inner child, play hard, and love even harder, and for those reasons, I am forever grateful for them.



**Kermit Singing Rainbow Connection
(Elementary School Age)**



Gonzo and Camilla Sketchbook 2022



Muppet Monsters Sketchbook 2022



Bert and Ernie Sketchbook 2022



Me at Center for Puppetry Arts 2021



My 19th Birthday 2022

Works Cited

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