

# The Best Childhood

By Cody Maxam

As a kid, I was a brave knight who went on many incredible adventures on the back of my dragon. Wait . . . that's not right. I was a wizard, who cast spells and fought dragons. Who am I kidding? I WAS the dragon, flying through the bitter cold air, soaring far too high above everything else, exuding my superiority as if I were painting the landscape itself to fit my liking. Okay, obviously none of these are true, but, as a kid, I believed them to be. I was greatly influenced by fantasy novels and television shows, and as an outcome, I read many books, wrote dozens of stories, and drew countless pictures to go along with my stories.

It all started a long, long time ago, (no, not in a galaxy far, far away) when I had just begun to learn how to read. My parents had bought me a pack of Pokémon cards, and I would stare at the pictures and read the descriptions for days on end. Those cards and I were inseparable; we went anywhere and everywhere together – even in the tub. I was so fascinated by the drawings and each little tidbit of information on each card, that, pretty soon, I was able to recite each card title and the description of each Pokémon. My parents were so impressed that they bought me Pokémon books to read, and because of those books, I was introduced into the realm of fantasy novels.

As I grew older, I was able to read a vast variety of books that ranged from a brave knight going on a quest, to a wizard casting spells and fighting dragons, and finally, to the dragon itself and its interactions with the environment and creatures by which it was surrounded. The *Harry Potter* series was a huge influence on my reading. In the second grade, I had read *The Goblet of Fire*, and I can still see carrot stains about halfway through the book from reading during snack time. By about fourth grade, I had read so many books and short stories about these mythological and medieval adventures, I decided I was going to try my hand at writing my own stories and drawing pictures.

The stories I wrote consisted mainly of the basic storyline of a young kid who would go on adventures and try to thwart some evildoer. For each story, there would be a different kid going on a different adventure in a different world. One story involved a young knight who banded together a league of young adventurers that consisted of wizards, eleven princes, dragon masters, and any other fantasy character one can imagine. Another story had a farm boy, who had become blind as a child when the spirit of the Wind inhabited his body. The pictures I drew would be solely based on the characters and how I would describe each of them. The knight, for instance, was clad in black armor with gold plating around each plate of armor. The influence of these stories and pictures swept over most other things in my early childhood life, so much so that it ended up being the only means of entertainment I would allow myself to have. All my small, short stories amplified my interest in writing and eventually led to one of the biggest decisions in my writing career: I was going to write my own fantasy novel.

This leap into the world of such highly esteemed authors caused a change to take place within me. This change would further impact any writing I would do from that point on, whether it was a school assignment or another chapter in the novel. My writing reflected more mature and concise descriptions of characters, events, and scenery. I had learned many new adjectives and adverbs while reading all those books and, having understood the meaning of each one, was able

to incorporate them into my stories. Instead of saying “the ocean was very blue,” I could create a more intense and thorough image of how the ocean appeared; for example, “the ever-rolling waves of the cerulean ocean lapped against the craggy outcrop of rocks jutting out of the seemingly flawless waters.” Now, instead of just seeing the blue ocean like a first grader had colored the bottom half of a paper blue, my reader saw movement of the water, the depth of color in the water, a stark contrast between the smoothness of the “rolling waves” and the sharpness of the “craggy outcrop.”

This novel I had decided to write was like all the other novels I had read. It was about a young boy who went on an adventure to save his family from the tyranny of an evil king. Cliché, I know, but my concepts and ideas had not fully developed yet. It was set in a world like ours today, but with one exception: everything was under the control of this evil king. The young boy – I like to think he was me – set out on this quest to take down the evil king and save the world. Or that’s how it would have ended, had I finished the story. I fell into a rut and could not write for the life of me. Not even an outline of the story, a beginning-middle-end, could help me complete it. I could not create any more details or storyline, and I was so embarrassed by this. All my previous ideas were lost and I just gave it up, no longer wanting to be frustrated at it. A couple of years passed and I still had not even touched the story. This was a major turning point in my writing.

Eventually, I lost interest altogether and no longer wished to write for fun. I had grown active in sports, basketball being the first step away from the “best childhood.” I met more friends because of basketball, and we started to hang out more and more. I knew that when hanging out with them I couldn’t pull out my notebook and start writing. Who knew what they would have said about that? After basketball was over, one would think that I would have at least looked at some of my stories, but that was not the case. Friends took over my life and time, and I had soon completely forgotten about my novel, leaving the notebooks to gather dust on my bookshelf. This has been the case ever since, as I continued through middle school and high school and delved deeper into the world of sports.

Pretty soon, the only time I would do any creative writing was if I had to for a school project. It had become so alien to me that it had become more of a hassle than a passion. My writing had almost completely diminished, but my reading was still present, barely. I read maybe a couple of books here and there, but it was an embarrassing amount compared to what I had completed as a kid. Even my style of reading had shifted. Books I read no longer contained dragons or wizards or knights, but more of a realistic sense and story. I could no longer force myself to dive into those kinds of books with the vigor of my childhood. I started reading books like *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins, or *The Divergent Series*, by Veronica Roth, where the story and characters had a possibility of reality behind them. Fantasy had left my vocabulary, as I focused on what could happen and not about what would be cool had it happened. The most recent change occurred to me this summer, however.

My mom had suggested that I clean my room, so I set aside an afternoon when I didn’t have to work and I had nothing else going on. I started by cleaning my floor and under my bed and then finishing with my desk. As I was preparing to take the garbage out to the trash bin, I caught sight of the binder that held all of my stories and drawings. It took me a few seconds to recognize what it was, for I hadn’t seen it in years. I walked over to it, took it off the shelf, and sneezed when the dust filled my nose. After I had recovered, I stared at the mahogany-colored binder for

several seconds. Not a thought passed through my head as I continued to stare. Before I knew what I was doing, I shoved the binder into my bag of trash, tying it tight, and proceeded to take it out to the garbage bin.

Numerous stories and pictures – my childhood creations – that had been collected for almost a decade, I had just tossed away, never to be seen again. At the time, I was just cleaning up my room like my mom had asked, but now as I reflect back on that moment I realize that I had just thrown away a part of myself: my childhood. The worst part about it was that at the time, I couldn't make myself feel anything towards what I had done. I had become too wrapped up in work and my friends that the act of throwing those pages away didn't faze me at all.

I knew at this moment I had changed completely as a person, whether good or bad. I knew that the decision I made would always be one that I would second guess. What could cause me to feel nothing as I threw the binder away, but feel regret now? I have the rest of my life to try and find the answer, which may forever elude me, but as for right now, nothing can be done but to find new passions in life and apply them to my way of living, and possibly I can rediscover the love I had for writing.