



## SILENCING THE MONSTERS

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As a kid I used to write in a blue spiral-bound notebook. Uncensored by people's expectations, I didn't worry about themes, grammar, or spelling. I just wrote stories. Sometimes I wrote about events that happened around me, but mostly I wrote about much more important things: elves, dragons, and fairies. I loved clashing the real world with worlds of my own design, creating colors and wonders. But each time I shared a story, someone would ask me, "Why are your stories so dark?" I began to think something was wrong with me. The dragons I once wrote about turned against me. They transformed into monsters that bashed around in my head, leaving droppings of doubt and fear. The colors I had so freely splashed onto paper became muted until they were nothing but large black blots of ink.

Looking back as an adult, I realize I shouldn't have been ashamed of my stories. I should have kept writing. By allowing myself to be influenced by what others thought, I let my voice be silenced. I let fear and shame consume my words, and I still struggle with these emotions.

My fear stems from the reactions I received as a child, and also from dropping out of high school my freshman year. I eventually went back to graduate, but I had missed two vital years of academic English. I felt that I hadn't learned the grammar and syntax that would help me write like a real author. It wasn't that I couldn't write, but I felt like a fraud.

Not until I started community college did I begin to write again. In my first English class I would sit and nod my head in agreement, attempting to appear intelligent, when my teacher discussed protagonists and antonyms. I sat in the middle row trying to mesh into the class, my head down, praying he wouldn't call on me. Hell, the truth was, I was faking it. Whenever an assignment was due I would go to the writing lab to make sure every grammatical error was corrected before turning it in. I thought if I could keep up the facade I would be safe and no one would discover the monsters banging around inside my head.

I survived that first class, but the next one was a disaster. The professor gave me good grades, but every paper came back splattered with red pen. He would write comments like, "Comma splice in the first sentence!" or just "Yikes! Commas!" I swore off the comma. My writing became choppy. My sentences shortened. I would never write a sentence that required "and," "but," or "therefore."

Eventually I found the courage to talk with my professor about my fears. He had no idea that I was feeling this way and encouraged me to continue writing. He told me I had good ideas and that my writing was strong, but it was his job to slice and dice our papers. I know he meant to help my writing, but instead he destroyed it.

When I came to Evergreen my faculty encouraged me by pointing out the strengths in my arguments, and the writing-intensive program meant that I couldn't run away from my fears. Instead I had to face them. As I began to slowly gain back my confidence, I became a writing tutor in order to help others explore their voices.

Although it is important for people to write well for educational purposes, what is most important is that people write for their own personal achievements. Writing can free those stigmatized by society. Every person on this planet, no matter their level of education, has the ability to produce worlds of their own design and generate independent thought. As a tutor, I hope not only to encourage people to develop and express their ideas, but to instill within them a passion, a desire, and a need for writing. In this way we can work together to create effective change: within ourselves, our writing, and our communities.

Together, we can tame the monsters.