

The Budding of a Writer
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They said it couldn't be done. "You *never* get your first piece published. Be prepared for rejection and try, try, again." When I submitted my first written piece to a publisher, I didn't know that axiom. I simply sent it off and hoped for the best. Not receiving an immediate reply, I shrugged my shoulders, and forgot about it. Then one fall day, I received a check for \$7.50 in the mail. The publisher had bought my poem – my first submission of creativity on paper. I was so overjoyed I promptly treated the whole family to a round of sodas at the soda shop. I was only 17. Almost ten years passed before I tried submitting again. When I did, the article was immediately accepted. Lucky or blessed, either way it has encouraged my love of writing and success with non-fiction.

I have always loved to make up stories and jot my 'how-to's', dating far back as grade school. My first story, though very simple, was written as a second grade assignment. By fourth grade, my writing skills developed enough to win a 4th grade reading contest. That's right. *Reading*, not writing. The challenge was to read the most books within the month, writing a summary of each one. The teacher would then make a tiny mock book cover with the title and pin it on the bulletin board for all to see. We all knew everyone's progress in the contest, and I knew I only had one more book to read before winning. So...I made it up. I wrote the book report on "Susie's Summer", outlining the good and bad experiences "Susie" had had, pulling from my own experiences from the past summer. I made up a name for the author and turned it in, shocked at my own deviousness and urge to win. To my joy, horror (but delight), I saw the mock cover pinned up the next day on the board announcing me as the winner.

The quandary began to boil in my young soul. I had lied. I had deceived the teacher into thinking I had really read the most books. Do I tell her? My conscience finally won out within a week, and meekly I crept to her desk.

“I didn’t read that book, Miss Palmer,” I whispered, not wanting the other kids to hear.

“What book?” she asked.

“You know,” I gritted my teeth. I hated to admit my guile. I felt so ashamed. “You know – the last book report I turned in?”

“Oh yes -- Miss Palmer fumbled in the stack of papers on her desk to find my report. She perused the summary again. “Susie’s Summer” -- a very *good* book report. “How could you write such a report if you didn’t read the book?” she wondered out loud.

“I just made it up,” I confessed softly, looking down as the tears mounted in my eyes.

“You **WROTE** that story?”

“Yes, M’am.”

She sat quietly at her desk looking at my report and thinking hard for what seemed like an eternity. I shifted my feet. I stared at a spot in the carpet and tried desperately to shake off the flood of tears that threatened to spill out. Would I get an F? Was she going to turn me in to the office? Would she tell my mom? I was visibly shaken and scared.

Finally she spoke. “You not only read them, you write them! I think you deserve to be the winner!” I heard her saying as she patted my quivering hand.

“Good job! Class? Listen up. I want to read you a story....”