

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....”