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### Dealing with My Own Mysteries

When I was younger, I was so adamant about making my true personality sheltered and cut off from everybody else. I felt as if I was exposing myself by doing something as simple as telling my best friends what my reading tastes were. When presented with a question as simple as “What types of music do you listen to?” I would often answer “I enjoy everything!” The first and second days of each school year from kindergarten to probably sixth or seventh grade were usually some of my least anticipated, not because of the beginning of the school year but rather due to all the icebreaker activities. The reasons why I had felt this way seemed mysterious to me and still do. I question my ways to this day and will continue indefinitely, wondering *“Why was I so guarded about my preferences?”* *“Why could I not just simply be more confident about what I enjoyed?”* and, in more direct examples from my younger years, *“Did it need to be so difficult to simply show something so miniscule to my second grade class and teacher?”* as well as *“Why was I so guarded about myself that I could not even express myself at a convention full with others that have similar interests as myself?”* After much thought, I have come to a conclusion: It was partly due to constant invisible judgment. That is, from the inside of my developing brain, I would think about what others may think about me and perceive it as reality if I would show my true self to my peers. As I have grown, I have found that it does not need to feel so hard to express my interests, contradicting my past self.

One vivid memory happened almost a decade ago now, back when I was in second grade. It was fairly early in the year, probably around early October, when the leaves outside my classroom window had become a mosaic of fiery colors. My teacher had given the class an activity that was supposed to be engaging and exciting (to a flock of second graders, that is). The students were all supposed to grab a beloved stuffed animal from their home and give it to the teacher overnight. She then would then have the collection of creatures ‘go on an adventure’ around the classroom for the students to discover the following day. As I was hearing this information for the first time, I remember acting almost as if I was in disguise, trying to blend into the crowd. My expression matched that of my peers around me, but on the inside, I was not pleased. It was not because I was worried about being without my little plush dog I had named Snickers; I was more worried about what my classmates and teacher would think about me naming my stuffed animal Snickers, or his appearance, or anything else; the list goes on and on. Second grade me did not want to be known for having that specific stuffed animal (or any of my other ones, for that matter), so I ended up speaking to my parents about the activity at the last moment, in an attempt to weasel my way out from participating. Upon hearing my concerns, I remember being sent to school with Snickers anyway, much to my dismay. Looking back on the moment, I understand they most likely just did not want me to feel left out in the grander scheme of things. I put Snickers snugly in the bin with my fellow classmates’ stuffed animals, which I did not enjoy.

I must have made enough of a commotion about the matter after the school day had gone by that my parents brought me back to pick Snickers back up again. I can recall being distraught, with both my parents and myself. On one hand, I could not bear with the idea that my classmates would see Snickers; on the other, I could not bear with the fact that my parents and teacher are

being inconvenienced for such an inconspicuous reason to them. I remember shedding many tears from this internal battle at that time.

That experience was not the best but recounting it from only my mind as the primary source explains why; being younger, many people's emotions are much stronger. It did not help that my brain ran crazy when my mother calmly explained our arrival. I try to keep a sympathetic mindset on hand in situations, which seemed to backfire on me at the time because I remember feeling so guilty and embarrassed for wanting to retrieve my little stuffed animal. My young mind blamed myself for wasting both my mother and teacher's time, as I felt like they should both be doing more productive activities instead of worrying about me. The teacher ended up using a monkey plush instead of Snickers, and I still have a picture of it from a memory book that we created that year.

I looked back on that experience countless times in my mind, and for a while, I thought I had just been, for a lack of a better term, acting stupid. Rather than perceiving my tendencies to think a bit too much about how I am viewed by my surroundings, I believed that I was being irrational and felt guilty for simply 'being a burden' to others around me.

Another memory I had occurred three years after the previous story and a week or two before I was turning ten. For context, I was quite a big fan of video games, especially *Minecraft* due to the infinite amounts of enjoyment and creativity I pulled out of it. As an early birthday present, my parents surprised me with three VIP tickets to a *Minecraft* convention in St. Paul. One was for me, one was for my mother, and one was for a childhood friend of mine. Upon receiving them, I felt a few strong emotions: excitement, guilt, and anxiety. Guilt, for the money my parents must have spent on the tickets (I did not think that they should have gone out and spent that much on something meant for me), excitement, because I loved *Minecraft* and

spending time with my friend, and anxiety, because of all of the what ifs that rolled into my mind at that moment.

Fast forward to the convention, and I wanted to hide, badly, getting shy and embarrassed. The feelings of vulnerability made my younger self uncomfortable, but I attempted to mask my feelings from my friend and mother so as to try to not ruin their experiences or appear ungrateful. The experiences were entertaining though, which was great, at least. I knew that a few YouTubers, including two that I watched every so often, would be attending, which I found to be both petrifying and amazing. It is rare for me to see any type of celebrity in person, especially ones I enjoy watching, which elevated the moment. However, when it came to simply waiting in the meet and greet lines, I could not do it. The what ifs streamed back in my head again, and I was so worried about what they may say to me or ask of me about my enjoyment of *Minecraft*. Simultaneously there were also thoughts about what my friend may think of me liking them. These thoughts tied together to create a problem I know all too well within myself—the inability to make decisions.

This occurs very frequently in my own life, and I still often get frustrated with myself for doing it. For example, I am known by my family members to be extremely indecisive when dining at new restaurants, thinking things along the lines of “*Should I try the chicken or the steak? Both look amazing but I can only choose one... I had chicken last, so I will try the steak—wait, no, if I pass up on the chicken then I will not be able to have it again..!*” My brain weighs every gain and loss when presented with even the simplest decisions, which frustrates me. Paired with my tendency to feel easily guilty in situations such as that with my second-grade teacher and mother, I often feel like I am dragging everybody around me behind with my indecisiveness. I understand how people around me may feel when it seems that I am dragging my feet, and I do not enjoy it either. In fact, I may not like it more than they do. That is how I felt the day of the

convention, as my mother and friend were waiting on me as I internally debated attempting to say hi to people I watch online. It got to the point where I ended up not meeting anybody, which I accepted because it meant that my party would not be dragged with me any further into my internal debate. This experience had strengthened my yearning for silence about myself, as I had connected the dots and felt that the three of us would have never been in that situation if I had not been so open to them about my liking for *Minecraft*.

I have figured throughout the majority of my life that many of these situations would be avoidable if I was radio-silent toward those around me about my interests and stories. In fact, I have never spoken to anybody about going to this convention in general until last month, ironically. However, I found that in high school, especially this year, I have become more open about myself to others and am finding it somewhat easier to talk to people. This could be due to my luck of being able to surround myself with supportive and inclusive people, as well as me simply wanting to push myself out of my comfort zone little by little. Whether it be talking to a school counselor, a large group, or an interviewer, as I become an adult I have many important interactions with many important people. It requires me to think, act, and speak on my own, which I can better accomplish by first understanding myself.

Looking back on this essay's creation, it almost feels weird to be writing about these moments because nobody ends up seeing this side of me save for my closest family members. The stories I shared have been shared for the first time, which is interesting because I was the only one who knew about them for the longest time. There are feelings of irony stemming from not writing about myself in an essay that I designed to be speaking about how closed off I was in the past. This made me realize the extent of my personal growth upon completing this paper. While I still had a sense of feeling guarded throughout the paper, I became vulnerable about the world from my eyes for the first time in my life.

As I think through the dozens of my past works of literature, I will be completely honest in the fact that this single paper was one of the most thought-provoking of mine. I certainly will never quit thinking about my actions and how I operate day to day, however now I have developed what I believe is to be a great foundation to build upon as I explore myself in the future. People grow, and so do our brains, and at the same time it is important to understand where we came from and how we interpreted our surroundings in our younger years. I will forever be me, from birth until death, and so understanding my past thought processes and why I am who I am is a blessing. As silly as it seems, I can confidently say now that I can tell somebody what music I enjoy listening to without going haywire inside my head.