



Reading in a Tree

by Michele R. Acosta

Today is like many of the summer days I spent at my grandparents' house in Indiana – except I am writing, instead of reading and I am sitting in a chair on my deck, instead of on a branch in a tree growing in front of my grandparents' house. But the wind is blowing gently under the umbrella, just like it blew through the leaves so many years ago.

I don't remember how many hours I spent in that tree.

It has been a long time since I felt the wind blow through its leaves. My grandparents sold the house and moved off of the farm the year that I started college. I probably did not climb the tree for the last few years that my grandparents lived there.

I was not a tomboy. In fact, that tree is the only one that I have ever climbed (unless you count the one I tried to climb and got stuck in). It was the perfect tree for a girlie girl to climb. There was one branch that grew straight out from the tree. If I reached up high above my head, I could grasp the branch with both hands and hoist myself up to a much thicker extension of the trunk that grew at about shoulder height. Holding the branch, I "walked" up the trunk until I could swing around and sit in the saddle created by the trunk and the branch. I reached for another branch above my head to pull myself to my feet. An even higher branch allowed me to pull myself to a sitting position on the branch that I had first used to pull myself into the tree. The tree had so many perfectly positioned branches that I could climb a little bit higher in the same fashion, but I usually didn't.

I was not actually interested in climbing the tree. I did not climb for the sake of climbing, but because I wanted to sit on the one branch that was thick enough to be comfortable, lean against the smooth bark of the trunk, and feel the gentle breeze blow through the leaves and through my hair. I usually had a book in hand, too, so climbing higher than my branch was impractical.

I am not sure why, but I never seemed to go to my grandparents' house prepared. I always seemed to be searching for something to read. My grandmother loved decorating. She filled scrapbooks with magazine clippings archiving the year's worth of current home fashions. Had she belonged to my generation, she would probably be a marketing expert. The tools of her passion, women's magazines, fueled my passion. She saved years of back issues of magazines and many of them published one or two fictional pieces per issue.

I remember one about a girl who climbed trees and another about a girl names Lissa (spelled with 2 Ss). Actually, that may have been the same short story. They were all cheesy romances, but the summer breeze blowing through my tree seemed to set the mood and allowed me to slip into fiction-induced trances that the words alone could not have done.

It was a time when things seemed to stand still. By the time I reached high school, I had other things to do than spend weeks at a time with my grandparents reading in a tree. By the time I started college, my grandparents sold the house, but when I was an all-too-shy-pre-adolescent, that tree filled a real need. Ironically, my memory of that tree and the time I spent sitting amongst its leaves is clearer than any single memory from high school or college.

I felt like I belonged. I felt free to be myself — even though I didn't know who that was. At home, I was reminded — especially during the long days of summer — that I did not have many friends. I was painfully shy and somehow, I always felt inferior to other kids my age.

That time before high school was also the only time in my life that I was free to read voraciously. The summer before I started 8th grade, I read titles including *Wuthering Heights*, *The Black Rose*, and *Gone with the Wind*, among others. Everything changed after I started high school. First, higher education took over and dictated my reading (probably for the better), then marriage and family decimated the time I could spend reading.

I've never lost the ability to slide into a trance-like state. This is perhaps the biggest reason that I cannot be the sort who leaves a book on the bedside table and reads for an hour before bed. If a book captivates my attention, I read cover to cover, stopping only to eat (sometimes) and sleep (if I can no longer keep my eyes open). For a long time, it meant that I only read when we went on vacation.

We left on one family vacation the day after the fifth Harry Potter book was released. I've read each and every book in the series to my sons more than once. Since we were on vacation, we could only read in short bursts. We finally reached the point in the book where I couldn't disengage myself. I kept reading after I tucked my boys into bed. At 1:00 a.m., my husband finally insisted that I turn the light off. The only place I could turn on a light without disturbing anyone was in the bathroom, so I sat on the cold bathroom floor until 3:00 in the morning so that I could finish the book.

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I drove past my grandparents' old house recently. The tree is still there, but my branch has been cut off. At first I was sad. That branch was there for me when I needed it. But nothing stays the same. The branch was only an extension of the trunk.

I have been able to recapture the essence of those moments spent in my tree in very different places and times. Most recently, our trips to Florida beaches have rekindled memories. I sit under a beach umbrella — often with a book — with the Gulf breeze blowing a bit of nostalgia in off of the water. I watch my sons play with an abandon that only belongs to childhood, and I think about the girl who used to read in a tree.

About the author:

The author is a writer, a former English teacher, and the mother of three boys. She spends her time writing and teaching others to write. Visit articles.TheWritingTutor.biz for more articles or TheWritingTutor.biz for other writing and educational resources for young authors, teachers, and parents.