

## Math Autobiography Reflection

*By Sally*

*\*all names and identifiers have been masked/changed to retain anonymity*

From a very young age, I was fascinated by math. I loved puzzles and games from a young age, and math was a way to solve problems in school. My favorite show on tv as a child was *Cyberchase*, a show about three kids solving math problems to save the universe. It fascinated me that math could be so important that it literally saved everyone. I would play the *Cyberchase* computer games after school, watch reruns whenever I could, and tried to use the “Cyberchase for Real” segments, where two normal humans did math in the real world, in my actual life. That was where my love of math started, and I tried to upkeep that in school.

My strongest memories of elementary school math were my love of the Math-a-thon, which was a 100 problem packet [masked] gave students to raise money for cancer research. Our teachers would give us the packets, along with fundraising sheets. We could raise money by either having people pledge a certain cent amount for every problem we did, or a general dollar amount. This task was an absolute joy for me, and I would always sprint through my packet. After every Math-a-thon, I was always invited to the reward lunch for top students because of my completion of the packet (and usually raising a lot of money along the way, not to brag). Math was a game I got to play in school, and the Math-a-thon gave me a way to play it even longer. I remember my favorite problems were word problems, where I could think to come up with my answer. My elementary school teachers were very supportive of my love of math, so I was never in want of math problems.

While performing strongly in math in elementary school was easy for me, I remember doubting myself even when I was placed in the advanced math program in middle school. Math

was fun for me, but I felt that I wasn't as good at it as I thought I was. It seemed like as I got older, I started doubting myself more and more, to the point where I was performing extremely poorly in math by college and ended up removing the subject from my course load entirely by the end of my freshman year of college. I know that my teachers didn't mean to discourage me, and I doubt that that was their goal, but I felt that I was annoying my math teachers, because of my creative mind, so as teachers got more serious, my silly personality made less sense in the classroom. I felt that I understood less because of this, meaning that I completely understand math up to algebra, but I have no idea how to solve any statistics problems, even though that was my math course for college. While I learned math in English, my primary language, at a certain point, it felt like I was learning it in Chinese.

By the time I finished statistics, I was completely over math and didn't want to do it anymore. It was too hard and I was so frustrated with it. I had really liked math when I was younger, but I was under the impression that I was not a "math person" by this point, so I just gave up. I think that my understanding also really shifted because when we got past algebra, I started taking theater classes. Kids like me were told that we had "creative minds" and that math and science will probably come difficult to us. When you hear that enough times, whether it's from friends, teachers, or, eventually, yourself, you start to believe it, and I definitely started to experience that.

What I'm learning now, as an educator, is that my teachers may have been saying that, but I also had a few differences between myself and my fellow students, particularly in high school where I genuinely started struggling with math. For starters, I was at a lower socio-economic status than most of my classmates. This meant that while my classmates had money for tutors and extra math help, I was going home, doing my homework by myself, and going to

bed. My family couldn't afford extra math tutors until I was a junior in high school, but by then my confidence was low enough that even my high SAT scores in math couldn't convince me I was good enough at it. Additionally, I had an infant sister and two disabled parents, so I really wasn't focusing on studying that much in general. Added to the fact that I had undiagnosed ADHD (finally diagnosed when I was a junior in high school), I stopped studying all together unless it was a class I really had difficulty with, and the grades I got were what I could receive by winging it.

Now that I'm a teacher, I get to enjoy math again. As a substitute teacher, there are some days where I get to work on math more than others, but I enjoy helping students solve the puzzles that I got to as a child. What frustrates me now is that the tools that I learned are not used as much. I feel sometimes like Aaron, the boy we read about in class yesterday, who felt that certain things were math magic, like the blocks. For me, I understand the purpose of counting blocks, but I don't understand how to teach them, nor do I understand the worksheets that utilize them. Maybe it's because I'm only a sub, but I feel as though I can't understand how the worksheets are set up and therefore I'm a bad teacher at it. My hope is that through this class I'll be able to understand Pearson math better, and then I'll be able to teach the students I sub for better by extension. I want kids to love math as much as I did, and I hope that they continue loving it.