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### Science Autobiography

Like so many things that people take personally, my reaction to science comes from that “well I did \_\_\_\_\_ and I turned out just fine!” mentality. Such a mentality, I know, is exactly what perpetuate cycles to repeat themselves, so I at least try to be somewhat fair to science when I admit that it is not a discipline that interests me much.

I was privileged with an upbringing that exposed me to many opportunities to explore science throughout my childhood. Summers enriched by trips to science museums, my parents’ own elaborate knowledge of native Florida plants and animals (among plenty of other things), kid-scale telescopes and experiment kits all played a role early on. As best as I can remember, elementary science was received well by me, though even then I did not ever consider a future for myself in the field. I was much more committed to a career as a writer or artist (the antithesis of science in my eyes). I really did enjoy learning and seeing and experiencing science, but it was more so through the lens of childlike wonderment.

Transitioning into middle school science meant strict notebook formats and drilling of “THE” scientific method. My interest and success took a major hit in 6<sup>th</sup> grade when my poor vision was keeping me from accurate note taking, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the content.

Though starting off 7<sup>th</sup> grade with eyeglasses solved some of my problems, it did not change everything for me. Every exciting field trip or experiment that we did in class

was overshadowed by the dread of having to complete a lab write-up or report on it.

Without the sense of a strong classroom community, science just became 45 minutes of doodling in a science notebook and waiting for the bell to ring.

My 8<sup>th</sup> grade year was characterized by a debate I had with my science teacher over the adage “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” while learning about sound energy. Not only did I defend my view in class on the spot, I went home that night to write a formal argument on the matter. After comparing the scenario to the “textbook” definition of sound, drawing on the experiences of Beethoven (who was almost entirely deaf when composing his most famous work), and proposing alternative hypothetical situations, my teacher still laughed in my face about my determination and insisted I was still wrong.

High school science was about benefiting from the legacy of my brilliant science-minded older sister while still keeping myself very much separated from her level of commitment. Still on the language arts (and now marching band) end of the spectrum of interests, science was just something for me get through. My conceptual understand became weaker and weaker as the content moved to more, what I call, “invisible science” (DNA in biology, thermodynamics in Chemistry). The linguist in me loved the weekly root word quizzes freshman year, but scoffed when asked to memorize the periodic table as a sophomore.

I remember conducting a calorie lab in chemistry that involved lighting peanuts on fire under a soda can. Even though I was following all of the directions, I had no heart in the activity. I looked around to see the “future-scientist” types marvel at their measurement tools and collecting their data, and I was simply unimpressed.

Junior and Senior year went better for me, as Physics and Marine Science were much more “visible” to me. My Physics teacher was hilarious but really knew how to reach his student, including me. I liked the algebraic component of physics. And though my Marine Science teacher was not particularly memorable, I enjoyed having a new batch of fish names to memorize every week, identifying the attributes of their body structures, and learning more about the lovely Florida mangroves. Things like that seemed to connect so naturally to my life.

Coming to college, I dreaded the FKL science requirement. Luckily, I was able to take two different Environmental Science classes (one in the Fall and the other Spring of my Freshman year) and succeeded in them. After years of disengagement and bad procrastinating habits, college worked out wonderfully for me. Lecture-style education worked for me. Taking notes while my professor drew out the environmental impact of fracking and landfills on nine different sliding whiteboards worked for me. It really was a revelation for me as a learner.

I think the biggest themes for science to me is “visible” and “invisible”. I find meaning in learning about native Florida plants because I’ve been kayaking through them with my family since I was ten. It is meaningful because I can see the fish that hide in the prop roots of the mangroves and because I am HIGHLY allergic to the Brazillian Pepper Trees that compete with them for space and resources. I certainly appreciate that other people are interested in the invisible. Thank goodness my doctors are concerned with HPV vaccinations and that my Tupperware is microwave-safe. I didn’t ever appreciate when I felt pressure to take interest in all things science. I didn’t ever appreciate a rigid

approach to the scientific process. Though I have come out of my experiences feeling overall successful, I still am conflicted about science in the elementary class.

Yes, perhaps there are a few students in the classroom that will be future scientists, and it is important that we foster that curiosity and skill early on. But what about the kids that just don't? Why do we insist on developing future scientists by taking away from our future authors and public leaders? Why do we steal their platforms and insist that we WRITE like a scientist and READ like a scientist because that's what SCIENTISTS DO? And this may be my tallest soapbox of all, but I truly am a spirit of the creative arts and I mourn that a love of arts does not seem to stand on its own (as if a skill or interest is only valid or worthy if it is somehow explicitly applicable to the science field).

My definition of science is: **a combination of skills, information, and intuition that emerge and are enhanced by interacting with the world and beyond.**

Besides my soapbox, I do like the concept of science, as I do accept it to encompass pretty much everything that we experience in daily life. Through MY definition, I embrace my identity as a scientist.



Enjoy this  
picture I took  
of a  
waterspout on  
Fort Myers  
Beach ~2008