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My journey into journalism started with a novel and a Ticonderoga #2. At nine years old, I set out to emulate Mike Lupica, humbly accepting poetry as the first step and the most accessible form of wordcraft I could muster. I nestled stanzas within the margins of the pages of the novels I cherished.

Those novels exclusively chronicled the lives of young professional athlete hopefuls like myself, except for when my mother plopped the wrong cerulean-covered book on my nightstand and I ended up reading about teenagers passing joints around while listening to “Thunder Road.” I had no idea what was happening, and I don’t remember the book. But I remember the look on my mother’s face when I asked her if condom is short for condiment.

We recovered. As I navigated my teenage identity, my values, and how I related to the world, life possessed a weight that, for the first time, needed to be transferred into something. Basketball helped. I loved the crooked hoop in my creviced driveway, and as I watched the ball rip through the net, that weight lifted.

But books were a form of alchemy. The weight of those burgeoning emotions and incessant inquisitions could be transmuted, not just eased. Books hold a mirror up to humanity, sharing slivers of the weight of story with each reader. I had no readers, but I dreamed that one day, I would.

I credit my seventh-grade English teacher, Mr. Carlon, for transforming my love of reading into a love of story. He would routinely shut the lights off, drag a barstool to the front of the class, and tell a 50-minute tale that captivated an audience of jittery thirteen-year-olds. He made storytelling unequivocally cool, trusting our ears with his vulnerable and hilarious tribulations and trusting our brains to transfer the intonation of his voice into the cadence of our writing.

In ninth grade, my English teacher, Mrs. Gagnon, stayed after school with me to talk about John Steinbeck. I was enamored with how he portrayed the downtrodden, the poor; America's bereft and forgotten. She explained how Steinbeck's novels were rooted in journalistic practice, and suggested that I write for my high school newspaper.

From 10th to 12th grade, I did. Writing timely and relevant stories, albeit at times niche, felt important. It felt purposeful. It felt like something I could do for a living. I pictured myself running around, pressing politicians and publishing exposés on corruption. Maybe even writing a book about it.

After high school, a few years of traveling, working, and reading culminated in two desires: to fix issues such as political corruption, and to write about them. I seemingly scribbled a song or poem every day, but it felt solipsistic. And my singing sounded bad. I thought back to Steinbeck, to the legacy of my hometown *Boston Globe's* Spotlight team, and to the effects of work such as *Silent Spring* and *Unsafe at Any Speed*, and applied to Boston University to study journalism.

When I was a child, I had a nightlight that emitted just enough photons to legibly illuminate the 12-point font of a book six inches away from the outlet. Any more light risked waking my mother. When it was safe to do so, I hung my head off the foot of my bed, fervently reading and scribbling in the margins. Many mornings, I woke up with my feet on my pillow and a book in my hands.

I am incredibly lucky to learn how to report stories from professors at BU whom I admire. For the reporting to turn into writing, I tap into my reservoir of prose from those younger, sleepless, novel-filled nights. I think growing up is simply trading the late nights for early mornings, the nightlight for a cup of coffee, and writing just a little more than would fit within the margins of a young adult novel.