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## Fiction and French Roasts

Sarah Groh

Cedarville University, sarahkgroh@cedarville.edu

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## Sarah Groh

Sarah Groh is a Nursing student at Cedarville University. She is also on the cross country and track teams and enjoys writing, reading, and art.

## Fiction and French Roasts

It's a sticky summer afternoon, and the downtown streets bustle with people trying to stay out of the mid August sun. In the coolness of a corner coffee shop, my best friend and I share a French roast and a desire to write.

My sisters make fun of it, my parents admire it, my teachers encourage it, but only Erin understands the urge to do nothing but sit at a roll top desk and type my imagination into a Word document. We call ourselves the modern, teenaged Fitzgerald and Hemingway, drinking coffee instead of beer and dreaming of starting our own literary era.

I trace my passion for writing to the first day of second grade, when I started working on a story about my cat. My classmates marveled at my patience as I took the entire school year to craft my masterpiece.

"How's the novel?" my teacher asked one April afternoon as I sat down for Writer's Workshop.

I gave her a shy smile, unsure of how to respond, and opened my folder for another glorious day of writing. I asked my parents what a novel was when I returned home from school.

It was the first time people noticed my ability to write, and I decided I would never stop. I wanted nothing more than to become an author.

Two years later, my eagerness turned into intimidation when I moved on to fourth grade. Mr. Saelzler was the scariest teacher at Chapman Elementary. He was at least three times my size, could beat anybody in tetherball, and assigned math and science quizzes the day before spring break. He talked of distant things like high school and college and made us write “entries” in our notebooks instead of stories. But the scariest thing of all was the time he told me he wanted me to share my writing in front of the class at least once before the school year ended. At the time, I thought it was another scheme of his to make me less shy, like the time he forbade me to read during indoor recess so I would socialize. He couldn’t think of me as a good writer, not after Erica’s piece about her fudge sundae or Sia’s ability to insert imagery into a bland sentence. And how could he expect me, the girl who barely talked and stood outside the tetherball courts alone at recess, to stand in front of the class and speak?

One May afternoon he asked me to read aloud my analytical response to a section of a book we read in class. It was the hardest writing assignment I’d done as a fourth grader, and I was sure I’d done it wrong. My cheeks flushed and my soft voice stuttered as I read, worried about what the others would think. But when I finished, he congratulated me and deemed my paragraph one of the best in the class.

Because I let the fears of public speaking and being inferior to my classmates overwhelm me, I didn’t realize Mr. Saelzler had a

reason for everything he did. The “entries” I thought were torture opened my eyes to the world of writing beyond long stories. He assigned tests before spring break to prepare us for the seemingly distant future and encouraged me socialize so I would make friends. And he wanted me to share my writing with the class because he thought it was good, and he wanted everyone else to know it, too.

Part of my fear of sharing my writing with others was rooted in the fact that I had nobody with whom to share it. That is, until my sophomore year of high school when Erin and I both signed up for a creative writing class.

It was during our first assignment, writing stories to describe ourselves, when Erin and I first discussed our ideas.

“I want to write about my trip to Guatemala this summer,” Erin remarked after class. “What about you?”

“I’m not sure yet,” I said, trying to hide the fact that I didn’t know where to start.

The thought of being surrounded with others who could write so well so easily intimidated me. For our first assignment I decided to go after it with aggression and try my best to be as good as they were. I thought until I came up with an idea about my chickens and started typing.

From then on, Erin and I talked of how things we learned in Anatomy or History or English inspired us and how one day our novels would be on a bestseller list.

After I turned in the first assignment, I didn’t think of it again until a few days later when Ms. Simpson called me up to her desk after class. My heart pounded in my chest as I wondered why

she wanted to talk to me alone. She pulled out my story, revealing green, cursive pen strokes covering the front page. I looked away, too discouraged to read what she'd written.

Then she spoke.

"Sarah, this is an incredible story! It is one of the best student stories I've read in a long time."

Astonishment stole my reply.

"I was holding my breath the whole time," she continued, "and I shared it with a few other English teachers because I was so moved..."

I didn't know what to say. The best student story she's read in a long time?

"T-thank you so much."

She handed me my story and gave me permission to leave. I hurried into the hallway, keeping the comments pressed close against my chest, trying to keep from smiling. But nothing could suppress the joy and confidence bubbling up inside. She had confirmed everything I'd ever wanted since I was seven. I was a writer, and a good one. I could be published if I worked hard enough.

My dream came true a year and a half later when I self-published my first novella. The council and confidence from Ms. Simpson and the encouragement and interest in my ideas from Erin helped me persevere and produce enough words to complete a story. Their belief in me pushed me past the fear of my own ideas and strengthened me when I felt I couldn't write one more word. Through long days of drafting and late nights of editing, I remembered my childhood dream and all the people who helped

me to achieve it along the way, not daring to give up after all they'd poured into me.

I titled my novella *Forbidden Pearls* and typed the title across the front with the same pride with which I marched my “novel” to the publishing shop in second grade. As a little girl, I had a wild imagination, a mind full of dreams I thought would never come true. But becoming an author was no longer as fictional as the stories I produced; it was a reality.

Coffeeshop conversations and analytical discussions about literature with Erin bridged the gap between my second grade dream and reality. By the wonder of my second grade classmates and the confidence of my elementary school teachers, I started writing. And because of the encouragement from Ms. Simpson and countless conversations with Erin, I will never stop.