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How Fiction Helped Me Find Myself

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The following is a guest post by Fabienne Payet

Let me take you back to my childhood. I was born in '78 so it might take a while...

At age 9 I was diagnosed with asthma, I had a hard time breathing and doing things. And I did not know anyone else who suffered from it, so no one could relate to me; But that changed. I saw *The Goonies* on television and the lead character, Mikey, had asthma too! How amazing that was to find someone like me. He went on a great adventure, inhaler in hand. It made me feel proud, made me feel as if I could go out and join them just the same even though I had this limitation.

Later on when I was much older it was *Sidekicks*, with Jonathan Brandis that brought forth yet another character surmounting great odds whilst having asthma. It gave me a feeling that I belonged still. It mattered to me.

I want a role where I too can reach out to a little girl that feels so alone she finds a family on TV

This reflects something that I can track back throughout my entire life, finding solace in movie or TV characters. Finding friends I never had in real life. Aside from the asthma, I was severely bullied in school. Why? Because of the color of my hair (red), the fact that my parents could not afford to buy name brand clothing, and later on because I had very strict parents that forbade me to do a lot of things my peers were experiencing. I sought out to live that life I had dreamed off through TV shows. I found an alternative family with everyone on *Full House*, school friends and teachers that cared on *Boy Meets World*. In my own mind, I was the cool girl who had those amazing friends as opposed to the girl who was bullied day in and day out. Movies also became quintessential to me. It provided me with something to hold on to, a sense of identity that I did not have in the real world. I existed on a parallel plane of existence. I used to rent VHS movies all the time, some movies I rented 10 or 15 times because they mattered so much to me. My room was plastered in posters and postcards. I started a collection of movies that went from VHS to DVD, of which I now can say that I own over 3.000 and have seen over 5.000.

Even to this day coming out of a movie or watching something new on Netflix, my mind immediately goes into that world and I see things through their eyes, adopt their way of seeing and thinking.

Quite a few years ago I was in London on a weekend break on my own and somebody was handing out lanyards with a card attached to it. No idea what it was, I went and got one for myself. It was a fan access badge to the grand stands of the BAFTA's. It was starting in a few hours time.

I immediately went to change my train ticket and hotel booking and I went. I saw people that I had only previously seen on a small screen before. I saw Angelina Jolie, Adrien Brody,... and so many more. I was

hooked from that point on. I went to many conventions, theatre productions, and many more BAFTA's to see those people I admired as a child. I have met many of those people and it was magical.



Later on I had a chance once to become an extra in a Belgian film! Me in a movie, on a set! Where I belonged at last! I was only an extra, barely noticed in the background (even not seen at all in my first movie, only my legs in one scene, I used to joke that my pants were famous not me). But I had done it! Now in 2017, I have been an extra for 14 years, I have been an actress for 4. I have been an extra on films such as *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*, *The Fifth Estate*, *The White Queen*, and many Belgian productions. I have had a full episode of scripted reality dedicated to a story they picked for me. I have had small speaking roles on a very popular Belgian TV series. And I want more. I found my home on sets of movies and TV shows.

I love the nomadic life that goes along with it, you never know on what set you'll end up, wearing at times amazing medieval costumes or just your regular clothes you brought along yourself. I love auditioning, the tension, the fear. I prefer it to regular job interviews (as I am nowhere near being an actress that can live off her work, I still need a day job!). I never seek fame but I seek a further way of belonging really. Of becoming who I am meant to be on a daily basis. Perhaps I want a role where I too can reach out to a little girl that feels so alone she finds a family on TV, and make her feel better even if only for a few moments.



I am still grateful to all those actors that I have had with me during my life, although none of them know it. They allowed me to live a life worth living. They allowed me to be, when everyone else told me how wrong it was to even dare to be myself. And I hope to one day be part of those who reach out and help others see they have every right to be just themselves regardless of what the world tells them.

They matter. Just like I did.

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