

Toni Morrison Contest- Maria Bak

I grew up in a protected environment where it seemed like everyone enjoyed having me around and I had nothing to worry about. Since I was always sheltered, I didn't know anything about who I was and what I actually liked to do. Over the years, the places I went and the experiences I had shaped who I am as a person.

My mom is a choir director at our church and everyone was always kind to me and gave me lots of attention. I was that one girl who wore dresses to school, which I actually did until I went to middle school. The fact that I really liked to read didn't help anything. Then people and peers started making fun of me and laughing at me. I genuinely didn't care at the time, and I still don't care, but it taught me society was mean. Some of the nicknames I acquired were actually really hilarious, and people still call me some of them. This made me realize I should just be myself because it doesn't matter.

Everything was going well at school when I was in sixth grade, and then COVID 19 came around. I was stuck at home with my family for five months. At the beginning, I was enjoying not having to go to school and sleeping past the time I usually get up in the morning. I quickly realized that the rest of my friends were still able to talk to each other; I didn't have any technology to respond to them. I was cut off from the rest of the world. It became harder for me to focus on school work and I got distracted very easily. One day, while I was procrastinating, I came across some old paint and craft kits from when I was in preschool. I was so bored, I did all of the kits and used up all of the paint in a week. My mom was able to find more art supplies, and that's what I did for the rest of my free time at home while quarantined. We transformed one of my closets into an art closet. Then I remembered a sewing kit I got in second grade for my birthday.

Sewing became my next obsession. My parents completely surprised me for my twelfth birthday and got me a heavy duty sewing machine. It sat in a corner collecting dust for almost a year, but I eventually opened up and figured out how to use it. I now have a full closet of items I have sewed, some of which I even wear to school. Art and sewing has helped me express myself.

Since my mother is a choir director, music has always been in my life. Some of my earliest memories were dancing around my house and church, making up my own music and singing my heart out. I have been in choirs since I was two years old. The summer of fourth grade, I started playing the piano, and a year later I started playing the violin. I have also played other instruments in concerts if they are needed. I have gotten lots of cool experiences from having music in my life, from singing the National Anthem at an Indians game to touring with a choir to Canada. It also has given me a great group of friends I can always count on. Music is an amazing way to let off steam and express yourself.

All in all, lots of people and circumstances have helped me figure out who I actually am. I am even going to play tennis with my best friend next year, which is something I have been scared to do for the longest time. Trying new things is beneficial for everyone in life. It gives you character and expands your horizons. That is what helped me figure out who I am. Life happens, and when it does, you have to be ready to learn lessons from it so you can be the best version of yourself.