



Memories and Mentoring By Ann Rolfe

I came half way around the world for a walk down memory lane. I was born in London but at age twelve, emigrated to Australia with my family. Until now, I've never been back. One of the first things I did was to walk along the embankment of the river Thames, near where I used to live. My house, in fact the whole street, is gone now replaced by high-rise but many other landmarks remained and I was surprised at the emotion they evoked.



This is Park Walk School, where I went for my infant and primary education. Fifty years ago I sat in those classrooms, I played in the playground. I listened to the radio broadcast of the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, as he orbited the earth. About that time, a guy called Chubby Checker launched a new dance craze with his song "Let's Twist Again". The Beatles topped the charts with "She Loves You (yeah, yeah, yeah)" and my mum was a lollipop lady (with a white coat and stop sign) for the kids crossing the road to school.

Memories. The most painful one was being labelled "a slow learner" in infants' school. I remember us "slow learners" were made to stand around a big, dark, wood table. It was scarred and grooved with scratches and wear. I don't know how old it was but I think the teaching method was of similar vintage. We all had our books open and had to take turns to read out loud. It was terrifying. I could follow the words in the book that the other kids torturously uttered but as my turn came my heart fluttered, my knees felt weak and my head turned to mush.

My teachers didn't know any better. Now we do. People of all ages have different learning styles. An incompatible teaching style can debilitate learners of any age. Labelling is unhelpful and can lead to lack of confidence and self-doubt.

I realise now, that they thought I couldn't read because I didn't read well out loud. When I transitioned from infants' to primary school things were different. We were allowed to read silently, the stories were interesting and we could progress through the series at our own pace. My grandmother bought me books that I devoured.

Reading is still a major learning strategy for me today. I now know that I am an introvert, that's why reading out loud at my initial stage of learning was excruciating. I'm lucky, early labelling as a "slow learner" might have permanently disabled me. Fortunately it was followed quickly by a different experience.

When we emigrated to Australia, we moved around a lot, I went to three high schools in eighteen months. It was hard for me to make friends and the school library became my refuge. I read ahead of my age and discovered new worlds in science fiction, history and contemporary novels. I left school aged fourteen years and ten months and went to work. It was many years before I returned to formal education.

Reading, fiction and non-fiction, continued to expand my mind but it was not until I was twenty-four when, as a single parent needing to create a better life for myself and my kids, I started a distance learning course and I realised I wasn't dumb. I could learn and I loved it.

Life events gave me the opportunity to discover my strengths. Not everyone is so fortunate.

I think this is one more reason why mentoring is important. Everyone has life experiences that serve them or don't. A conversation with a mentor can help you make sense of the past, process the present and set goals for the future. Mentoring for kids or adults of any age can give you a different and more positive perspective. Mentoring can help people identify their strengths, learn better and achieve their potential. That's how Mentoring Works.