

Hijacked or Process: Only Time Will Tell

by Nancy Archibald

Writing my memoirs about University include stories about roommates, boyfriends and some of the instructors. I don't feel like I am getting to the heart of my experience.

I pondered the reason why. Then I had an "ah ah" moment.

I need to understand what I was learning back then.

Why was I frustrated with the slide rule when doing Chemistry assignments? Why was one course more interesting to me than another?

I decide to go back to school. Not physically, but online, where I find "Introductory Biology, Ecology, Evolution and Biodiversity" course. I feel like I can bridge to where I was fifty-two years ago and embrace the joy of learning. There is new information about fungi that scientists are learning more about every day.

A course on Botany also captures my attention. I love learning about plants at a level where I can explore their physiology and how they grow. Every plant has evolved in its own way; one cannot generalize.

One course leads to another. Especially when I take Chad's Prep Chemistry on YouTube. Chad makes chemistry easier for high school and university students. He goes through each concept and rules of chemistry. Taking his course makes me realize that many of the exercises in chemistry require an understanding of math.

I enjoy these classes, not only for what I learn, but they take me back to university and high school. Math especially reminds me of algebra and geometry classes in grades nine through twelve. I promise myself I will do math questions daily. They are good for my brain.

Any meaningful accomplishment when learning the exercises leaves me little time for writing my memoirs. In my mind, I recall what I learned and the experiences that accompanied the courses I took, but writing a story about this time in my life is another matter.

One story I can write might start like this:

“Learn in spite of your teachers,” Mom said one day when I was in grade ten as I struggled with a chemistry problem.

“I hate this textbook, it doesn’t explain anything right, I don’t understand,” I told her in frustration before I retreated to the dining room table, book in hand.

I sat down, opened the chemistry book and read chapter one.

The textbook didn’t make sense to me. My chemistry teacher didn’t teach concepts that built upon one another. It seemed we were learning useless information.

I remember Mr. Koole in front of the room doing an experiment.

That’s cool. But what did we learn?

I had Mr. Koole for two years in chemistry. I remember the concept of the electron going around a nucleus of an atom. I didn’t understand how small the atoms were until grade twelve, when we learned Avogadro’s number, 6.02×10 to the 23rd power. Even that was abstract to me.

What did this mean?

Miss Seigal, our East Indian chemistry teacher in grade twelve, dressed in her sari, knew chemistry well, and tried to get the concepts across to a group of students who just arrived at class from physical education, not ready to settle down and learn.

What were my chemistry teachers trying to teach? Electron configuration? That would have been too complicated for high school. Were they laying down the rules of chemistry like isotopes, mass number and atomic number? Did we learn the periodic table?

I can write memoirs about the concepts I learned through my childhood years. What I am learning online brings back these memories of high school that previously were only vaguely familiar to me.