

# UC Merced

## The Vernal Pool

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Apart at the Seams

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## **Apart at the Seams**

Brushing my hand across the familiar bindings while scanning the content of each shelf, my quest continued. Inhaling the aroma only familiar to those brave enough to explore this desolate area of the room, I found it hidden in the very last stack of books, the most damaged book in the library. Its binding falling apart in my hands as I turned the page and continued to read on. Every day spent identical to the last. Every day spent traveling to exotic places, associating with the upper echelon of pre-revolutionary France, or serving as a mole to England in Nazi Germany during World War II. That was my way of escaping the reality that life had to offer.

The art of escapism illustrated perfectly by every book I held was my saving grace in elementary school, as I was told that I would make some of my life long friends in elementary school. Everyone lied. The only thing I seemed to make at recess was a new enemy to taunt and tease me. At my elementary school, I excelled and finished kindergarten with the ability to read at a level surpassing the entirety of my class. For this, I was despised, as I didn't fit the mold set by the favored few of the first grade. The classroom was my safe haven; the playground was my battlefield. Dodging punches, balls, and rude comments became the entirety of my elementary school life and up to second grade, I faced this alone.

In the second grade, my best friend transferred to my school. Like me, he excelled in school and didn't fit the mold set by the savvy students of the second grade. We spent our recesses hiding out in our secret hiding place, the uninhabited library. Books became our beacon of hope in the darkness of being labeled outcasts. Together we plunged through the voluminous book stacks in search of books falling apart at the seams or discolored by overuse.

Pouring over these forgotten pieces of our school's literature instilled a fascination for the story each book told, the story that went beyond the words and the damage each book held. Why was this page covered in tear marks? Maybe they were struggling to contain the emotions that ensued from being a frequently forgotten face in the fourth grade, and the death of Beth March surfaced those repressed emotions. What was the one sentence that reader needed to hear at that moment? Did they also need to be reassured that they were more than their surroundings just

looking for a moment to spread their wings and fly, like Jane Eyre? Why was this sentence underlined or highlighted? Maybe they related as much as I did to Caroline Bingley's statement, "I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!" Our fascination went beyond journeying through Avonlea with Anne Shirley or adventuring through St. Petersburg with Tom Sawyer, but we wanted to know why this book had affected someone enough to check it out multiple times, dog-ear this corner, or cry at this part. We wanted to know if they were someone like us, outcasts, left to sit alone at the lunch tables, laughed at when the others pushed them or left to seek shelter at the one place the others couldn't think of, the uninhabited library.

Reading became my way to escape the bullying that continued through middle school. When I was being treated so terribly, I switched schools in search of relief. My new school was ten times the size of my other school, yet I was able to face it because my fellow outcast had switched that same year to the same school.

At lunch, we found ourselves back in the library rummaging through the stacks of our favorite books, those so damaged they are deemed unworthy to be checked out. What the others don't know about these damaged and tattered books, barely held together, displays the beauty they hold. They struggle to hold it together because they know that the content they hold is worth the battle. They don't know what words written in their story will save the next reader, and they fight for the ability to share their content with the next. Like the books, our life stories may be falling apart at the seams, but we continue to hold it all together, striving to be the beacon of hope to the reader of our beautifully damaged lives.