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## A Self Portrait

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### The Self Portrait

Some books you read, and some books you keep. Some books you store on shelves and some, from time to time, find their way to your bedside table. Some take weeks to finish and others you stay up half the night to find out what happens at the end. And then there are some that you never really put down, because some books you become.

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There are ten paperback books stacked precariously on my coffee table. None of their pages are bent; they have been handled with care. Some have not been opened in years, but I know them all by heart. Oddly enough, I suddenly realize that I can only recall two of the main characters names off the top of my head. The first is Anne, from L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, which makes sense because her name is in the title. The other is Sophie, from Sharon Creech's *The Wanderer*. Sophie's name has always stuck with me. I loved her story so much that can I clearly remember my fifth grade self deciding to name a future child after her. In fact, I wanted to change my own name to Sophie for awhile. My wish came true in high school, when my foreign language teacher asked us to pick Spanish names to use in his class. I was Sofia three hours a week for two years. However, for the other eight protagonists' names, I draw a complete blank. Did I really forget the names of the heroines in my favorite books?! How can I know their stories by heart and at the same time admit I do not know their names? My eyes bulge with surprise and embarrassment, but only for a moment. In my heart, I know why I can't remember; their names were replaced with mine a long time ago. Separately, they are ten books

about ten young girls. Together, however, they are a portrait – ten books about one woman. They are my stories now.

The transition from childhood to adulthood has been a shock equivalent to discovering that my city is underground and that there is a whole other world sitting above my head<sup>1</sup>. However, instead of a buried city or even an island shaped like a dolphin, my first wake-up call was moving from Texas to Missouri. I felt all alone as I figured out how to not only survive in a new high school, but also how to build a new world around me<sup>2</sup>. Then came college, when I became aware of a world that extended beyond myself. I learned in history and banned-book classes, as well as from my own experiences, that there is so much more pain and sorrow than I ever imagined. Thankfully, at the same time I realized that hope is even more powerful when it is challenged. Learning to fight for the positive things has shown me that feeling the depths of sorrow is worth it because it allows me to truly understand and appreciate the heights of joy<sup>3</sup>. As a result, I can be thankful and compassionate in the midst of pain,<sup>4</sup> and I can refuse to give into fears that cripple people around me<sup>5</sup>. Instead, I can be an adventurer and pursue what I love even when others disagree, which becomes more of an issue the closer I get to graduating. People tell me all the time that being an artist is not “practical” and that I should get a “real job.” However, I have decided to live out *Heartbeat*, by Sharon Creech, and not give up my passion for creativity just to please other people. Sometimes though, bad critiques or low Etsy sales are discouraging

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<sup>1</sup> *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau

<sup>2</sup> *The Island of the Blue Dolphins*, Scott O’Dell

<sup>3</sup> *Anne of Green Gables*, L. M. Montgomery

<sup>4</sup> *Small Steps: the Year I got Polio*, Peg Kehret

<sup>5</sup> *The Dark Hills Divide*, Patrick Carman

and I am tempted to believe in my insecurity that I am not good enough<sup>6</sup>. In those times I look for beauty in the small things that most people find ordinary<sup>7</sup>, such as the magic of secret gardens, to renew my strength<sup>8</sup>.

Over the years I have molded myself around these characters and embraced not only their stories but my own as well. Now, about to graduate and get married, my life is going to change all over again. However, I am confident that no matter happens, I will be able to welcome these changes as an adventure story waiting to be told<sup>9</sup>.

I am Lina, I am Karana, I am Anne, I am Peg, I am Alexa, I am Annie, I am Miri, I am Sophie, I am Mary, I am Domenica; but most importantly, I am Joyce.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Princess Academy*, Shannon Hale

<sup>7</sup> *The Wanderer*, Sharon Creech

<sup>8</sup> *The Secret Garden*, Frances H. Burnett

<sup>9</sup> *Bloomability*, Sharon Creech

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