Today, I am an avid reader. I read not only for school, but for pleasure as well. However, that was not always the case. As a child, I was read to constantly by my mother, grandmother, and other relatives, but I didn’t really take an interest in it until I was older. I had to find out for myself that reading can be an adventure. The one book that taught me this was Maurice Sendak’s *Pierre*.

The full title of this book is *Pierre, a Cautionary Tale in Five Chapters and a Prologue*, quite a long title for a children’s book. It is the story of a young boy who was taught by a hungry lion to care about life. I was not so much intrigued by the plot as I was by the excitement I felt when I heard this long title. Sendak wrote *Pierre* in verse and published it in 1962. I actually own a first edition copy of the book. It was given to my mother by her grandmother, and she passed it down to me when I was a child. I was not allowed to play with it when I was very young because it was an antique, so old and fragile, and I had a habit of tearing things up, as most children do. So, it sat on my bookshelf collecting dust for the first years of my life.

Although my mother read books and stories to me, *Pierre* always remained in its designated position on the bookshelf. She was afraid of what I might do to the antique book, so its mysterious blue-cover stayed on the shelf while the others were constantly being taken down and read. She read other books to me by Sendak, such as *Where the Wild Things Are* and *In the
Night Kitchen, which I enjoyed very much. I loved his illustrations and the exciting tales of imaginary adventures to far-off places. This was the reason I wanted to hear Pierre so badly. Why was there a lion on the cover? What could it be about? I asked my mom again and again to read it to me, but she always patiently explained that it was an old book that I couldn't play with. I would have just taken it to read myself; however, I was not yet literate, so that was out of the question. I could think of anyone who could help me. Then when I was almost four, my mother drastically changed her work schedule.

Ever since I can remember, I had gone to daycare while my parents went to work. Sunshine Corner was my second home. Then, one day, I just stopped going. My mother had taken a shift change at the hospital where she worked, and she didn't like the idea of my being taken to daycare on a motorcycle, and my father was inclined to agree. So my mom would wake me up and drive me to my grandmother's house in the middle of the night before going to the hospital.

As an only grandchild, I was spoiled in every way imaginable. I enjoyed the time at my grandmother's house very much, but not just because she bought me my favorite toys and let me watch as much television as I liked. She played games with me and read to me. As the days went by and the nightly journey to her house became routine, she and I became very close. Even though she was over sixty and I was only three, we had many things in common. Our favorite ice cream was cookies and cream, and we were the only two non-smokers in the house. One day after a third reading of A Cricket in Times Square, she asked me if I had any books that I want to bring for her to read to me. Finally, someone who could unravel the mystery
of Pierre. There were, however, still a few things that stood in my way.

The first obstacle I had to overcome was retrieving the book from the bookshelf in my mother's room. This small task was littered with complications of its own. The shelf on which the book rested was not very high, but I was less than three feet tall, and it was higher than I could reach. There was also the problem of keeping quiet, so as not to wake my father and get caught. I studied my mother's regular morning routine for a few days and discovered that the first thing she did when she got up was to go to into the bathroom for about twenty minutes. That gave me a large window of opportunity. However, there was also the problem of waking up in time to get the book. Being the crafty little imp I was, I found a way around all of these barriers.

One night, I woke up to the sound of my mother's alarm, which today was a little louder than normal. She did not seem to realize that I had turned it up the day before as she got up for her morning ritual. I heard the door to the bathroom close and I had my chance. I took my special miniature chair into her room and climbed up. I wasn't quite tall enough, so I had to reach and stand on the tips of my toes. I grabbed the book and immediately lost my balance and fell off the chair. It wasn't a very long fall, so I couldn't possibly have been hurt. I laid there for a moment to make sure I hadn't woken my father. I heard reassuring snoring and was relieved, but then the bathroom door opened. I snatched my treasure from the floor and raced back into my bedroom just as my mother entered her room. I hid the book under my pillow, but I had forgotten to move my chair! Luckily, she didn't notice it in the dark. We got ready as usual, and I didn't relax until I was safely in the comfort of my grandmother's couch.
All that work for one book, but it was worth it. My grandmother didn't question where the book came from as she read it to me. I even got to hold it and turn the pages. I laughed as Pierre poured syrup in his hair, sat backwards in his chair, stood on his head, got sent to bed, and all while shouting, "I don't care!" I was frightened when the lion proposed to eat Pierre, and his parents found the sick lion in Pierre's bed saying, "I don't care!" I was relieved when Pierre was retrieved from the inside of the lion, and I was happy when he finally learned his lesson and began to care. From that day on, I took Pierre to my grandmother's house every day. It was my favorite book, not only because of the plot or characters, but because of the trouble I had gone through to get it. To this day, I can recite most of it by heart, and my mother has never discovered what I had done.

Although my mother expressed genuine concern for her antique, she didn't even notice it was gone. Since then, I have looked at books in an entirely new way. Every time I open a book, I remember how exciting it can be to read. Even though she didn't do it on purpose, I thank my mother for giving me a thirst for reading and adventure.