

HOOPS—We all jump through them.

A series of short story bios.

In this blog I share a little about myself...

page 1 of 4 (#2 HOOPS)

I'm **Demery Matthews**. Today on HOOPS, I will tackle the topic of **Deciding What to be When I Grow Up** and the hoops we jump through to get where we are going in life. Since that title is as boring as white paint, I am titling this installment of Hoops: **To Write or to Design? That was the question.**

HOOP #2

To Write or to Design? That was the question.

(Warning: I drop one F-bomb. Plug your ears or blur your eyes. Hear no evil, see no evil, but damn if I can't speak it.)

If you read or listened to my first HOOP, you might remember a childhood memory I shared about deciding to become an architect. It had a little something to do with Mike Brady from the Brady Bunch, floor plans published in Sunset Magazine, graph paper, and a dollhouse.

In addition to all that, throughout my formative years I grew up in a housing development where, up and down the entire street, homes were under construction and in some stage of the building process. Contractors must not have bothered with fencing jobsites back then because I freely roamed these dangerous construction zones on the weekends and explored them before guardrails were installed. To gain access to second floor levels, I ran up temporary planks in lieu of stairways.

I remember one particular morning when a partially framed 2-story house, without its roof built, had about a foot of fluffy snow covering every horizontal surface within. My dog, Sammy, was with me and she ran up those temporary planks to the upper level. I tagged close behind. As I reached the top step I stared in horror as Sammy bound right out a second floor opening, to what I can only assume would one day become a balcony, and she proceeded to fall about ten feet down to the snow covered earth below. I ran forward on the slick plywood surface but, remembering what I had just witnessed, came to a safe stop before peering down at my dog below. She survived, uninjured, but looked back up at me with wild eyes.

The other thing I remember relative to early exposure in the realm of architecture was an obsession with going to any and every open house I could get myself inside. My folks even started paying for the three of us to tour *Street of Dream* showcase homes in fancy developments where we would gawk at the way rich people lived. I would gather any brochures with plans on them and then study the designs.

HOOPS—We all jump through them.

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page 2 of 4 (#2 HOOPS)

Then there was the annual occurrence of watching *The Sound of Music* with my mom around Christmas time. That Von Trapp family mansion was a major inspiration with its ballroom and immense curving stairway. I could not have been the only kid dreaming about living in a mansion someday, but I drew the damn thing.

The house sections I drew were usually about ten floors tall and each version came stocked with a fancy ballroom. There was usually a two level playroom given more space than any bedroom was allotted. That playroom then had a platform for stage play, a slide, a fireman's pole, a loft, and an interior jungle gym of course.

At some point, my design work became slightly more realistic and I even dabbled in some regional planning with entire towns laid out and painstakingly drafted. Actually, I don't think there was much pain involved. I LOVED to design and draw.

I then learned to properly draft in the seventh grade in an elective course that was half-drafting and half-woodshop. In high school I took two more years of drafting and that is where I pursued my interests in earnest. I asked my teacher, Mr. Sorenson, what I was doing. "Is this architecture or interior design?" I inquired.

"Both," he said. And when I pressed for advisement on whether I should consider colleges that offered architectural programs or open myself to a degree in something like interior design, Mr. Sorenson encouraged me to go the Mike Brady route. "Become an architect."

Nobody in my family was an architect. We had a small family. There were a handful of educators, and my dad was in sales, but I was determined to follow this architecture thing and see where it led.

I was a good student. I wouldn't say learning came easy to me because I was a slow reader and often had to get one-on-one help in math before the concepts clicked, but I was willing to work hard, and it paid off. I took advanced classes in high school for college credit and had one of the best English teachers I could ever imagine having. Mr. Arkle. He liked my writing. He challenged me big time. I got to have him as my English teacher in both eleventh grade and twelfth. Those were the same years I had Mr. Sorenson for drafting. He was equally a favorite teacher of mine.

It is no surprise that Mr. Sorenson's drafting classes were way out toward the far back of the campus near to where the welding, woodshop, and auto-mechanics classes were offered, but it is still odd to me that Mr. Arkle's English class was also way out in those buildings. As a result of the remote classroom locations, Mr. Sorenson and Mr. Arkle seemed to be buddies. Unlikely buddies. The Odd Couple for sure but, at least from my perspective, they seemed to like and respect one another.

HOOPS—We all jump through them.

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page 3 of 4 (#2 HOOPS)

I remember a competition between them started sometime during my senior year. Mr. Arkle began encouraging me to get a degree in literature and Mr. Sorenson already knew about my passion for architecture. But, I must say, I did love writing too. I just didn't love reading. Being a slow reader meant I was often behind in the course load and had to start writing my papers before I even finished the books. I always fell asleep when I read but I eventually managed the workload and, as I said, Mr. Arkle liked my writing. I received high marks, so I must have compensated for my reading difficulty somehow. I remember my mom helping me out by reading to me some nights and I do have to admit to knowing what *Cliff Notes* were about.

I do not remember ever considering not studying architecture but there was a time when I thought maybe I would double-major in that *and* literature. There is no way that thought lasted very long though. I was scared to death of the reading load I would face in college as a lit-major. So, I eventually chose to stick with and focus on my obsession for housing design instead.

The five-year architecture program at WSU was competitive and grueling and I had to get tough skin to handle the critiques. I had to pull a few all-nighters to manage the deadlines too. But, staying awake to draw at my desk in the design studio, surrounded by other talkative students and blaring music, was far easier than I imagine staying awake would have been in some quiet corner while reading.

However, writing remained a big part of my college experience. I took honors program classes which were small and offered essay exams, requiring long-winded written answers instead of the lead filled multiple choice bubble tests the huge lecture hall courses gave. I had a few of those too but I excelled with essay writing.

I know I dreamed of other professions during childhood. There was a time I wanted to become a veterinarian and I spent years dreaming up a horse jockey's life but choosing a career in architecture was one of those things that developed over time. It likely goes further back before I put pencil to paper. I played with blocks, built Lego worlds, and constructed blanket forts draped all over my folks' furniture. Fort building lasted into my teens and is something I'd still do if the spirit moved me. Hell, I'll even still play with blocks and Legos!

Writing was different. It was something I grew into much more slowly. It is something I gained confidence in only as I got older. There was a time I believed I wasn't *qualified* to be a writer and thought I needed that lit degree in order to have the *right* to write. I eventually got over that and got on with writing because I felt alive when I did it. It filled me up. I just had to wait for life to allow time for it because when my kids were young, and I worked full time to make ends I didn't have the headspace. Now I do.

HOOPS—We all jump through them.

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page 4 of 4 (#2 HOOPS)

Deciding what to become when we grow up and choosing a major or certification program, are hoops we jump through. Sometimes we jump back and forth a bit too. You know, I still read slowly. And I quite easily lose interest in whatever I'm reading. I decided that is just going to have to be okay.

As far as qualifications go, the older I get, the more I could not give a f*ck. Yes, we should do our due diligence and learn all we can about the fields we roam, but our most important lessons are learned by doing. So Do what makes you tick. Write AND Design. Build forts. Stack blocks. Try a hula-hoop maybe. Try it while sliding down the fireman's pole or dancing across the stage. Ask a friend to hold that hula-hoop out sideways for you to jump through. Just make sure you aren't on a slippery second floor level of a partially framed house without guardrails when you decide to clear that hula-hoop. It doesn't even have to be high off the ground. You can step through instead of jumping if that keeps you from breaking your neck. Be safe. Be sane. And remember to go back and thank your high school teachers.

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This was the second installment of “HOOPS—We all jump through them.” Thank you for taking the time to read.