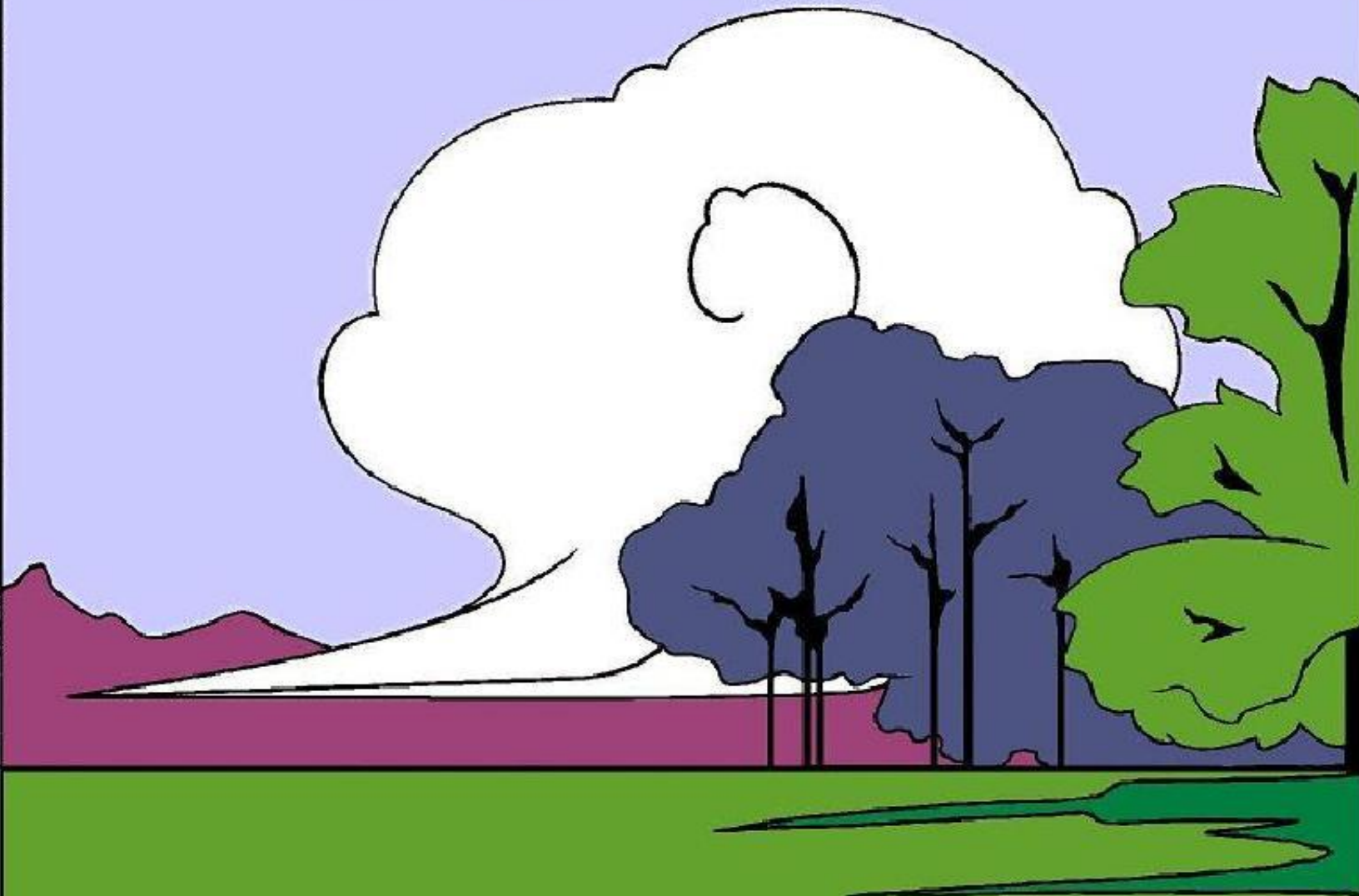


Based Upon

A True

Story . . .



Fall 2009

EDITORS IN CHIEF:

(We couldn't decide on only one, so we ended up with three 😊)

Amanda Garcia, Tyler Harris, and Danielle Smith

Special thanks to Megan Dillon, who got the aforementioned editors out of a bind and graciously provided the cover.

A heartfelt (and in some cases not so heartfelt) thanks to all those who provided the inspiration for the stories found in this compilation.

Names were changed in some instances to protect the pride and reputations of those involved. These are stories based on lessons that the authors have learned. All the stories found here are truly

BASED UPON A TRUE STORY...

Enjoy...

**ENGLISH 1005
Honors Composition**

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Choices

Choices are what make up our lives, filters, and thoughts. Choices are like a big web; you might have to cut one strand to get to another. One must struggle at one part because of another's choice that does not correlate with them. Being a freshman in college, I have been making many life-changing decisions. From birth, every decision your parents made for you has shaped you into who you have become; now I realize that we have to make choices for ourselves. I became frustrated and overwhelmed when deciding which college I should attend. How could I possibly make choices without having some kind of previous experience? These choices would be ones that affected my entire life. As I grow older life goes by faster. I start to learn things that have never been important in my life which have now become part of my daily life. It is hard to accept life with all these changes especially at such a pivotal time in one's life. However, the choice a person makes has an impact that will never allow the person's life to go back to a previous state of their life. One must be able to accept those changes to be happy and satisfied with what they have and what they will achieve.

I have started to notice things that have never occurred to me before. I have been very privileged because I never had to pay for anything and now I am starting to realize the true value of money. Over the summer I got a job. At first, I was hesitant, but wouldn't you expect everyone to be hesitant when they start something new? I was not sure how comfortable I would feel serving people. It was a life changing decision, I was not sure whether I was going to like it or not. Nor did I have any previous experience to help make my decision. In the end, I was satisfied with my choice. Since I could not be in control of what I could say to people, I had to be nice and polite to them even if they were rude to me. Obviously, I thought of stupid things at first. Like it if was someone I did not like could I just walk into the back room and not help them? Could I be rude to them? Soon, I realized these things did not even matter

especially when I was making my decision on whether or not to pursue a job. I learned how one's decisions can greatly affect the lives of others. For example, if I was closing and the other person who I was closing with never showed up, it affected my whole night. The manager and I had to call and find someone else to cover that shift. If the person we called was busy they had to make the decision of whether or not to work that night.

I learned a great amount of responsibility. No longer am I the inept, spoiled girl I used to be. Now I do not spend any of my money I earn. It goes straight into my savings account, because I have worked for the money. I think it is funny because I do so much more work at my actual job than I do at my own house. This reminds me of how little children are afraid of getting into trouble with their teachers, but they do not budge when they are at home and being punished by their parents. I have learned how to be a hard worker and a team player. It is not always all about you. Sometimes sacrifices have to be made. Something that you have never experienced and something that you never think you would experience is a reality to others.

I went to a third-world country last winter. It was a major reality check. I used to think of poverty as someone not having a home or a car; yes, it was an ignorant view but with the filters that I have had it made sense to me. In third-world countries, poverty is people on the streets begging for money. They live in tents made of scraps of cloth and they normally all live together in a ditch. This made me realize how thankful I am for never having to go through that. Since I never had to go through that, the trip helped me make better choices on wants and needs. People have their own descriptions of what their needs and wants are. I am still learning to keep those two separate. In the last four days, I have spent almost 300 dollars. I do not remember on what or why, but I have realized when it is your parents' money in your bank account it tends to go a lot quicker. These are careless choices made by myself and I should put more thought into the next time I swipe my card. If I do not improve my choices now it will affect me in the future. Obviously, I cannot live off my parents forever.

Driving every morning is another decision I have to make. Is it worth driving eighty miles per hour on the freeway? It is an important question considering all the new laws, such as no texting or talking on the phone without a headset. These are the decisions we have to

make on a daily basis. In some ways they do affect the future but in some ways they do not. So next time a choice needs to be made, it is important to weigh both sides and realize needs over wants.

Being eighteen years old, I cannot say I have much experience but there are a few things I have experienced and made choices about. For one, during and after high school some people learn who their true friends are. For me, I loved high school, all the football games, volleyball tournaments, Homecoming games, ASB meetings, field trips, and school rivalries. Seeing relationships grow and change has also been an experience in good and bad ways.

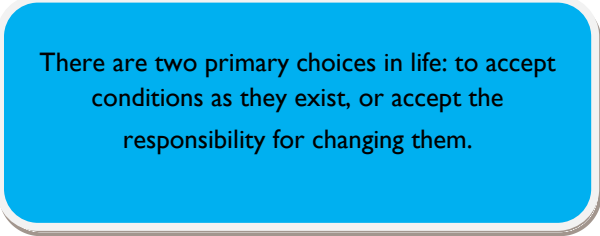
After I graduated from high school, I learned who my true friends were. They were the people that I can depend on, the people I try to talk to on a daily basis. I wish I could put more faith into others, but life becomes too hectic. The people that you would hang out with every weekend are either moved out, working, or just not around. Slowly, some people began to shrink away from their friends and that is their choice. It sucks. School and work are a lot for me, but keeping up with friends is a lot of work as well. Making sure one is not left out, and making sure that you text the other. We have to make a decision on whether or not you're going to read for your next class or text a friend or an old friend.

Sometimes it feels like an obligation to have to call your old friends. Then the reality comes; when you see someone from high school at the grocery store or out somewhere, the conversation normally lasts about five minutes. Each person asks how the other is, what he or she is doing, and just how life is in general. Sometimes people choose to stray from telling others personal information like they used to just because then it's almost mandatory to keep in touch. Also, it is difficult to remember if they are dating that one guy or what their major is. I cannot even decide my own major, how am I supposed to remember someone else's? These are more choices people have to make and they are definitely not easy ones. It is easy for people to choose to just keep to themselves and not include anyone in their lives. Then, when you really think about it, the more amiable you are with people the further you get in life. The relationships you make now and try to nurture will help you in the future. If one has a business in the future would they not want old friends to buy from their business? What about the scenario of an old friend looking for a vice president for his new company, you just got laid off

your job (with this economy), and you are qualified? Friendships, or should I say connections, could make a humongous impact in the future.

Some people already have very strong filters and thoughts. These are the people who know what they expect out of life and generally how they will achieve those goals. The choices they make can be premeditated or they can think thoroughly and decide. For some, a support system is great. My immediate and extended families are my most important support. They influence my thoughts on the appropriate things to do. Whether or not I listen to their ideas, I have something to fall back on when I am not sure on what new decision to make. I have only been in school for a month and a week and I feel like I have made more choices in these past few weeks than I have had to in my whole life. I would say it is easier asking family for advice instead of friends. I talk to my cousins occasionally on Facebook when one gets engaged, graduates, or that sort of thing but when we physically see each other we just pick up from where we left off. It is a choice we choose to make ourselves feel comfortable around them, which is sometimes difficult to do for friends or even vice versa for others. The thoughts we have greatly affect our choices. I strongly believe in mind over body. We can control what we think and believe and go on with our lives with whatever choices we make.

To think, these are the daily things that I must reflect on every day and wonder how great of a job I am doing. Slowly, day by day, they are affecting my future. Even though life changes, you still question why you let that friend vanish away. Why could life not go back to normal when all we did was sit around and watch television? Every morning we wake up and decide whether or not we are going to do the so-called “right” thing for ourselves. Every day is a new challenge in itself. I read a quote by Denis Waitley that said, “There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.” I most definitely agree. One needs to make choices on what he or she believes and not what others say. Another quote I read was by Robert F. Bennett, “Your life is the sum of all the choices you make, both consciously and unconsciously. If you can control the process of choosing, you can



There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.

take control of all aspects of your life. You can find the freedom that comes from being in charge of yourself.” To me the end of this quote is significant because if one is unhappy they cannot blame others, they should take full responsibility. One has full control and they should use it wisely to their advantage. The last quote by Robert Fritz is, “If you limit your choices to what seems possible or reasonable, you disconnect yourself from what you truly want, and all that is left is compromise.” This is really important; just because someone has to make a choice does not mean it has to be easy or necessarily hard. One should strive for what they want, not settle for less. It is worth more to try and make choices that make you happy and challenge yourself to something new, opposed to making the same-old boring choices every day. Live your life through the choices you make because you want to, not because you have to.

~AMANDEEP RAI

“Dude, Where’s My Car?”

Many see driving a vehicle as a right, something that is given to you at the young and fruitful age of sixteen. Driving is something that most every teenager looks forward to taking on. To many, it’s more of a status symbol. The ability to drive a car (legally) is seen as the top notch, a never before known sense of freedom. With this freedom comes many responsibilities, ones that teenagers say they understand. But what truly is this sense of understanding? It certainly is not mommy and daddy telling them to please drive safely as the teen bolts out the door to their car for the first time. The truth is that understanding comes from the consequences of their actions. What does it take a ticket, a wreck, or in some cases death? These are things that are very real possibilities in the everyday world, and are also very easily overlooked when one is presented with this new privilege. The main issue is can a sixteen-year-old individual be trusted with such a great responsibility? A responsibility which is much too far beyond their comprehension to even understand? I was under the impression that I could be trusted. I knew what “could” happen, but would refuse to take a serious look into precisely what happens as a result of those actions.

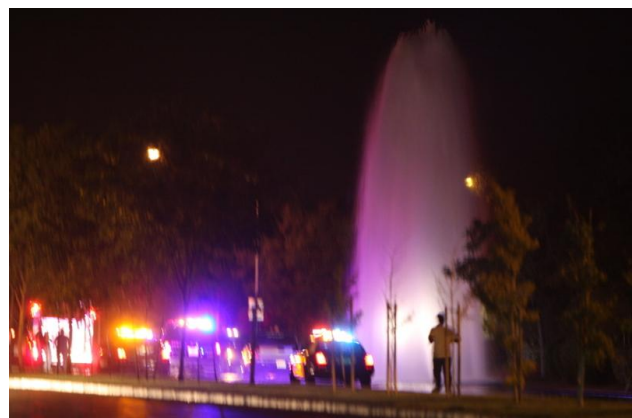
I was the stereotypical teenage male; I had been waiting more than anxiously to reach the age of sixteen so I could buss down to the DMV to take my behind-the-wheel driver’s test. I had it all planned out, receiving my learner’s permit precisely six months prior to my sixteenth birthday, this way I was eligible to attempt the behind-the-wheel test on my birthday. I took the test, passed, received that little slip of paper which was my temporary license, and in turn received that freedom I had longed for since I could walk. I had my license for about a year without any issues, driving day in and day out, to school, work, wherever my mind wandered I could go there. I was free!

Everything was going smoothly, not an issue in the world, until one frightful Friday night. It started off just like any other Friday; it was a day at school, preparing for our football game

that night. Normal bus ride out to Modesto, demolish the opposition, and take our bus ride back into town. It was a typical mid-September evening, mid to high 60's, not warm, but not cold, not a cloud in the sky. It was a night that many would enjoy laying out to look up at the stars, a very nice evening to say the least.

We arrived back at my school, and everyone said their goodbyes and went to their vehicles to drive home. I started up my truck and pulled out of the parking lot. As I turned onto the main road I accelerated; the speed limit on this particular road happened to be forty-five miles per hour. As I made a left turn at a major four-way intersection I began to accelerate, looking over my shoulder as I was about to make a lane change and turning the wheel at the same time. As I looked back to the road I saw a flood of water, and as I turned the wheel my tires began to spin uncontrollably atop the loose water. The water was flooding the road because the city had decided to over-water the grass surrounding this particular road that night. The road went from dry to flooded in a matter of feet, with no warning or signs. The truck spun a complete three hundred and sixty degrees, and then the tires gripped the pavement in a direction facing perpendicular to the road. The truck was now not under my control. I applied the brakes and the wetness on the tires made the truck begin to slide. It was now as if I was someone riding an amusement park ride. I was helpless and all I could do was hold on and pray to come out of this situation unharmed.

The truck was now heading straight into a ten-foot tall rock barrier, which guarded some local residences. The first impact was with a fire hydrant. The impact immediately snapped the fire hydrant at the base and hurled the little bundle of metal over one hundred feet down the road. The truck kept on going and bulldozed through a forest of trees, tearing them down one by one before finally encountering the rock barrier. The collision with the barrier sent the truck for a spin. Hitting the barrier at an angle, the momentum of the truck forced the front end to whip around. By this time the truck had come to a complete stop, ironically sitting in the road facing



the appropriate way in the inside lane. The scariest part of the situation was finished; all that was left was to assure that I was not seriously injured.

The initial impact of the truck to the fire hydrant was enough to set off the sensors for the front airbags of the vehicle. I was lucky enough to have gotten away with only a small burn in my right hand from the chemicals that were released from the dashboard when the airbags were deployed. I was able to walk away with not a scratch on my body, only the minor burns which I was able to wash off and not have any serious side effects to follow.

The major issue was what I witnessed when I was able to escape the vehicle and take a



look at the surroundings. It was like a movie scene!

The destruction that occurred when the fire hydrant was destroyed resulted in a geyser of water shooting straight into the air, towering 20 feet about the rock barrier and engulfing the street and adjoining median. It was a sight to see; cars were stopping on the road to take the time to

capture photographs of the incident.

The whole incident seemed to be a blur to me for the weekend following this eye-opening event. Through the night I was shaking out of control. The thoughts of what could have happened behind the wheel of that truck were mind-boggling. To this day I can recall every second of the accident, from getting off the bus, to calling my parents, to getting taken home. The smallest things seem like such a big deal to you when you encounter such an unfortunate event.

There are stories from people who have been in serious accidents who say they can relive the entire scene in slow motion. This is completely true. As each second passed I was seeing everything in slow motion. From the second I saw the water on the road to the instant the vehicle stopped its motion, I was in a different state of mind. Time seemed to freeze; what happened in a matter of ten seconds real time seemed to take a month in my time. It is not something that I would wish for anyone to encounter.

I learned a very important lesson on that September night. When I decided to drive, the responsibilities I was accepting were and are overwhelming. Parents can tell you to drive safely and not to speed, but the truth is that it is all in the driver's hands. Listening to the warnings, practicing safe driving techniques, and being a mature individual are very important in situations like these. I learned not only that I need to listen to what my parents told me about driving, but also that I need to be careful given any situation I am put in. It can happen to anyone, and though it is a very horrific and unfortunate event to have to be a part of, it is something that I can use to become smarter. In being involved in that situation, I now know how to handle myself when I encounter other wet roads, and what not to do in those similar situations. I understand that I could have been seriously injured in that wreck, and I am very thankful that I came out with hardly a scratch on my body.

Nearly every newly licensed teen believes that they know how to handle a vehicle and that they will not be involved in a wreck, or get pulled over, or do anything wrong. The sad and unfortunate truth is that an event like this could very well happen to anyone, at anytime. Parents need to keep informing their young drivers, and the young drivers need to seriously take into consideration the information that they are being provided with as it can very well save their life.

~TYLER HARRIS

ENJOY EVERY MOMENT

The biggest lesson I ever learned was also the most painful one. The lesson began on November 17, 2008 at around 5 at night in my dining room. I was just sitting down to do my homework when the house phone rang. I picked it up and it was my mom calling from the hospital. She was there because of my dad, and I was speechless as she told me this. My dad never goes to the doctor, he is never sick, and he never gets hurt. I just could not connect it. He was like superman to me, but my mom proceeded to tell me that everything was fine, his leg just went numb. A small feeling of relief came over me, but I was still uneasy about the situation.

The full story that she later explained to me was that he was walking to lunch with some of his co-workers and he had to sit down because he could not feel his leg. Now my dad has complained about his leg hurting a little bit before for no obvious reason, but it always passed. So he went to the hospital, and for something to bother him enough to make him go is scary. The doctors ran tests on his chest and leg, but they did not find anything wrong so they said he did not need to stay overnight. However, they did want him to see his doctor the next day, so they went ahead and released him.

My brother and best friend were with me when my mom called and I explained what happened. They both figured that everything was going to be okay after I told them what my mom said and they told me not to worry. So of course I relaxed a little. Then about an hour later my mom walked through the door helping my dad in. But it did not look like him. He looked so pale and drained from everything that happened that day. She helped him over to the couch and

told me to get him a pillow and my brother to get him a pot because he was feeling queasy. I gave him the pillow and he gave me the biggest hug I have ever gotten from him. It was as if he was scared because of what happened, like he knew something still was not right.

My dad's back started hurting and he threw up a couple of times. I was on the phone with my best friend when he threw up and she told me that I should go tell him that I love him. I did not want to bother him so I didn't. I regret that decision every day of my life since that evening. That whole night he was restless, couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, he just couldn't relax. I went to sleep that night and slept fine and in the morning I saw my mom help him to the couch when I was getting ready for school. He looked the same, like nothing had changed from the day before. As I left I gave him a kiss on the cheek, told him bye, love you and good luck at the doctor.

At school my mind was off of everything that happened because I was focused on my work. Then I got the note from the office during my Spanish class at about 10:30. It told me to go to the attendance office immediately. I packed up my stuff and was out of there quickly. I knew it couldn't be good news. That walk was the worst one I have ever taken; the whole way there different ideas kept running through my head, "I hope he didn't have a heart attack", "everything is okay", "maybe the doctor found something bad". I walked right into the office and they said that my mom was waiting for me in the conference room, so I rushed in there. She was standing there with her best friend crying and then she said, "I don't know how to say this but your dad died". My heart dropped and I didn't know what to say or what to do so I put my stuff down and started crying in my mom's arms. I just kept thinking, "What is going to happen, what are we going

to do, this is impossible he can't be gone". Then my brother walked in and he looked shocked at the sights occurring around him as he stepped in. My mom broke the news to him and we all cried together.

From school we rode to the hospital and the whole way there I could not say a word. I just kept crying, it was like an ongoing nightmare that wouldn't end. I still couldn't believe it. However, it all came to life when we got to the hospital and I walked into one of the emergency rooms. There he was lying lifeless on the gurney, with his shirt ripped open, and tubes coming from his mouth. It was horrible but at that point I understood that he was gone, so I said "good bye, I love you", hugged him one last time and left the room. That was the hardest day of my life and to this day I constantly replay everything that happened in my head. It's a continuous horror movie that won't go away no matter how much I try to forget it.

On November 18, 2008, my father passed away from a ruptured aorta at the age of 48. All of his friends and family couldn't believe the news because he was so young, not even sick and the last person anyone would think of to pass away. I think of him every day because I was very close to my dad and he was the one person who knew me the best. He was always there for me, and I could talk to him about anything and everything. For the longest time I asked the question, "Why him, why now?" It just seemed so unfair to me. My dad missed out on so many important moments in my life: my 18th birthday, graduating from high school, picking my college, my first college softball game, and so much more. I wish he could have been there with all my heart, but no matter how much I tried the truth was always staring me in the face. He isn't coming back.

I view things much differently now than I did eleven months ago. I have always appreciated my friends and family but this made me realize that I honestly could not live without them. When this happened I felt so much comfort from the people around me, they helped me through it and continue to do so today. I have great friends and now my family is much closer to me than they ever have been before. I also do not let the little things bother me because it is pointless and just makes life worse. When there are so many bigger problems in the world people should not complain about the little ones because others have it much worse. I have grown very wise since then and learned many lessons because of this tragedy. Death is a part of life and no matter how much we don't like it, death is still going to take people away because it doesn't care how innocent they are or how old they are or even how young they are. I am stronger because of what happened, I can't say that I will ever be as happy as I was with him in my life but I am stronger. If anything the main lesson I learned from this is to live everyday to its fullest because maybe there won't be a tomorrow. Life is unpredictable so I say ***"ENJOY EVERY MOMENT WHILE YOU STILL CAN"***.

~NICOLE JENKINS

Lesson Learned



My best friend Hannah tried to kill me one time. We were making left-over Chinese food at her house. I was absorbed completely by my broccoli beef, and barely took note when she stuck some steamed rice into the microwave. What it was hot, she pulled it out and took a bite. A perplexed look took up brief residence on her face, and she handed me a little take-out carton.

“Does this taste odd to you?” she asked. What a terrifying phrase. Falling entirely for her dreadful scheme, I lifted a forkful to my mouth. It was then that I realized that she was actually a cruel, sadistic person. As I deposited the contents of my mouth into the trash can, sputtering for air, I shot her what I thought was a look of shock, horror, and reproach. Apparently, it was not as effective as I had hoped, because she just started laughing.

“Hannah?” I asked. “What did you do to this rice?” The sneaky little pretender looked totally innocent, as though this whole thing hadn’t been a set-up.

“I just put some milk and salt onto it and put it in the microwave.”

“You put milk on it?” I demanded, outraged. “Why on earth would you put milk on it?”

“I don’t know. I thought it would be good. You know, like butter?”

Let me take this opportunity to interject that Hannah is a notoriously picky eater. If it has meat or anything green on it, she doesn’t like it. She also dislikes fruit. This leaves bread, rice, and noodles. She’s a carb-etarian. So when I took the food from her, I assumed it was going to be something bland and unappetizing. What I didn’t expect was rat poison in the guise of left-over Chinese.

*Looking back on it, I like to think of it as a learning experience. Sure, I completely lost faith in Hannah’s sanity and cooking ability. Sure, my taste buds almost shriveled and fell off. But even more, I learned something that will serve me for the rest of my life. If somebody asks, “Does this taste odd to you?” don’t eat it. Lesson learned. **

I have a little brother. His name is Timothy, but we call him Timo. I also have an older brother named Lane. We just call him Lane. When we were younger, Lane and I used to play cool games all the time. We’d play with Legos, run around my grandparents’ farm, and hide on the top shelf of his closet with a couple of broken walkie-talkies, waiting for someone to

ambush. When I was eight years old, Timo was four, so he wasn't quite capable of keeping up with Lane and me. And I'm not going to lie, we were pretty mean about it. He'd follow us around, asking if he could get in our tree house with us.

"Hey Lane, what's that?" I used to ask. "It looks like a bug. I think it's trying to...communicate with us!" Poor Timo would run into the house to tattle to Grandma, who would give him a brownie and some blocks to play with. But we were always that way. I was an absolute jerk to that fuzzy-headed little pip-squeak. Unfortunately, Karma is a cruel master.

Today, my little brother Timo is five feet nine inches tall and outweighs me by twenty pounds. He keeps trying to get me to arm-wrestle him, and I keep telling him I'm too busy for such childish games. Maybe it's something you attain with age and maturity, or maybe it's something that has to be pounded into you by your eighth-grade brother. Be nice to the little guy, or one day he's going to knock you down. Lesson learned.*

My parents used to be missionaries in Africa. They lived in the village of Wasolo in what was then Zaire. My mom likes to tell the story of her experience in trying to breed rabbits. You know how everyone talks about things multiplying like bunnies? Well to hear my mom talk about it, you

would think that rabbits have no reproductive instincts at all. So she toiled and suffered, worried and worked to get those rabbits to make babies, usually to no avail. The only reason she wanted rabbits, of course, was because the people in the village were protein deprived and the rabbits would make good eating. One day, Mom decided that it was a good day for rabbit stew, and sent Dad out to slaughter one for the pot. Ten minutes later, in walked Dad, carrying what had been the only male. That was the end of the rabbit breeding experiment. And what did it teach us? If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself. Lesson learned. *

There's a song I used to hear on the radio sometimes. It's called "Big Yellow Taxi," by Counting Crows. In that song is the line, "don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone." Bad grammar, good message; it's true. People often want whatever they don't have. It goes hand in hand with the old saying, "the grass is always greener on the other side." Why is it that what we don't have is so enticing? Why do we always want what the other guy has? I don't know. I'm working on it. *

My friend Molly was talking to me once about Top Ramen, so I



decided to look into it. As most of us know, Ramen is a staple food among the young, the poor, and the

*lazy. We college students practically live off the stuff. Something that made me laugh in my research is that Ramen consumption is considered a national economic indicator. Here's the funny part: usually the more product is consumed, the better the economy, right? Well, not with Ramen. There's actually an inverse relationship between Ramen sales and economic stability in a given region. Based on this, I have come up with a theory: Top Ramen is solving world hunger. Before you laugh, think about it. Ramen is cheap and easy to make. It preserves well and contains plenty of carbohydrates to get people through the day. And while it may not be a perfect solution, at least it's taking a step in the right direction. As it turns out, the cheap little packages of instant noodles that you see in your grocery store every week are saving the world, one seasoning packet at a time. We learn new things every day. **

*At one time or another, most kids hear the phrase, "If you keep doing that, your face is going to stick that way!" It's almost a cultural rite of passage. The sad truth is, if you keep doing that, your face is NOT going to stick that way. Your parents, your friend's grandmother, your great aunt Bertha lied to you. You know what that means? It means that people are cruel. People get their kicks from scaring little kids into believing they're going to be ugly, freakish mutants for the rest of their lives. Aunt Bertha is mean. Lesson learned. **

I had my son Zeke when I was seventeen years old. He is perfect and handsome and sweet, and the joy of my life. That being said, I can tell you that I went through Hell before he came around, and I've done a lot of dumb things in my life. I like to think of myself as a fairly sympathetic individual and it is therefore somewhat painful to me to see other people make mistakes similar to the ones I made. Sometimes I see a couple of little high-schoolers getting all touchy-feely in public, and it takes all of my considerable will power to stop myself from politely advising them concerned the utter stupidity of their ways. In my head, a reel is playing a version of what might happen if I decided to do so. I'd walk up to them and smile, introduce myself, and shake their hands.

*“Did you know that over the course of pregnancy, women add approximately two square feet of skin to their bellies?” I would ask, as a point of interest. “Interesting, right? Did you know that almost one out of every four American has a sexually transmitted disease? Did you know that pushing a baby out of your body is similar to trying to pass a grapefruit through your nose? Do you want to see my stretch marks?” Maybe not that last one. But it seems insane to me that young teenagers don’t understand that having sex doesn’t make you cool. It’s a serious decision, and one that can hijack your life if you’re not careful. Here’s a good rule of thumb for young people: if you’re not ready to have a baby, don’t have sex. It really doesn’t get much simpler than that. No method of birth control is one hundred percent effective. I had to learn that the hard way, which included six hours of labor and no epidural. Take my word for it; it’s much easier if you just follow my advice. Lesson learned.**

~ANNA VISS

I LOVE YOU, BUT I WISH YOU WOULD CHANGE

Shannon's parents never had a foundationally strong relationship to begin with. Her father worked long hours and had to commute 115 miles each way to work; he was usually gone from four in the morning until five in the evening, five or six days a week. As one could imagine, that left Shannon's parents very little time to enjoy each other's company. Over time, their communication disintegrated to being essentially nonexistent. It might be expected that Shannon would have a better relationship with her mother than her father, but this was not true. Although Shannon loved her mother, Michelle, most of her happiest memories centered on her father, Roger.

Roger was Shannon's best friend. He taught her how to be funny and how to be strong. He showed her that even the toughest of men could lose his hard shell and be in complete adoration at the sight of an infant. Shannon and Roger had a special bond in which they trusted and respected each other more than they did anyone else. From the time Shannon could speak every word she said made Roger smile and every word Roger spoke made Shannon giggle. Shannon adored being silly with Roger, but admired his ability to also be sincere when necessary. He was the sweetest part of her childhood.

Michelle loved Shannon very much, but she lacked the wisdom required to raise her children. Michelle could not stand the thought of anyone being unhappy with her, consequently she treated her children as though they were her friends, not her children. When Shannon wanted to go to a friend's house, she could leave the house without even a simple "goodbye." Michelle did not ask Shannon where she was going or what



she was doing. Most kids and teenagers would say that Michelle was the coolest mom ever, but Shannon only felt that her mother did not care. Out of all the unpleasantness that resulted from Michelle's lack of parenting skills, what affected Shannon most was that Michelle was not there for her emotionally.

Shannon's sister, Christina, who was five years older than Shannon, was bipolar. At least twice a week Shannon could be found crying on the floor behind her locked bedroom door as a result of something that Christina had done or said to her. (Often things like glass were thrown or the words "I hate you" that resonate so deeply in a young child were screamed). Shannon's brother Matt, who was three years older than her, had a difficult time expressing and dealing with his anger. When he got mad about something, the only way he knew how to release his anger was through hitting or pushing or hurting Shannon in some way. As Shannon provided Christina and Matt a way to deal with their problems, she was left with no one to turn to when experiencing her own emotional and physical trauma.



As Shannon attempted to deal with her feelings toward her brother and sister, she turned to her mother for comfort. Many times when Shannon would reach for Michelle, Michelle was too busy to help. Everyday Shannon had to face a statement like one of these from Michelle: "I have too much to do to sit here and listen," or "Be quiet, I'm trying to watch my show!" As much as this infuriated and frustrated and disappointed Shannon, she did not retaliate by showing her mother the same treatment in return. When Michelle was upset and needed a shoulder to cry on, Shannon was right there with open arms. Since Roger was always at work or doing something alone, Christina was always out doing something rebellious or was too psychologically dysfunctional to not make situations worse, and Matt usually shut out the world, Shannon was the only one Michelle had to turn to. Sadly, Michelle eventually convinced herself that that was acceptable, that children are supposed to be there emotionally for their parents at all times, and Michelle began to abuse that belief.

The summer before Shannon's sophomore year of high school, things became really intense in her household. Michelle had been talking to an old friend, Steven, on

MySpace for a few months so she decided to ask him to meet up with her when Shannon went to cheerleading camp at the beginning of that summer. There, Shannon met Steven and soon befriended him; little did she know that she would be seeing a lot more of him in the future.

Arguing and screaming between Shannon's parents filled the rest of that summer. Shannon did not know why at first but she quickly found out. She had believed that the verbal fights that surfaced that summer were due to many years of built up tension between Michelle and Roger, but one night she was given new insight to their problems. "I've made a lot of mistakes, Shannon," Roger uttered solemnly, "But I don't understand why she's doing this." *This*. Shannon did not want to ask but she had to know so she stood there silently dreading the revolting words she knew would slip out of her father's mouth. "She's having sex with him—she told me..."

By August, Michelle had been going on "walks" for the past two months. She would leave the house saying she was going on a walk at around nine in the evening, which was not unusual, but each night she came back increasingly later: midnight, then one o'clock, two o'clock, and so on. Michelle had been sneaking out to have sex with Steven. Shannon was completely disgusted, terrified, and traumatized by the thought. She could not believe that Steven, someone she trusted, respected, and had developed a friendship with, would knowingly destroy her family.

Roger and Shannon began trying whatever they could to convince Michelle to stay home. Roger brought home flowers everyday for Michelle and left her notes about how much he appreciated her before he left for work each morning. Shannon cleaned the entire house every day and asked her mom if she could do anything else for her, but all of this did not affect Michelle. Shannon spent many nights crying on her kitchen floor feeling as though her perfect world could suddenly disintegrate at any moment—and then it happened, Roger announced that he was moving out—and he did.

Has anyone ever experienced what the death of a friend feels like? How about a best friend? How about a father? Shannon felt as though her father—her best friend—had died. Once he moved out, she was unable to see him or even talk to him for legal reasons.

Within a few days of Roger moving out, Michelle sat down Matt and Shannon for a talk. "Now, I have decided that I can't live my life without Steven so either we are all moving into his house in Turlock or he is moving here. You decide." Shannon was furious; she thought to herself, *You kicked my dad out after cheating on him, and now you're going to have someone else sleep in HIS bed!?! Disgusting!* Steven moved in with them because Matt and Shannon decided that if they were not going to have a happy place to come home to, then they at least wanted to stay in the same town and have their friends to lean on.

As life went on, Christina got involved with drugs, Matt became more solitary, and Shannon's anger toward her mother grew more intense with each passing day. Shannon longed for a mother who could love her the way she needed one to. She wanted a mom who would listen and give her loving advice and stand up for her, a mom who would cook her dinner once in a while, and who would tell her to eat her vegetables and play safely. More than anything Shannon wanted Michelle to see where she went wrong, apologize, and make an effort to love her in the gentlest way possible; she wished that Michelle would open her eyes to changes that Shannon felt were so unmistakably necessary. Shannon found herself unable to keep her thoughts hidden. She began blurting out her feelings each time her mother made a mistake, but of course, Michele did not want to hear a word of what Shannon had been feeling.

As time went on, Shannon continued to struggle with the frustration and despondence she felt toward Michelle. After a while though, Shannon realized that as much as she wanted to, and even though Michelle loved Shannon, she would never be able to change Michelle. Since Shannon believed that having a loving a gentle relationship with her mother was important and necessary for living a healthy and overall flourishing life, she knew there had to be a way to attain it.

Eventually, Shannon understood that she had to make a change within herself. She began looking at Michelle with new eyes; instead of thinking about all of her mother's flaws, Shannon thought about all of the things she liked about her mom. As Shannon practiced this, she saw a change in herself; she began doing more things for her mother around the house, speaking more gently to her, and showing more affection for her. Michelle saw this change in Shannon and after a little while, Michelle began

mirroring Shannon's attitude and actions. They were finally about to love and appreciate each other for who they were; their relationship flourished into one with a bonds so strong that even devastations and mistakes could not break it. Even Matt and Christina were affected and transformed by it. Shannon learned that life was easier when she forgave quickly because being angry with someone will not change them or make the situation better. She had the power to make any situation worthwhile and turn any bad day brighter.

~ KERI ALAIR



A Lesson Learned the Hard Way

Evil in the form of a GPS. That's the only way I can fathom what the extra hour and a half of driving was intended for.

It all started this summer when my family and I decided to take a road trip up to the West Coast and on to Canada. It had been a few days since we had begun our trip and the five of us: me, my brother, mother, and father, plus our pet corgi, who seemed to have developed a flatulence problem especially for this trip, were ready to make camp. It was decided that instead of breaking camp the following morning, we'd stay at the next stop for a couple of days and enjoy the Oregon scenery, however overcast it may have been.

After we had finished raiding one of the many In 'n Outs along the highway, we all jumped back into our crowded little Toyota Tundra, making sure to leave the window open, and entered our next destination into my dad's brand new Tom-Tom GPS. The screen flickered on and a beautiful woman's voice told us that our destination was roughly a thirty minute drive away, via Patrons Road.



The car roared to life and we were off. As we continued on our way guided by the mystical woman's voice, I began to notice our surroundings had taken on a rougher tone. It was becoming increasingly more difficult

for my father to make the pinpoint turns, which would have been all too easy if he was simply driving our truck, and not hauling a twenty-one foot trailer as well. Houses became fewer and farther between. I began to see wild animals with increasing frequency. And what's more, we had just passed the thirty minute marker.

Something was wrong, we should have reached our destination already and the road didn't seem like it was getting any easier up ahead. My mother suggested that we may have made a wrong turn and my father checked the GPS to see if that was the case. However, that didn't seem to be the reason; the Tom-Tom screen smiled blankly back at us insisting that we were headed on the right course. We decided to continue on for a little while more in case we were close to the camping ground and turn back if it didn't show up.

We drove on for what seemed like an eternity. The road kept getting smaller and it didn't look like we were going to be headed downhill for awhile. As we crawled along the road we saw signs of construction up ahead. *At last, I thought, an actual person to give us directions, so much for our voluptuous friend.* But luck didn't seem to be on our side; actually it looked as if it were our mortal enemy. It turned out that a big part of the road had been washed out in a landslide and the construction signs were just for show, apparently Can-Trans works in Oregon too. They had tried to make it seem like work was underway by placing a few boards across the area and showing rocks underneath them. Overall, it wasn't anything more than I'd come to expect from the Department of Transportation.

After unloading the family and the pet corgi, who I was ready to let disappear into the forest, my father slowly inched his way across the boards. It was a tight fit but he somehow made it. Everyone loaded back into the truck, it took some effort not to drop the leash, and we lethargically continued up the road.

It was already an hour past the expected travel time and it didn't seem like the fun was going to end anytime soon. Everyone was at their wit's end. I, being in close

contact with my little brother for over half the day, was ready to throw him through a window and my parents had begun to fight about whose brilliant idea it had been to bring Cloe, our pet corgi. All the while the Tom-Tom glowed maliciously on the dashboard enjoying the chaos.

After the madness had subsided into a brooding silence, my father announced some more appalling news. We were running out of gas. Our cell phones were out of range, although the Tom-Tom seemed to be working just fine, so we had no way to call for help. If we didn't reach the campground within the next ten miles someone was going to have to continue on foot and it was getting dark. That would mean spending the night out in the middle of nowhere.

There hadn't been another house for miles. With no way to ask for directions or pull off the road we continued down the path wondering if we could see civilization in the coming week. Then suddenly the road transformed from gravel to pavement. It grew wide and there were even two lanes visible on the pavement. At last a break, I felt pavement was a sure indication that we must have been close, because apparently in Oregon they don't pave roads unless it is close to something important. Our spirits lifted as we drove around the corner and came upon a cluster of houses and what looked like a convenience store up ahead.

However, as we drove further into the "town", if you will, we realized that it was only a loose interpretation of the word. This town contained a total of seven houses, all of which were as beat up and run down as the next, a small school, and a sign on the convenience store door that said it closed at four o'clock. It was now six twenty-four, an hour and a quarter past the expected travel time. In what universe is it appropriate for a convenience store to even be in a town that only has seven houses I don't know. But, with that in mind, we discussed whether or not we should continue down the road.

We decided that we might as well continue on for as long as possible. Even if we ran out of gas it wouldn't take us far from town and it wouldn't be a far walk back. Besides, the road was still paved ahead and I held tight to my theory about the Oregon road system. So, we crawled along the road in a final act of desperation, hoping to come across the campground my mother was sure didn't exist.



Everyone was tired and ready for our little adventure to be over. We went on for about another ten minutes, the truck sputtering along all the while. Just as we were about to give up hope the pavement intersected with Evergreen Road, and shortly after we could see an entrance sign to a state campground. We drove our faithful Tundra up to the desk and smiled as we saw a woman sitting behind the window. My father handed her the money and told her about our horrible ordeal. The woman replied that if we had taken Evergreen road instead, it lead to the highway and it would have only been about forty minutes in travel time. Silence. The Tom-Tom had won the game but not without toying with us for about an hour and a half first.

Lesson learned: buy a map. To this day our Tom-Tom GPS remains locked away in a cabinet, suffering for the terrible crime it committed. After the incident my father bought a set of maps for the rest of the trip and the GPS was locked away, not to be seen again until we arrived at home and it was imprisoned in our cabinet. Maps are now the main source of direction for the Dillon family.

However, that was not the most important lesson I learned from our little adventure. Now, when I look back and remember our ordeal, I laugh. Even though at the time it didn't seem funny to be stuck on "Bob's" road, I now laugh and think of how much we struggled to reach our destination. It seems so funny that we should

have had to struggle so much to overcome something so trivial. Now, I feel nostalgic when I think of the memory and almost wish I could repeat it again. Because, even though it was quite the ordeal, what I remember most is that it was time I spent together with my family. Although unexpected, the even offered me a way to spend time with and get closer to my family.

I have learned that the stories you remember most aren't those in which everything went according to plan, but rather those in which the unexpected made an appearance and you had to struggle to overcome it. As I look back and remember my most cherished memories, I find that they are the ones in which everything ended up going horribly wrong. A life filled with the expected is one somberly lived. It is the unexpected that defines the very essence of life and makes it worth living.

~MEGAN DILLON

Trying to Breathe

Running while trying to catch your breath is probably not the best idea. Perhaps that should be lesson number one: do not try to catch your breath while running. In actuality my first lesson to you, the reader, is dealing with long trips. Maybe you are thinking about escaping to the Bahamas, or maybe it is spring break and as a college student you are dying to fly to Mexico. Whatever the case I have a couple words for you, be prepared. Make sure you have everything ready the night before. Unfortunately, I learned that the hard way; hence my running while feeling like my lungs were going to explode.

I had thought that I had everything ready. Lists were written, boxes checked, red lines run through things to do. Then, the morning I was scheduled to leave, my head popped off the pillow and I realized that I had forgotten to put my liquid toiletries in plastic bags. Two seconds



later found me unpacking my work of creation otherwise known as my suitcase. It had taken me two hours to pack and situate everything so that it zipped close. Now, with only an hour before I had to leave,

my contents were ‘neatly’ scattered on my bed as I frantically tried to stuff all of my liquids into a gallon-sized plastic bag. Now if you happened to be of the male gender you might be asking what the problem is. The problem is trying to fit shampoo, conditioner, moisturizer, perfume, hairspray, liquid soap, toothpaste, and foundation in a teeny-tiny plastic bag. Trust me, it is quite difficult. And no, I could not just use the shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, and soap from the hotel. I can tell the difference and it just does not work.

What was I saying? Ah yes, my suitcase. Finally I somehow managed to fit all of the aforementioned items into that plastic bag. My mom was searching for weeks for her small bottles of hairspray, perfume, and soap. We will not tell her, will we? Good. After stuffing the plastic bag I was faced with my next dilemma. I had to restructure my entire suitcase. Glancing at the clock I began to really panic. I had thirty minutes to get out the door. Whatever extra clothes I had packed got thrown from the pile. I decided I did not need two swimsuits and I probably did not need a pair of shorts for every day I was going to be there. Then I proceeded to roll everything into little balls so that they fit perfectly. I decided that wrinkles were worth the time they would save me. It took me a total of twenty minutes to pack my suitcase, which is a record. As I said previously, I have never completed that task in less than two hours.

Letting out a sigh, I choked as I gasped, catching a glimpse of myself in my closet mirror. In all the fuss I had forgotten that I still had not gotten myself ready. My black hair was sticking out from the braids I had put it in the day before. My day-old mascara had run during

the night and now made me look like a raccoon. I happened to also be wearing my most tattered and comfortable pajamas. I scrambled to put on something decent while also trying to take out the braids from my hair. Water ran unchecked down my face as I tried to scrub the mascara off the underneath of my bottom eyelids. I had already packed my makeup remover and there was no way that I was going to unpack my suitcase again. Finally I resorted to soap and found myself muttering vehemently under my breath as a little bit got into my tightly closed eyes. How that happens every time I will never know. It does not matter how tightly I close my eyes, soap always manages to get into them. While flushing out my eyes I started to plan my exit from my house. My shoes were by the front door, I had made sure that my car was unlocked inside the garage, and my car keys were...were...oh no. The grocery store had been a necessary errand the night before and I had been extremely tired when I got home. This meant that my keys probably had not made it to where they usually go. I quickly brushed my teeth, grabbed my suitcase and purse, and practically flew down the stairs.



My car keys were not hanging on the keys hook by the garage door. I picked my brain, trying to think of any possible place I could have put them. They were not in the pocket of the jeans I had worn the night before. Rushing to my room I scanned the contents quickly. They were nowhere to be found. Praying, I tried to make my hands cooperate enough to command my cell phone to call my mother. She did not answer and I shook my phone, growling to her voicemail that I did not know why she had a phone if she was

not going to answer. I do not think it necessary to say that by this time it was already quite past the time that I was supposed to have left.

Sitting on the last step of the stair, I tried to think of where I had set the keys the night before. When I get extremely tired I get a weird punch-happy. Things cease to make sense and giggling comes very easily. I had been running all day and had been more than a little tired. It had almost been as if I was functioning in a haze. I did not remember anything. I let my head fall into my hands and began to sniffle. Just then my mom walked in the doorway and stopped abruptly. She asked, "What in the world are you still doing home!?"

"I had to repack my suitcase, and I wasn't ready, and I got soap in my eyes, and...and...I CAN'T FIND MY KEYS!!"

"But they're right here!"

I blinked the tears out of my vision and stared at the key chain dangling from my mom's right hand. With a shaking voice I asked, "Where were they?"

"On the garage floor by the front door of your car. I saw them as I was walking inside and picked them up, thinking that you had somehow gotten a ride to the airport. Amanda, what time does your flight leave!?"

"Gotten a ride...well, thanks. Umm, I'm not quite sure. I think I need to leave, NOW. I'll talk to you later. Love you!" I dashed out the door and quickly started my car. As I sped out of our driveway, I saw my mom standing at our front door with her hands on her hips. It

was a familiar sign of her frustration with me. That did not matter at the moment however. All that mattered was getting to the airport.



Finding parking at an airport is a daunting task. I have to admit that before this I had never gone to an airport by myself. This resulted in my making a few wrong turns at the airport and having to make several illegal u-turns. Finally I fought find-a-parking with a BMW convertible and won, taking by a foot an empty spot that had miraculously appeared. Wrestling with my luggage, I hurried along the cement sidewalk, hoping with every fiber of my being that my car clock had been fast by a half an hour. I had to stop at the meter and buy a parking ticket for my car. Things have sure gotten expensive over the last year!

I glanced at my watch and started to run. Running while trying to catch your breath is not a good idea. My lungs were working overtime and I knew that I was not going to be able to run for very much longer. I could not get a good breath into my lungs and soon they were screaming for oxygen. My chest heaving, I burst into the airport. Gasping, I tried to ask an employee where the check-in for United was. He stared at me and I tried again. “I need....check-in....flight....late...united...UNITED!!!” Nodding quickly he motioned to the left of me and started walking away. I took that to mean that the check-in was to the left and continued on my way. Five minutes later I rushed to the check-in desk and rang the bell furiously. A nice-looking lady took my information, entered it into the computer, and then

looked at me sympathetically. I am sure that I must have been a sight. My hair was frizzy and strewn behind me, my face was makeup-free, my clothing consisted of old shorts, a sweater two-size too big, and flip-flops, and my chest was heaving while my lungs refilled themselves with oxygen. She handed me back my information and opened her mouth to say something, but all that came out was, “Ummm. I’m not sure how to tell you this...”

“What is it? Please don’t tell me I’m late. Well I know I’m late but I was hoping the flight had been delayed!”

“No, no the flight hasn’t left yet...”

“Oh thank God!!!”

“...you see, it isn’t going to leave anytime soon. Your flight was cancelled!”

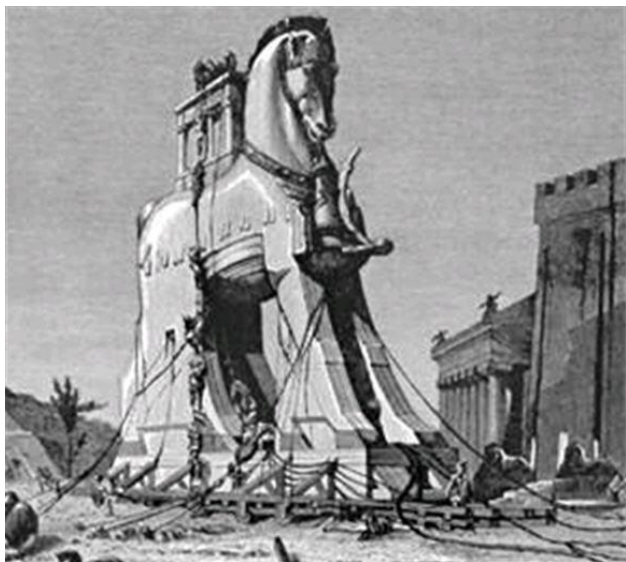
There it is my dear reader. My pathetic story. My flight was cancelled due to some engine trouble. I ended up spending five hours at the airport waiting for another flight. I learned a valuable lesson that day. Always be ready ahead of time, and if at all possible leave more time than you think necessary to achieve what you need to get done. Oh, and to top off my wonderful day, that night I discovered that I had forgotten my toothbrush at home. Go figure!

~AMANDA GARCIA



KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE AND YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER

Most people have heard the common phrase “keep your friends close and your enemies closer”. This quote was coined nearly two and half millennia ago by a Chinese war general named Sun-Tzu. While this quote can still be applied to several circumstances in today’s world, it was originally intended to be a war strategy. The first part of the quote, “keep your friends close”, means to keep your friends close to your heart. Let your friends know you care so that they will return this affection, and be there for you whenever needed. To keep someone this close to your heart means that this person will remain a loyal and trustworthy friend. On another note, “keep your enemies closer”, means to let your enemies *think* that you have let them into your heart. If you let your enemy believe that they are special to you, they will let go of their resistance and let you into their life. This phrase can be easily linked to war. If you give the illusion that you are on the enemy’s side, your enemy will let their guard



down and the power is in your hands. Consider, for example, the Trojan War. The Greeks left a giant wooden horse outside the walls of Troy. The horse represented an offering to Athena for a safe voyage home, and the Trojans saw the horse as a token of peace. They opened the walls to the city and brought the horse in. Once the horse was in the city, Greek soldiers broke out of the

wooden horse and ambushed the Trojans. Once the enemy lets their guard down, they become vulnerable to deception. A war cannot be won solely on hostility alone, therefore, strategy is needed. If there is one lesson I have learned in my life, it is to

keep my enemies close. This phrase has unquestionably helped me to win my personal battle.

While I have never been involved in the kind of war with lethal weapons and lives being at risk, I have been engaged in a mini-war for the last two years. The enemy in this “war” happens to be my boyfriend’s other. It is a common conflict for mothers to feel threatened when another girl comes into her son’s life. Many people say that a mother behaves the way because she loves her son and does not want to see him get hurt. However, there is a fine line between looking out for someone’s best interests and being over protective. This is often a popular theme seen in several films, such as *Monster in Law*. However, actually living this situation is anything but comical. I have been with Joe for two years, and from the very beginning, I could tell that his mother, Debbie, was going to be difficult to get along with (I got this impression after being told that she insists that “girls are the devil”). Joe is currently a senior in high school, and therefore, is still a baby in his mother’s eyes. While I understand why his mother was skeptical about him having a *new* girlfriend, but after two years, I think I have proven myself worthy. I have never been in trouble with the law, never been into drugs, and I obviously adore her son. But despite my good intentions and morals, I still never seemed to win her approval. It became increasingly more difficult for me to see Joe because his mom was adamant about not letting us get too involved. The actions she took to keep us apart seemed unreasonable and unnecessary. At first I felt unworthy, but after a while I realized that I had no reason to feel this way. I am a good person and had not done anything wrong. Why should I let this woman make me feel like a bad person for caring for her son? As time went on, and Joe and I became more serious, Debbie became more and more controlling, and in return, I became more and more frustrated. My frustrations began taking over my mind, I dreamt about them almost nightly, and they eventually turned into resentment.

I had tried everything to make my relationship with Debbie work. After all, he is a big part of Joe's life. Joe had tried talking to his mom to find out why she had such a



problem with me, but she would refuse to discuss the situation and always come up with some absurd excuse. I had tried discussing the problem with his father, and I even confronted Debbie's mother. They both admitted that she was acting somewhat foolish, but they did not want to get involved and the situation still remained unsettled. When I began seeking advice from my friends and family, they advised me to try to stay on good terms with her if I wanted my relationship with Joe to work. However, my

stubborn nature told me otherwise. I was tries of trying to win her approval and I began to openly resist her authority. However, the more I resisted, the more she tried to pull Joe away from me. I had underestimated Debbie's power and she did all she could to cut off communication between us. She has taken the measures of turning off his cell phone service and even taking away his truck keys. The situation became a tug-o-war and Joe was right in the middle. This battle had caused turmoil in their family as well as our relationship. I had begun to take my frustrations out on Joe, blaming him for not fighting back the way I wanted him to. When I started to realize that my retaliation was rapidly leading towards the end of my relationship with Joe, I decided that his woman was not worth it. I have never cared about someone as much as I care for Joe, and I was not about to let his mother ruin us. I then decided it was time for a new approach, and this is where "keep your enemies closer" comes into play.

Towards the end of summer, the day that I would go away to college was fast approaching. Debbie, being her controlling self, had already told Joe that he would not allowed to come visit me while I was away. Joe and I tried to spend as much time as possible together, since we knew we know we would not be seeing each other much in the coming months. She was still continuing to make it difficult for us to see each other

by coming up with random chores and punishments for Joe. I felt as if she was counting down the days until I left. I knew that if I wanted to see my boyfriend at all within the next year, I would have to try a new strategy in dealing with his mother. While I could not just forget and forgive her for the things she had done in the past two years, I could pretend forgiveness. Joe, his dad, Debbie, and I sat down around the table and I told Debbie, "I know you and I have not had that best relationship, but I don't want to leave without fixing thing between us. You are a big part of Joe's life, and that means you are a big part of mine." I went on to tell her that I was willing to make compromises to keep us all happy. While I did not exactly mean half the things I told her, I could tell I was saying exactly what she wanted to hear. We discussed the conflict for about an hour, and even though I resented some of the things that she said, I held my tongue. I still hold a grudge for the anxiety that Debbie has cause in my life, but since I let her think that he has a special place in my heart, she has backed off significantly and finally let me into her life. Since our talk that day, my relationship with Joe has been much easier. It is no longer World War III when we want to spend time together, we frequently talk on the phone and I can now go to his house without feeling like an intruder. Debbie still occasionally says and does things that I strongly disagree with and as difficult as it is for me, I still hold my tongue. Despite my occasional urges to tell her off, it has been worth every effort to let Debbie think she is special to me. It is not an easy effort to make peace with a person you despise, but it is definitely worth it on the long-term. For any girls with the same problem, remember to keep your friends close, and your boyfriend's mom closer.

~ANONYMOUS

STUBBORN ME

Being one of those “I learn the hard way” types of people, taking advice is not one of my strong points. I find it pleasing when I push the limits. Learning from my own doing, rather than others’. It is my life to live, not anybody else’s. Why base my life on someone else’s experiences when I can learn from my own?

I have felt a strong burning sensation in my hand before, so much so, that I honestly believed my hand would fall off. I was in the first grade. It was the last day of school and everyone was helping clean the classroom. I was removing staples out of the bulletin board, my



hand resting in the open doorway of a large metal door. My teacher, Mrs. Hernandez, approached me and suggested I move my hand “just in case”. I thought it was a silly request because who would not see my hand in the crack of the door? Eric, whom I married on the

playground in Kindergarten, released the door. An immediate rush of pain and heat overwhelmed my left hand. I cried over the pain, the unease of everyone staring at me, and the simple fact that it could have been avoided. I was told to remove my hand from the doorway, but stubborn me, I refused to listen.

I have felt a surge of embarrassment during a Halloween school parade. On the day of Halloween every student and faculty member came dressed up for the traditional “show off your costume to the entire school” parade. I dressed up as Morticia from the “Addams Family”. Standing in Party City, the week before, I argued with my mom about the length of my wig. I believed that Morticia had short hair, but according to Mom, she had long hair. I arrived to school on Halloween dressed as Morticia with a short haircut. Nobody knew who I was dressed as. Apparently, Morticia is nobody without her long, sleek, jet-black hair. Trying to explain I was Wednesday’s mom from the “Addams Family”, a group of students started to laugh at me. I was told to get a long haired wig, but stubborn me, I refused to listen.

I have felt such a high velocity of pain in my left arm that I believed I would lose a limb. The typical Saturday morning, Mom was making breakfast in the kitchen and the children were watching “Tom and Jerry” in the living room. I obtained a sudden thirst for chocolate milk. The kids were told to stay out of the kitchen when Mom was cooking; she said the kids created an obstacle course when we were in the kitchen. So, being the bossy eight year old that I was, I demanded my dad to make me some. Unfortunately, my dad did not work fast enough and my impatience led me into the kitchen. I reached for the first glass that I saw, a large coffee mug. This cup was filled to the brim with fresh, hot bacon grease. The moment my fingers wrapped around the base of the mug I knew something was wrong. I yanked my hand away, but my fingers were caught in the handle, dragging the cup down. The grease fell onto my forehead and dripped down my arm. I suffered from second degree, borderline third degree burns. I was sent to the doctor every morning to clean my wound and redo the dressings on my arm. I now have a large scar on my upper left arm and an indentation in my forehead from this terrible ordeal. I was told to stay out of the kitchen, but stubborn me, I refused to listen.

I have felt an unbelievable amount of stress, such a great amount that my stomach turned to nausea as a remedy. Procrastination was something I have always battled with. My will to socialize was the persistent victor over my will to study. Struggle would be an understatement when it came to my homework, I all together gave up. Which in high school did not cause too much of a problem. Waiting until the night before or the morning of, I still turned in adequate enough work to graduate with a 3.8 grade point average. High school, thought, is now over. College is my new and improved problem. Coming to college with such poor study and work habits, I am still adjusting to planning my time accordingly. Every Monday morning I wake up with the thought, "How will I survive this week?" Monday is the most stressful of all days, I am at school until 3:30 and sit in one of the most horrible class I could deem imaginable. I will not state which class I am referring to, but most everyone I talk to will know which class I am speaking of. Throughout my entire high school years, I was subject to continuous nagging over my work habits. Teachers told me I would not be able to cope in college. My mom told me my habits would affect my future. Well, here I am a freshman in college not knowing how or if I will survive another week. I get headaches and I get nauseas when I am stressed out. My new best friends in college have become Aleve and Pepto-Bismol. I was told to improve my ways of studying, but stubborn me, I refused to me.

I have felt so much animosity, that I fear it has turned into hatred. It is rooted back to the summer after sixth grade. I remember my sister coming home from a softball tournament in Washington the day it happened. My parents sat in the far corner of the backyard arguing about an issue my siblings and I were oblivious to. Drinking root beer, my sisters and I tried to ignore what was happening. My dad walked into the house screaming words that I have blocked out of my memory. He packed a small bag of his belongings and left our home. A place where I once felt loved, welcome, and comfortable. Yet, ever since that day, home has never felt the same. I never call my house home anymore, it is a place where I sleep and eat. Dad did not return for months, he would stop by



to visit and Mom would leave, but never anything more. I overheard my mom talking on the phone one day; I found out the truth and wish I never had. (I leave out the details for the reason my dad left because they are not necessary nor are they any of your concern.) As an eleven year old I did not know how to properly handle so much pain and anger. I kept it bottled in and it continues to stay bottled in until this day. Dad eventually moved back in. Mom, eventually let him sleep in their bedroom again. My dad was once my hero, the man I looked up, but now all I see is his failure to prove he loves me. My dad and I never formed a father-daughter relationship after this incident. My mom told me repeatedly that I should not hold onto my anger, she forgave him and so should I. I have not forgiven him, I wish have, I wish I would, but the same thoughts always float across my mind. Over the years my dislike has churned into hatred and I am not sure how it has gotten to this point. I was told to forgive him, but stubborn me, I refused to listen.

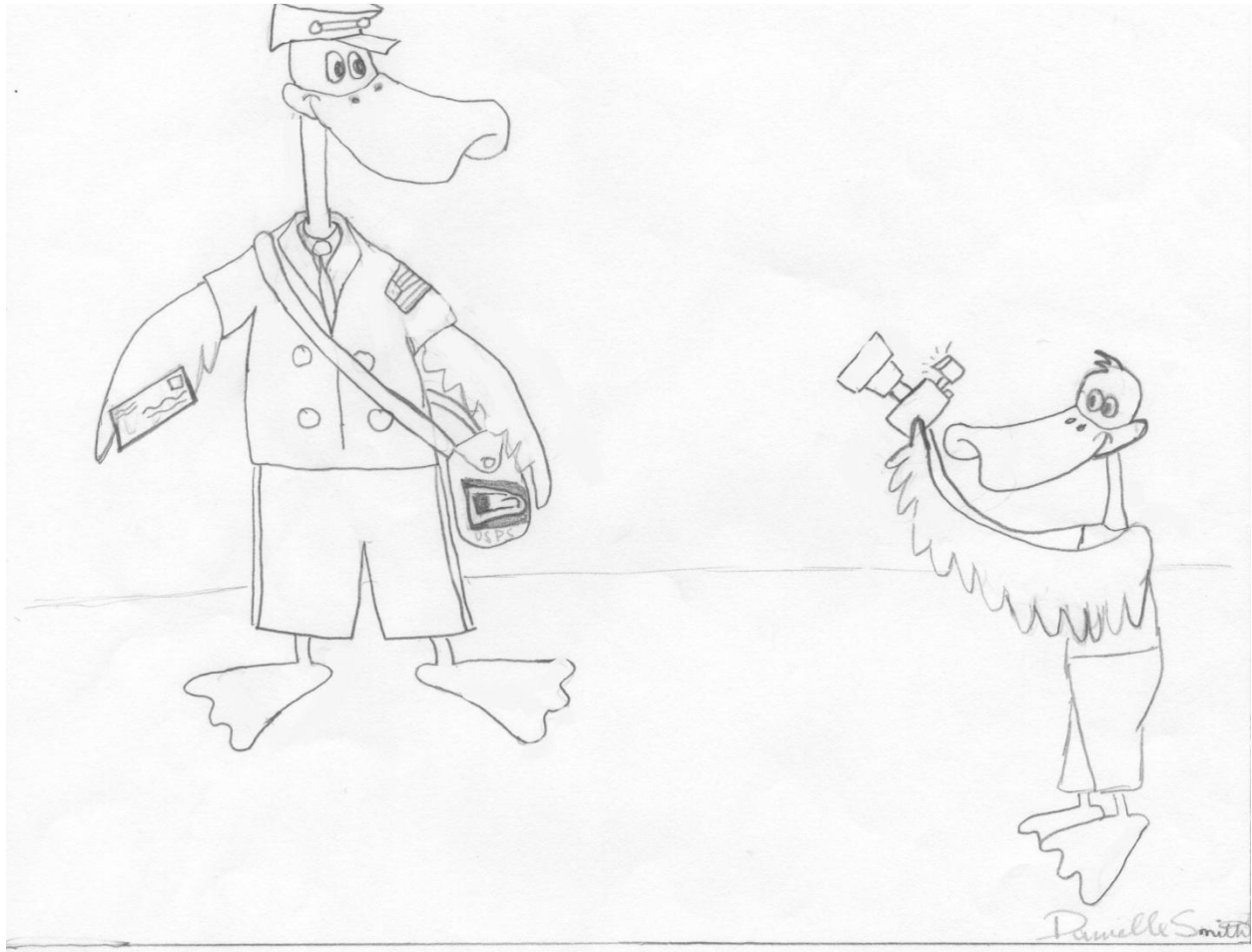
I have felt a sudden change in my heartbeat, almost as if my heart had completely disconnected itself. Recently, over this past summer, I wasted my time on a boy. Looking back on it now, it all seems so ridiculous. All my friends and family told me Jon was not right for me. At first, Jon was nice, he got along with my friends, and it seemed as if everything would work out. The moment the relationship got serious, he became controlling. Always wanting to know where I was going, how I was getting there, who else would be there, when I would be getting home. Then, there were the constant phone calls and angry voicemails if I did not answer my phone. Breaking up was equivalent to a repetitive nightmare; the sort of one when you are about to die, but then wake up with your heart beating at a more rapid speed and an irregular pattern. The feelings I had for Jon were still relevant, I could not ignore them. However, I knew that those feelings were not directed towards the Jon he had become. I was afraid of what ending the relationship would do to him, he had become emotionally dependent on me for support. The day I broke up with Jon, he completely lost control. The one person I put all my trust into, tore me down in less than three minutes. It was in that moment, standing in front of Jon as he screamed obscenities at me, that I realized everything in the past six months was a

mistake. Everybody I knew told me I was dating the wrong person, everybody I knew told me the truth. I was told to break up with him in the beginning, but stubborn me, I refused to listen.

I would not say I regret my past, but I do regret the way I insisted on learning through my own experiences. The best advice I could give is to humble yourself, no matter how stubborn or how right you believe you are. At times, a person has a tendency to believe that people are trying to control them, when in reality they are trying to help them. I have learned that listening to others makes an individual wiser. Not everyone must suffer to learn a lesson. I now appreciate people's advice. It took me eighteen years to realize that I do not have to untangle the webs of life on my own. I look back on all the outrageously, stupid things I have done, especially the things I purposefully failed to mention, and wonder why I did not heed other people's warnings. Spare yourself the pain, embarrassment, and trouble and learn from other people's experiences, thoughts, and mistakes. Do not be **stubborn** like me.

~ DARIA STEWART

{ ~~Don't~~ Shoot the Messenger }



BROKEN TRUST

My house on West Avenue was the largest and most appealing of them all, and because of this, strangers stop in their cars just to catch a glimpse of the beautiful sight. In front of the house, was a rusty pink-colored fountain filled with fresh water leading to a long, white entrance. As one came in, they saw a circular parking in two different directions, finally leading

to the entrance of the front door. This magnificent white house looked like a tropical resort the closer one came, and this is exactly what my father had envisioned. He always held a desire to move out into the country and build an enormous house, so he could be proud of his creation. Of course, we were not always so wealthy as to have such amenities.

My father came from India to California with absolutely no money in his pockets and did not have any family members whom he could ask for help from. After staying in the United States a couple of years, he traveled back to India to enter arranged marriage with an innocent eighteen-year old girl, my mother. As a child, she was raised in a religious middle-class family that taught ethical and moral values to children. However, when my teenager arrived to this foreign country, she was shocked at the hardships she would have to endure. She discovered that the foolish stereo-type Indian people retained about the U.S., how “money grows on trees,” was completely wrong. She began working in a hospital as a nurses’ aid, and discovered that this was not going to be the easy life style everyone back home in India thought it would be. Nevertheless, this was not the end of her worries because after some time, my father revealed a deep dark secret. He told my mother that he had previously been married to a “white” woman and had two children with her. However, he explained that he was now being asked to pay child support. My child-like mother was shocked; however, she handled the horrible situation well by telling him that it was his past, and that she forgave him. She also said that it was not the children’s fault, and that she would take the responsibility of paying child support. Even though, she was from a good family and always received what she desired, she never once complained to my father about the struggle she had to endure. In contrast, she assured him that she would do anything for him and would always stay by his side.

After ten years of hard work, my family, which consisted of me, my parents, and two younger brothers, thought we were living the “American Dream.” I always retained a lot of respect for both my parents. My mother, a secretary of the family business, taught us children everything we should know and supported us in the good and bad times. My father, a plumber, worked all day and would come home and get the royal treatment from my mother. I always felt extremely blessed to be born into such a great family and thanked God for such amazing parents. Even in school, I would always tell my friends about how lucky I was to have such

loving and caring parents that gave me more than I needed.

Everything was going by happily, until one day, a strange couple, I had never seen before, came over to our house. My father said he wanted to introduce them to the family, however, this couple seemed extremely odd. Richa, the short stubby woman, with small black beady eyes was wearing a traditional black Indian suit. She sat on the sofa close to my dad, and the two acted as though they had known each other for years. Richa's husband, Robbin, sat at a distance from her and watched cartoons on the television. I got the impression that he was mentally sick because he did not care his wife was sitting so close to another man, and that she was conversing with him as if he was her husband.

For some time, I sat in the living room with my father and listened to what the two were conversing about. As I got up to go get a drink, I was in complete shock as he began to ask her to spend the night. I immediately went outside to go inform my mother, who was in the kitchen preparing food for the so called "guests," that my father invited complete strangers to sleep in our home. My mother, unaware of the situation taking place in her house, was caught up in disbelief. Hurriedly, she went inside and called her husband inside the room. She began questioning him about why he was talking to her so much and why he was asking her to spend the night. He began to laugh and said that nothing was going on and that she was crazy and cynical. After they spoke, my mother began to trust his word; however, she continued to be extremely suspicious about this lady she had only met a few hours ago.

That same night, my mother was tremendously upset because she confessed she still had a few doubts about my father, but I told her that a man like him could never do something as horrible as cheat. In my own mind, I was a little scared, but knew that my father would not think to take such an action. When I went to school the next day, I told my best friend, Nelly, about everything that took place the night before. She was exceptionally stunned at what I was telling her because I used to always tell her that my father was the "best." I felt particularly ashamed to be telling my best friend something so foul about my father, but I needed someone to help me understand and make sense of the events that had occurred.

2 MONTHS LATER...

One day my father decided to tell my mother that he wanted to go to India for a two

week vacation. My mother knew that Richa flew to India only a month before, to visit her family in India. Often, Indians travel to India for months at a time so my mother knew that Richa was still there. For this reason, she told my father that if she caught him coming back with that woman or even if she heard any news that they were seen together, she would kill herself. He assured her that it was nothing of that sort and if she wanted to tag along to India she could and that it would be her decision. In spite of this, my mother trusted him and said that it was okay. However, one day when I was passing by my parents room I overheard my mother telling my father that she wanted to go to India with him. My father said that there was only a week until his departure and he wanted to go alone. At the time, I thought he did want my mother to come along, but I talked myself into believing he was just joking like he always did about this subject.

2 WEEKS LATER...

One day we got a call from India that my father was very sick and I was extremely hurt by such tragic news. However, when I talked to my younger cousin, he told me that my father was always on the phone with someone and would constantly talk in English. The second I heard this bewildering news, I began to doubt my father. I decided I would not tell my mother about this because my cousin could have been mistaken, for I thought, what does a fifteen-year old boy know? Thousands of questions raced through my mind, but I decided my father was a good man and would not do anything to hurt my mother.

TWO WEEKS LATER...

My father came back from India and brought back presents for everyone and everyone was extremely excited that he was back home. I felt like everything was normal again and there would be no more tensions in the house. The next day, I told Nelly that my father was back, and informed her about everything he brought back for me. Coincidentally, Nelly's father had also gone to India and came back on the same flight my father had. She informed me that her father saw my father at the airport holding hands with some other woman, who did not look like my mom. The second she told me this bewildering news, I froze in my seat and only three words came out of my mouth, "Richa that bitch!" I did not know what to say or do except sit there in disbelief. Immediately, I rushed home and told my mom what was going on, and she said she

was aware of this fact. She began to cry and then fell to the floor unconscious. I looked at my mom and did not know what to make of this absurd situation. The one and only thing I knew was that my life was about to change dramatically.

5 MONTHS LATER...

My mom filed for divorce and that that bastard got the biggest shock of his life. He always thought that my mother was a “naïve, innocent women” that was weak from the inside. Of course, he was not entirely wrong with this assumption because before he committed this sin, she was. However, I, and the rest of the family (including her younger brother) was a strong support system, and without us she probably would have given up on life. The day that “bastard” told her he was with another woman; she pleaded and begged him to come back. She stressed the fact that they had three healthy children together, and if he was to live with another woman, everything they worked so hard for would be useless. She also feared that we children would get the wrong impression about our father. He told her that he did not care about his children or her and did not care whether his “family” went to hell or not.

When I talked to “my dad” and asked why he was cheating on my mother, the one woman who had helped in times when he did not even have a roof over his head, his reply was that it was none of my business and that I could do whatever I wanted, but he was going to stay with Richa. I told him that she was only after him because of his money, and what this woman and him thought as love, was actually defined as lust. He only ignored my words.

TODAY 4 MONTHS LATER...

After this outrageous turning point, my perspective on life completely changed. I used to have a love for people and always retained happiness to see others succeed. Even though I was “wealthy,” I never showed off to anyone, and when friends came over to my house, they would be in shock to see I was living such a great life-style. However, when I found out Richa was having an affair with my dad, even though she knew he was married with three children, I began to understand not everyone in this world is like me. I understood the fact that people will do anything for money, and that it is mainly what people care about. I began to realize I was living in a world that did not exist for the people of today.

I learned a very important lesson from this occurrence in my life, and that is to not trust

anyone. Even if that means a brother or father, because I learned that life is unpredictable and anything can happen at any time. I always got everything I desired, but most of all believed that my parents were a gift from God. Never, did I think that my father would betray such a loving and caring wife, as well as three children who loved him deeply. I always looked up to my father, but he committed a sin in my eyes and I can never forgive such a heartless and cruel man for that. Also, I learned that very few people are supportive through a problem, because most people are only looking out for their own good. Most of all, this sharp turn in my life has taught me to embrace the harsh reality for what it is, not for what I was trying to make it. I have learned that a caring, loving, and truthful person like my mother rarely exists in this world today. Specifically, people like her are the ones that are taken advantage of, because they are completely pure from the heart, and have no bad intentions for another individual. This transformation has been difficult but I believe God was trying to do me a favor. To explain, God was seeking to teach me the strength of a mother. Maybe he was trying to show me that money means nothing only relationships we believe in, retain a true value. Most of all, I believe God was aiming to prove that I was living in an imaginary universe, that was very far from reality. I always thought everyone was the way my mother raised me to be, a kind, fun-loving, and caring person, but God taught me that not everyone is necessarily good.

~ PREETI CHADHA

WHY YOU SHOULD STOP LIKING JERKS

You most seductive of beasts
How quickly your stock rises and falls
But is your case ambiguity
Or foolishness?
Are you ignorant
Or are you trying to redeem yourself?
Go ahead, slowly reel me in
So I really feel the cut
Change the way that I feel it
So you can be powerful
Darling, you're nothing
But do keep trying
Go on thinking you've won
This is only a part of the game
And you cannot claim
What you've been getting from me
So who really has the power?
You ponder, I'll wait
You'll find you're a beast on a leash
And I'm the one holding it
Go as far as you wish, darling
Because you'll come right back

~ KELLY MARELICH

Trouble In Paradise



Have you ever been told of how amazing somewhere is, and how you “just have to go” there? Well my mom had always told me this about Catalina Island, that it is a beautiful and amazing place. So last year, my family and I went on

a cruise to Catalina Island and Mexico. It was an amazing vacation, including many great memories. One of the more memorable parts of my cruise was our trip to Catalina.

It was our first day on the cruise ship. It was about eleven o’clock on an August morning. My family and I got ready, ate breakfast, and started to get into line for the boats. From our cruise ship, the cruise passengers were going to take motor boats to get to Catalina. If you can imagine, the entire ship is waiting to board the motor boats on two floors of the cruise ship. There are huge and long lines of people everywhere, it is noisy and a slight disaster. Nevertheless, my family and I decided to join the never ending line.

After being in line for less than one minute, I decided that I wanted to change my clothes. I was going to run up to my room, change, then meet my family back in line. I merged through lines of people and walked up about twelve staircases to my room. After changing, I locked my door, and walked to a nearby elevator to get back into line.

Like I said, there were only two floors to board the boats from, floor two and floor three. I could not remember which floor my family was on, but with only two floors to pick from, it should not be too difficult to find them. I took the elevator, and upon reaching the second floor, I found an even longer line of people than there were a few minutes ago. I politely tried to push my way through them, and managed to look for my family. They were nowhere in sight. I called them, but of course the combination of the ship’s

bad service and my family's never-failing abilities to never answer their phones, led to me not having any idea where they were.

Seeming as the only obvious next step, I decided to try the third floor. I could not take the stairs because there were people lined up and down them. I made my way through the line once more, onto the elevator. I pressed the third button, and walked onto the third floor. I pushed through the line once more, and did not find them. I went back to the second floor to look for them, but they were nowhere in sight. I decided I would try the third floor one more time. As I was waiting for the elevator, I saw a sign. It said "Elevators Do Not Stop on the Second Floor." So at this point, I cannot find my family or get a hold of them. Then, I come to find out that I have pushed through the same line of people four times in about twenty minutes, in an extremely frustrated manner. Embarrassing right? It doesn't end here.

At this point, I had given up, and I decided to get in line by myself. I finally reached the front of the line, and I was asked to show my identification. I showed the only identification I had with me, my high school id card from the previous year, embarrassing. Extremely frustrated, I boarded the motor boat, which left to Catalina quickly. There was a man sitting across from me, with a parrot on his shoulder. I do not know why, it was very weird. I have

motion sickness, so after a few minutes, I began to feel nauseous. To make the boat ride worse, the parrot started yelling, and simultaneously a baby started to cry. I could not wait to get to this island. About ten minutes later we finally arrived. We all disembarked from the boat, and the first



thing I saw was a sign saying, "Welcome to Two Harbors!!" Slightly confused, I called my family, and they finally answered my call. I asked them where they were, and nothing they said made sense. They said they were near the shops by the Avalon Theater. I asked them where Avalon was, and they said it is the town they were in. On Catalina

there are two towns, Avalon and Two Harbors. I was in the wrong town of Catalina. This trip to Catalina had become absolutely ridiculous.

I walked back to the dock, where the boat had dropped us off. I asked two of the men in charge of the boats if there was any possible way to get to Avalon. They found me a sailboat that was going there, and I boarded with about ten other people. At last, I was on my way to the right island. About fifteen minutes into the ride, the driver had spotted some dolphins. We all excitedly rushed to the side of the boat to see them. The man in charge of the sail needed to adjust the sail, and began to move it. As soon as he tied it in place, I turned around, and the outhaul had moved. It hit me on my head, and knocked me onto the deck. I was lying on the deck, very confused. My head and back had an extreme amount of pain. All I could see was the bright sky, and eleven bright eyed people staring at me.

Everyone on the boat moved me to the bench furthest away from the sail. When we arrived in Avalon, a few of the men on the boat carried me to a doctor on the island. An extremely attractive man came over and checked me to make sure I was okay. He said I would be fine, and I had suffered from a minor concussion. He wanted me to stay in the office for a while, just to make sure my head was okay. Meanwhile, the secretary in the doctor's office called my family, and they came to see me. They were so shocked at what had happened. After an hour, the doctor said I was okay to go, and my family and I went to the beach.

My mom, sister, and I walked around and looked at the shops. Catalina was beautiful and had amazing weather. We went to the beach, went shopping, and had lunch. After lunch, my mom and I went on a golf cart ride around the island. We drove around the mountains, and saw the beautiful island. Once we got to the top of the mountain, we decided to take pictures.

After we took our pictures, we sat in the golf cart, but it would not start. As my mom continued trying to start it, the cart slowly began to roll downhill. I was having a heart attack, and my mom thought we were perfectly fine. After nearly reaching the end of the cliff, she thankfully got it started, and we made our way back down the mountain. I clearly had suffered from a great amount of trauma that day.

Before reboarding the cruise ship, my family needed to use the restroom. As if my family had not ditched me enough already, they decided to leave all their belongings and purchases with me while they went. I was waiting for them near an ice cream booth. While I was waiting for them, I saw these two boys, about seventeen years old, in the ice cream booth talking to each other. A minute later, one of them came over to me and asked, "Hey, my ice cream is frozen, could you warm it up for me?" I was amused by this question, but I did not understand what he meant. I asked him what he meant, and he replied, "Well maybe you can just hold my ice cream, and your hotness will warm it up a little." Then he shyly walked back into the booth. At this point, I did not think this day could get any more ridiculous. I sat there and laughed, with some guy's ice cream in my hands.

When my family came back from the restroom, I gave the boys back their ice cream, and they excitedly thanked me. My conclusion from the "amazing Catalina Island," as my mother claimed it to be, is a little different than I expected. I left Catalina knowing these things. One, do not leave your family in an extremely crowded area to go and change your clothes. Two, learn how to be observant, and notice signs that say when elevators do not take you to certain floors. Three, do not sit or stand near the vicinity of an outhaul. And four, boys' cheesy pick up lines do not change no matter what "amazing" island you travel to in the world.

~ALEXANDRIA BACKUS

TWO PHONE CALLS

Growing up, I had one best friend that traveled through years of school with me. Going to her house every weekend became my "second home." Her

mom would take us everywhere together. Soon enough her family became my second family. I went on trips with them to the mountains or camping by the beach, I would spend the night on the weekends, and her mom and dad would kiss me on the forehead as if I was their own daughter. I loved her family as much as I could, and I do my best to remember those days and how much they meant to me.

I specifically remember that day that she called me. She mentioned something about her mom coming home from the doctor's office saying that she had something called cancer. I had no idea what that meant, so I asked my mom and she left the room with tears forming in her eyes.

I never asked about it again. I never wondered. I just simply went on with my little life playing in her backyard and spending the night every Friday. As I grew older I began to understand the meaning of this word. All the pain and hardship it entailed did not come to my attention until one day in seventh grade I went over to their house and her mom was sick in the bathroom. I left as soon as I got there. A few weeks later I got another phone call. I was not prepared at all for the news I was about to hear. All the signs had not phased me because I thought her mom was healthy enough to fight the cancer. I never thought anything bad would ever happen. I believed that if I prayed for her, and stayed positive, her mom would get better soon....that she would be the invincible mom that she always was whenever I visited.

I answered the phone hoping for an invitation to come spend the night at her house. But I was mistaken. All I could hear was silence on the other end. I was stone cold. I did not say a word. Complete silence aired the phone line for about a minute, until she spoke up almost as silently as the moment before. She told me that her mom sat her and her younger brother down on the couch. Her dad holding her hand. "Mom has brain cancer," was all that was said. I continued to be silent. No thoughts ran through my head, no words came to mind to say to

her to make her feel better. I just did not understand how something this big could be happening to my best friend's mom. I was shocked. It was unbelievable.

The next few years, our teenage lives became tremendously busy. I hardly saw her, and barely ever saw her family, especially her mom. I talked with her as often as I could. We talked about high school, boys, and friends. I never asked about her mom. I was afraid that I would be bringing up a sore subject. That's what I kept telling myself, that it was too hard for *her* to talk about. But later on I had to admit to myself that the reason I never asked was because *I* feared hearing about her mom *dying*. I tried to imagine my own mom sick and not able to get out of bed, but it was too much for me to understand. I was afraid because I would not know what to say if she said that her mom could not feed herself, couldn't sleep, or could not even remember the face of her own daughter. I was afraid of hearing what was worse than I could even imagine.

I let two years pass without seeing her mom and without speaking of the matter. I cannot believe I was so selfish. I cared so much about my best friend, but I could not face reality. I could not face the fear that I saw in my friend's eyes.

It was another busy and exhausting night for me in my freshman year in high school. I got a voicemail from my sister saying that my friend had called the house phone. I froze when I listened to my sister's voice in the recorder. At that moment, my mind seemed to melt. I knew what she had called about. I knew and I felt guilty. I felt a sense of shame and deep remorse sweep over me. My face turned white and I closed my phone. I could not call her. I could not face it. I was so scared.

On the day of the funeral, I remember walking into the church so slowly that I could feel the bones in my toes pushing off the ground. The room was filled with tears falling from every face, but a smile never left a face. Friends and family of her mom spoke of memories and wonderful things about her. Looking at my

best friend was one of the hardest things I ever had to face. As tears streamed down my cheeks, I approached her to give her and her little brother a hug. My hug felt so meaningless to me, because I was ashamed that I never went to visit, and that I never asked about her mom or how she was feeling.

It took me years to forgive myself for this, even after my friend had already forgiven me. There are some things I'm still trying to forgive myself for... how I never said goodbye.

I don't know exactly how to tie the lesson that I learned into my story, but I can tell you that I regret every time I called to talk about boys and school, but never about the one thing I feared the most. I regret never seeing her, and most of all never saying goodbye. So, because of this I am still trying to say goodbye to this day, and I have learned that it is not always enough to be forgiven by others, but sometimes I have to forgive myself.

~ RACHEL BRAND

{  Never Eat Yellow Snow }

"~~Never~~ Eat Yellow Snow!"



BREEZE

Overcoming obstacles is the essence of becoming a stronger person. When I was ten, I overcame the biggest and most useful obstacle that I have ever conquered.

It was a cold Tuesday night at Hawkrest Ranch. My weekly lesson was minutes away from starting. My teacher, Tammy, was helping me tack up my favorite horse, Breeze. As I looked into his honey eyes, I could tell he was his



usual full-of-life self, ready to give me a hard time. The first twenty minutes of the lesson went shockingly well. Then it was time to canter. I kicked him with my right foot and he began to canter. We went around the arena moving as

one. I moved my hands back and forth with the three beat rhythm that his hooves made as they hit the ground. All of a sudden, Breeze started to run faster and faster and finally went into a full gallop. He raced around the arena. I pulled back on the reins with all the strength I could muster, but he was biting the bit and could not feel my gentle yanking. I could hear Tammy yelling at my lesson partner, Jessica, to get to the side of the arena. Unexpectedly, Breeze started to run straight towards Jessica. I knew Breeze was going to go left or right of the upcoming horse, but I did not know which way.

The only thing I could hear was my heart pounding in my chest. All I saw was the image of the horse in front of me getting closer and closer. I had to take a chance. I leaned hard to the left hoping Breeze would do the same. Two seconds later, as I was flying through the air, I saw Breeze running in the opposite direction. He had turned right. I hit the ground, hard. It took a few seconds for me to get my wits back. I propped myself up on my elbows and looked around.

After two years of riding lessons, I had finally fallen off a horse. I was so astonished that it had actually happened. I did not know if I could get back on Breeze again. The fear of it happening again filled me. But even though I was scared, I got back up on my horse. I knew that if I let Breeze win, I would always be afraid to canter, and I did not want that. I wanted to be able to become a better rider without having the fear of falling sitting in the back of my mind. By getting back on the horse, I learned that by never giving up you can get closer to accomplishing your dream.

~DANIELLE SMITH

BACKSTABBING BEST FRIEND

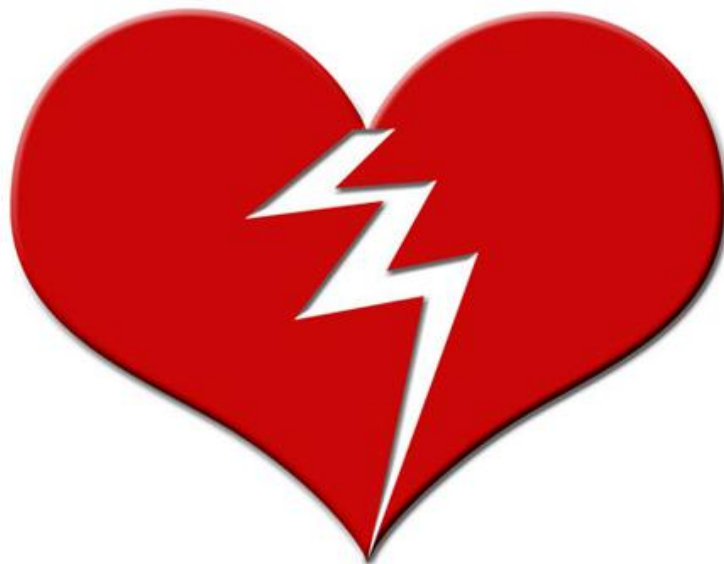
My next story is about my ex-best friend, her boyfriend, and his best friend. Yes, this is a generic “lesson learned,” but it was one of the most effective for me. I dated my best friend’s boyfriend’s best friend. Try to figure that one out... I was introduced to this guy through my best friend’s boyfriend, and from the beginning we “clicked.” But, when the relationship began to fail about two months later, I got the back hand from my best friend’s boyfriend. He attacked me verbally and picked apart each of my weaknesses and announced humiliating lies about me on Facebook and around school. Immature? Yes, absolutely.

In the beginning I *tried* to stand up for myself, but that entailed fighting back and arguing, and I am terrible at both of those. Of course my best friend’s boyfriend was one of the most arrogant guys ever and loved to watch my feelings be destroyed. So I was doomed, I had this arrogant, annoying guy throwing me down in every way he could think of, and spreading rumors about me all over school, and I had my ex-boyfriend egging him on, along with my best friend taking his side and watching me crash and burn. I was humiliated, exhausted, and hurt. I decided to give up. There was nothing I could do but to sit back and let them get out everything they wanted to say. So I took it, I took all they had to say and tried not to let it effect me. This was not as difficult as I thought because I was not on my own. I had most of my friends and all family members backing me up, and even teachers. The three backstabbers only had themselves and a few of their gullible friends thinking that this whole situation was just hilarious. Good for them.

Luckily, all of this happened at the very end of my senior year, so I do not have to see most of the people from school after I graduated, including the three of them. Occasionally the topic comes up, but most of the time I just forget about

it and so does everyone around me. One of my teachers gave me this advice one day when I came into class upset and crying; she said, “You are always responsible for what you do, no matter how you feel.” I took this advice early on in this fiasco and stopped trying to argue and stand up for myself. I did not want to say something or do something that I would regret being responsible for, and it worked. It gave me the upper-hand in the end. I let go of my best friend and the grudge I had on my friend’s boyfriend, and now they both have exactly what they want: each other all to themselves and the guilt of all the shit they put me through. Now lets see how Karma will come back to get them.

~ RACHEL BRAND



THE ALLIGATOR UNDER THE BED

PART 1: THE CONFLICT

Fifteen years of friendship and I could count the number of serious fights we had on one hand. When we were four and three, I accidentally got sand in her eye. She was pissed, and three, so she threw sand back in my face and I wasn't trying to take that abuse. We moved on, or maybe just forgot.

Another time, we were maybe seven and eight, we caught a lizard and named him something or other, and thus he was forever to be our pet.

I let him go. She was pissed. I didn't want him crawling on me. She said, "That's no excuse."

She left for maybe an hour, and then came back for the dramatic reconciliation. The lizard was important, but not as important as me, thankfully.

Then there was that time a couple of years later when she left me. Or rather, her family moved away a few towns over. As fate would have it, she made new friends and life sucked. We never spoke of it, whatever it was putting tension between us. It lasted longer than a day this time, the festering insecurities and misplaced feelings of abandonment, and went on until she called me nearly in tears one night. "I'm coming over." And that was that.

They became even more difficult to deal with as we grew closer and were expected to act mature about things. Sand and lizards were so far away, now there were boys, there were other friends, and there was shit-talking to deal with. It got complicated, but we handled it. We didn't have arguments because we knew it was a waste of time and energy.

If something mean slipped out, it was followed by, "sorry" and a smile. A funny look was washed away with wordless communication. She'd glance at someone else and make a face so I knew it wasn't me she was annoyed with. Or maybe I'd shake my head slightly but sincerely so she knew not to worry.

Bottom line is we were pros at avoiding conflict. Making sure not to agitate each other, or at least provide reassurance, which no one else in the world ever seemed to comprehend.

In a weird way, the most recent of our altercations was a result of our method of communication. It was agonizing and slow. There were no real blow-ups or direct confrontations. It was a monster that only teenage girls could create.

It seemed to come out of nowhere. One day, we were just talking less and snapping, sans the “sorry” or quick but genuine smile. I called her less and she was “jokingly” telling me she hated me, both of which never happened with us. For a brief time, the first in so long, we were not on each other’s side.

But we didn’t speak of it. We didn’t dare.

PART 2: UNDER THE RUG

There was this tension that neither one of us knew what it was, or how to deal with it.

Is it me?

Is it her?

Am I overreacting?

The confusion made it worse; sharpened the anger somehow. Actually, the confusion probably contributed to ninety percent of it.

We couldn’t talk about it. It just started seeping out. It happened over the weekend, ended on Tuesday. Friday went a lot like this:

“I hate you.”

“Want to spend the night?”

A smile and, “yeah.”

Or, “I’ll go with you.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Oh...”

“Do you want to?”

A smile and, “yeah.”

Both of us trying, both of us angry, both of us having completely different nights in which WE were the victim. Then finally we were walking home, and ultimately walking into a situation that would break the invisible camel’s back. Of course, it wouldn’t be a clean break.

Her Night:

Here we are at Miranda’s house, smoking a cigarette, about to head over to Kelly’s for the night. She did invite me, does she remember? I figure we’ll take Wawona, since she hates Parkview, and this way Miranda won’t be able to tell that I’m going over there. Just in case she over reacts or something. There is no time for that.

We are all sitting so far apart, barely talking, at least not like friends do. Not like usual. We’re getting up and saying goodbye to Miranda and when I turn around, Kelly is walking the other way.

“Well fine!” I march home, confused and upset.

My Night:

Does she still even want to come over? I can’t tell. She seems so angry... I feel like I’m annoying her. Was I too pushy inviting her? Does she want to be left alone?

WHY DOES SHE HATE ME?

Miranda is going in, so I tell her goodnight and Amy is turned toward Wawona, I'm assuming to walk home. She's not coming over then.

I say "bye" but she does not say it back.

"Well fine!" I march home, confused and upset.

PART 3: PASSIVE AGGRESSION IN 140 CHARACTERS OR LESS

Whosthere_AMYis: Fuck you. I SADLY know who your leader is.

KellyMermaid: No, really, I can't even feel that knife in my chest, don't worry about it.

Whosthere_AMYis: @KellyMermaid But I love you.

KellyMermaid: I'm so aware of how I succumb to the right kinds of manipulation.

Another day went by, and it was us walking home again. I took Wawona with her. We'd had a decent time that day, despite everything.

"How've you been?"

HORRIBLE. "Okay, you?"

"Same."

"Hey..."

"Yeah?"

"You maybe want to... talk or something soon?"

"Yeah, I do." Smile.

"Okay!" Smile.

Monday came around and she never called. She stayed with Miranda.

KellyMermaid: People are just the worst.

Whosthere_AMYis: Having people problems today?

KellyMermaid: I have people problems daily.

Whosthere_AMYis: I'm really sorry. For EVERYTHING.

KellyMermaid: You don't need to be. I don't know... did you still want to talk or something soon?

Whosthere_AMYis: Sounds great. :]

PART 4: THE TALK

We, naturally, did not formally discuss our scheduled meeting. Instead we lead up to it under the façade of tattoos and Jake and Amir episodes. Once there in her room with needles and ink, I began.

“So what’s been up lately?”

“Nothing, just a bad week.”

“Me too.”

Silence. I probed further, “Are you mad at me?”

She laughs a little, “I thought you were mad at me!”

“Not at all, I was only mad because I thought you were mad and I didn’t know what I did!”

“Well, because you were hanging around so much with Miranda I thought you were, like, replacing me.”

“Of course not, I just felt like I was annoying you!” At this point we were in tears from laughing at our own ridiculous misconceptions.

“Oh, jeez, Kelly will you marry me?”

“Absolutely! I already have everything planned, down to the dresses.”

“I can’t believe how funny this is now that we actually know.”

“Yeah I didn’t think this would ever be funny, I was miserable.”

“Seriously. We’re so lame.”

“Yeah, I know. We have to go back and delete all of our angry tweets.” And we couldn’t talk for the next twenty minutes because the whole thing was so incredibly embarrassing and funny and insane and, well, us.

“Seriously, marry me. We’ll get such great benefits, too.”

“Okay, get me a ring with a pearl.”

And thus we were BFF again. In the end, the lesson we taught each other was simple: communicate effectively, and if you don’t want to, life is going to be bad for a few days.



BAD NEWS

We're just sitting in my backyard, trying to figure out where we are.

Really look at our surroundings, or at least what is right in front of us, and decide where a scene like that one might be taking place.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?

"Where are you, Jean?"

"I'm not sure yet, let me take another hit."

I never said we didn't have help finding out.

"I dunno," Hope chimes in. "Your neighbor's house is blue and has all those dangling things. Reminds me of a beach house."

"Ooh, so you're by the beach, that's great!" I celebrate my friend's breakthrough to somewhere nice. Somewhere other than reality.

"I've got it!" Jean exclaims, "I'm in Wyoming. Just look at those trees!" It's not that we understood her reasoning, really. Just that we didn't care to question it. Perhaps Wyoming did have trees like that. Perhaps they were even better where she was.

So we all "ooh" and "ahh". None of us has ever been to Wyoming before.

"The designs on your house, Darlene, they remind me of New Mexico, especially the tan color with this time of day." Renee finally adds in.

"You're right, I never noticed that! There are so many places to go in my backyard."

"But where are you?" Jean inquires, lighting a cigarette that could take her somewhere else entirely.

“Um, nowhere good.” I admit, looking at the side yard with its broken fence, disorderly trash bins and dirt. Can you tell I got the worst seat at the table?

“I think, like, Georgia.”

“Oh I’m so sorry!” Renee puts her hands to her face in horror.

“I know oh, God, what do I do?”

“Take another hit?” suggests Hope.

“Yeah, maybe. Say, is this stuff laced?”

“I’m not sure, why?”

“Just curious.”

I try moving my chair but I can’t get Georgia off of my mind. What a terrible place! All I can think about is the picture of it on that puzzle mom used to have in the shape of America. Every state had a special, defining picture.

Georgia had a peanut.

“I think this might be laced.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Want to go to the park to get out of Georgia?” Jean asks.

“I really do.”

“Bring the pot.”

MORAL OF THE STORY: BE FAMILIAR WITH WHERE YOU GET YOUR STUFF.

~ANONYMOUS

Hard Work and Perseverance Pay Off

The hot sun is beating down

Sweat is rolling down your face

It touches your lips and tastes so salty- taste of hard work

It's coming down to this one last point

You're going to give it your all!!

Ready, set, serve

You think back that just a few short months ago

You could have only imagined playing

Being a part of a team and working hard

You worked months... Early in the morning before the heat came out

At night when the sun was going down

Running...running...running....

Hitting... hitting ... hitting ...

Serving... Serving... Serving...

The day that you had anticipated all summer came...try-outs

You worked so hard to this point... It had to pay off

The end of the day the coach calls you

Your stomach is turning. Thinking I hope I don't throw up

"Are you ready to work hard" he says

YES!!!

"Good, you're on the team!! Congrats"

No word in the dictionary can express how you feel.

How could there be... There's too many emotions going through you..

ESCTATIC! EXCITED! WORRIED! SURPRISED!



The ball is hit your way...

You slam it back...

It hits right over the net... will she run and receive it..

One bounce... two...

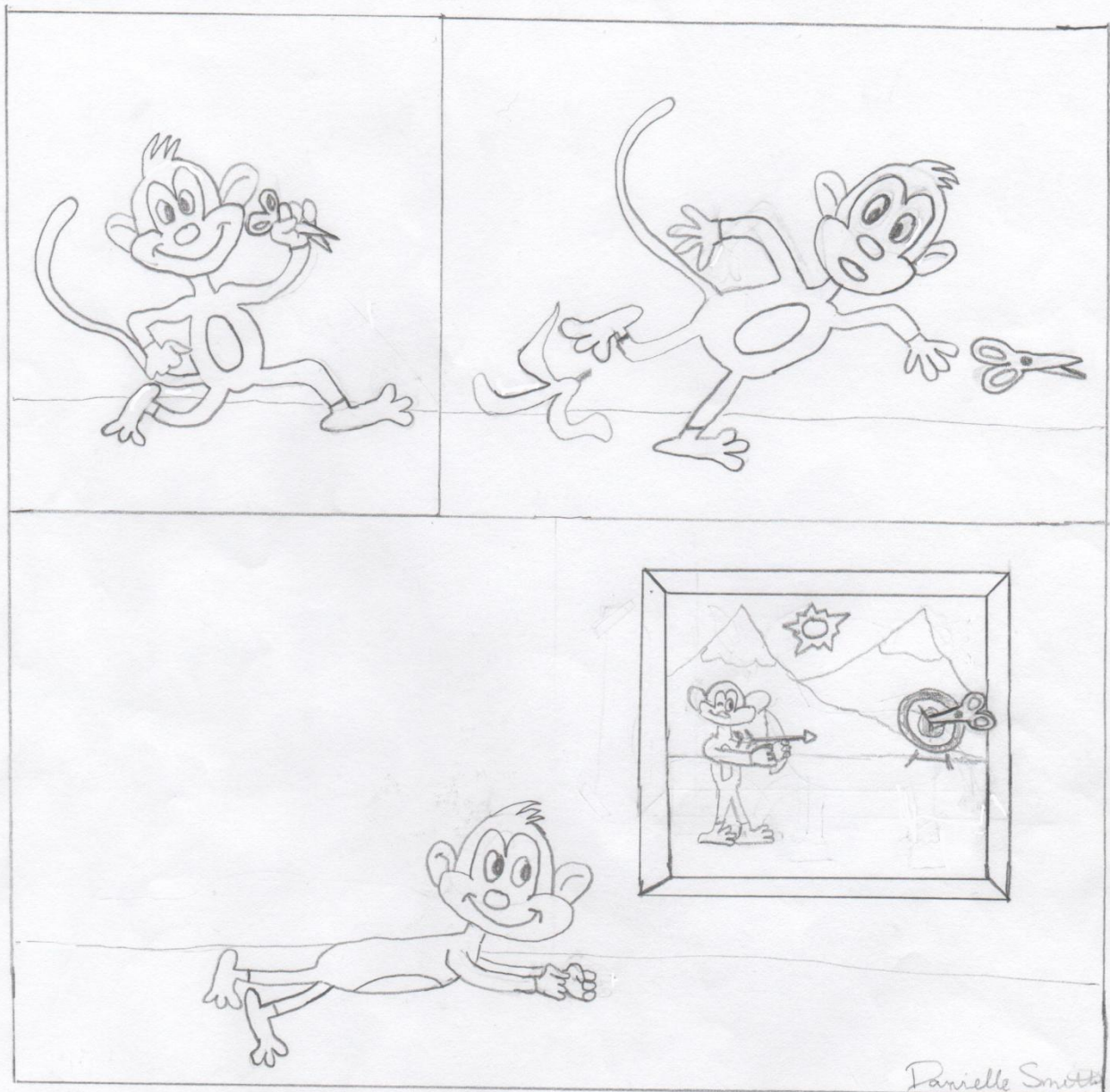
YOU WIN THE GAME

You realize at that moment all the hard work was for something... That you will never forget this feeling in your life...

Nor the hard work to get to this point... And how in life perseverance pays off

~ NICOLE SASSENBERG

~~Don't Run with Scissors~~



Danielle Smith

PRIDE LASTS FOREVER

When most people set running goals, if they set them at all, it is to be done running within a certain amount of time. When running the half-mile, mile, or even a three mile run, there is very little doubt that the runner will reach the finish line. The goal is to finish in a certain amount of time. The runner hopes to improve their time, or to beat any competitors in the race.

For this race, however, my goal was just to finish. I wanted to get an idea of what it would be like, to get a real understanding of the race. Sure, I had some times I wanted to get under, but overall my goal was just to finish the race. What race you ask? What race could possibly be so difficult as to cause one to question whether they would be able to finish? The answer is one simple word: Marathon.

The Marathon is the most recognizable race in long distance running, with its only challenger being the mile. To those who have run this race, the mile is no longer considered “long distance”. This race is 26.2 punishing miles. The sheer distance alone makes most people question the sanity of someone who would undertake such a challenge. The distance is not the only obstacle in these races, as most of them have hills or are run in extreme weather that add to the physical stress of the event. This is why runners of these races have their sanity questioned on a regular basis, as I did when I told people I planned to run one. I assure you that these runners do have a mental state, but whether it is good or bad I will leave up to you. They possess a determination, a perseverance, and unwillingness to accept defeat. These are the runners who make it through “the wall” of the race. The Marathon is as much a mental challenge as it is a physical one. The body and the mind must be strong if a runner hopes to go the distance. If the mind is not strong enough, then the strength of the body matters very little. The mind drives the body with motivation and perseverance, and without these things, the body will quit.

“The wall” is a mental barrier during the marathon when your body does not want to keep going. It varies when each runner will hit it, but it is guaranteed that they will at

some point during the race. I hit it at mile eighteen. After two and a half hours of straight running, I did not want to go any longer. I began to realize that I had just over eight miles to go. I thought back to mile marker ten, which seemed like it was an eternity ago, which made me realize how much farther I had to go in order to cross the finish line. My own mind began to work against me, and yet, I had to find ways to motivate myself through it. I realized that all the training of the previous months would mean nothing. The effort to sign-up, the race fees, and arranging transportation, everything leads up to that moment of crossing the finish line, and if that doesn't happen, then none of it matters. This may seem like a harsh or extreme outlook, but this is the motivation to push runners past a mental barrier that cannot be described, you must experience it for yourself to really understand how strong it is. It is easily the most strenuous and demanding thing I have done in my life, but also one of the most gratifying and rewarding. Let me take you through it.

The morning of the race, I woke up well before five a.m. in order to meet the buses that would take all 2300 runners up to the starting line. It was raining, not hard, but it was noticeable. There was a large green wall as we approached the starting line along the side of the road. I have never seen so many port-o-potties at one place in my life. There were over seventy right in a row. The buses dropped you off into a chaotic mess. People scrambling all over the place: trying to get in their last bathroom stop, trying to get enough room to stretch, and keep warmed-up on this cold, wet morning. You don't want to begin such a physically demanding activity with cold and stiff muscles that is just asking to pull, strain, or tear one.



The race began with the sound of a siren. With 2300 people in the race, not everyone can begin at once. Instead, the start is almost like going over a waterfall. It is crowded and packed in, gradually speeding up as you get closer to the starting line, but when you cross it, suddenly you rush forward and begin to spread out. With the sudden feeling of freedom

from the confining crowd, my first instinct was to run hard, and get some distance from the lead pack. This is where the mind games begin.

The first mile can be the death of the race for anyone who is not completely prepared. With the rush of adrenaline, and hopes of a good time, it is tempting to take off. If I had, I would have died out long before reaching the finish. I took the first half of the race at a moderate pace, but saved some strength for the later parts of the race, as I had not even reached "The Wall". I had read about the race, and had read articles about this race and how to run it, and every single one mentioned this pivotal point in the race. It is this point that determines those who excel and those who do not and if I had any hope to make it through it, I was going to need all the strength I could get.

As I stated before, around mile-marker eighteen, I began to feel slow and tired. Just an example of how far that really is; that would be like running from this campus to Modesto. This is when the unique atmosphere of the race comes out. Other runners began to talk to me, motivate me, and basically do anything they could (short of pushing me) to get me to keep running. I ran on, knowing that each mile brought my goal closer, and each mile passed step by step. I treasured the sight of each sign telling me how much closer I was to finishing. Mile 24..... Mile 25..... Mile 26... I wanted to pick up that sign and take it home as a souvenir, because I have never seen a sign that has made me so happy. "Only 0.2 miles to go, that's less than a lap around the track", I thought as I passed the final mile marker. As I got closer to the finish line I could hear the crowd. I turned the corner and beheld the wonderful view of the finish line, and not only that, but the short distance to get there. I crossed the line, and began to walk. My legs felt like they were made of rubber. After the finish line, I received my medal, and got my picture taken.

Some final notes and suggestions you should decide before you run one of these. I know most of you reading this are laughing at the thought, because you think it is stupid. There are some actual benefits that go along with these beyond just getting in shape, and doing the race. For one, there is a sense of accomplishment afterward. Pushing through something so demanding makes you feel as though you could do

anything. The Marathon has a reputation of being one of the most grueling and challenging tasks a person can push themselves through, and so when it is conquered, a feeling of indomitable strength follows. Second, it is my belief that distance runners are among the few in this country who have a true appreciation for cars, simply because they know how long it would take to get places without them. One of the drawbacks, if you have a two-story house, I suggest that you either find a way to live only on the bottom floor, or you will have to get creative on how to go up and down the stairs, because your legs will be incredibly sore for the next week or so. That being said, I think that this race should be attempted by everyone at least once in their lifetime. It is a great experience that will impact the rest of your life. I will conclude with a saying that helped me push through the toughest moments of the race: **PAIN IS TEMPORARY, PRIDE LASTS FOREVER.**

~ BRIAN MEENK

STRESS LESS

Have you ever wanted to go back and tell your younger self everything you have learned? Is there a great lesson that you know now that could have saved you heartache and pain back then? If it was possible to go back and tell yourself what you know now, would you? I would. Something that I have struggled with for a long time is being stressed, especially over trivial things in life. If I could go back I would tell myself the lesson I have learned, which is not to stress as much. Life is too short and precious to stress, especially when you are young.

Imagine a time in your life where you really stressed over school. Was it a huge test, writing an essay, or struggling with a specific subject in school? We have all been there. At a place where you have tried as much as you think you can and wanted so hard to just give up. Yet there might have been that little voice inside your head saying keep trying you will get it eventually.

I do not exactly remember what was going through my head as a child. I can picture myself at the kitchen table, sitting there for hours staring at my math homework. I would think that this blank piece of paper would be the fate of my future. If I did not get a good grade, then I would not be an A student, go to high school, and get into college. I know your thinking “wow” that was a lot to think about when you were a kid, but I did. I would sit and hope my math homework would just do it itself since I had no idea how to do it. Tears would just drip down my face onto my blank paper as time went by. Each night I would get more and more frustrated. I remember getting a huge headache and having a red hot face.

I understood it as the teacher taught it day after day, yet the moment I sat down to do it at home I could not figure out what to do. I would even go into class during lunch to get help, but I still did not improve. As time went on through the school years and events in my life, I realized life does not get any easier. So now when I begin to stress about something I just remember that it is not that important. I realized all I need to do is think of the issue at hand

subjectively, to just relax, breathe, and do the best I can. I have to just read the instructions over and over again until you get it. Most importantly of all I can not be afraid to ask for help.

The point is to not stress over things in life like homework. I look back on all the hours I spent stressing and sitting there staring at the paper instead of enjoying life. I could have been doing so many more life gratifying things like playing outside with all the other kids, instead of crying inside over homework.

Something that I still struggle with and struggled a lot back then was grades. They are really not that important compared to life's big picture. If something was to happen to me now I would rather have enjoyed the last moments I lived instead of stressing over a homework assignment I cannot get. That is not to say not to do homework, what I am saying is just worry less about it. We are all individuals, so we all have things we excel at and things we are not so good at. We just need to realize that and continue on with our lives.

So I am not going to be the best mathematician in my class, so what? I can be the best in my art class or science class. You may be thinking "what if I am not good at anything?" Believe me, you will soon find something you are good at. We all have hidden talents, we just need realize them.

~NICOLE SASSENBERG

DITCHING CLASS IS NOT A GOOD IDEA

I was told that Senior Year was the easiest and most laid back year of your life, at least that is what everyone was telling me. Students told me the classes were easy, and graduation seemed to be around the corner. So, since I was a senior, I decided to leave class multiple times. But, karma got me, and some times life did not go as planned.

It all started when my friend and I decided to go to the mall instead of class. We were seniors, the teacher never took roll in our last class of the day, and we were bored. So we hopped in my car, and proceeded to head to Modesto. Everything was going well. We made it to the mall, bought some clothes, ate some food, and had a pretty good time. So we got in the car, and headed home.

We were driving through the freeway, when all of a sudden a purple SUV with huge rims, thumping speakers, and a sticker reading “Hawaiian Bloodline!” roars in from the freeway entrance driven by a stereotypical thug looking fellow in a wife beater with tattoos. I tend to get really annoyed when people try to show off, so for the next five minutes my friend and I refused to let that car out of the slow lane. He would speed up, and I would do the same, he would then try to slow down to get behind us, and I would slow down to block him. Eventually, he started to figure out I was doing this on purpose, which obviously did not seem to make him too happy. My friend and I were laughing hysterically while this was happening, which proceeded to anger him even more.

So, he began to drift over to our lane while we were right beside him, with a bloodthirsty expression on his face. His bulky, lifted SUV towered over my miniscule, compact car. It was comparable to David and Goliath. But, he had a well taken care of, expensive looking SUV, while I was driving an '83 Honda Accord. I safely assumed his car was worth more than mine. So, I called his bluff, stayed strong, and remained in my lane. I knew he would not dare scratch his prized, feminine colored vehicle. Of course, this made him angrier, and he

pulled back. Which made us laugh harder, which made him even angrier. So we continued to drive ahead.

Then there was this clinking noise, and we could not figure out where it was coming from. Then a cup bounced off my windshield, and we looked to our right to see the man halfway out his window throwing everything he could find at my car. Slushies, beanie babies, and spare change bombarded my little accord. I believe he was trying to catch our attention. It worked. Now that we were focused on him he began to yell many unpleasant words at us. Telling us he would hunt us down and slit our throats, and that he was going to wreck our cars, follow us home and beat us up, etc. Needless to say we were afraid, very afraid. So I entered the fast lane and hit the gas pedal as hard as I could, the engine roared, and my car hit a breakneck speed of 70 mph. Obviously, he caught up with us in about 2 seconds. Now he was keeping us in the fast lane while continuing to give death threats. We were not laughing anymore.

My car was already going max speed at 70 mph, the whole vehicle was shaking, so passing him was out of the question. I tried to slow down to get out of the freeway, but he would slow down to keep me in, I would speed up, and he would speed up. I hate karma. We passed our exit as we continued to go down the freeway. Traffic was mostly going around us; my little accord was already straining from going 70. But my friend noticed a car going rather slow in the middle lane, and an exit approaching. We saw our chance. We said our prayers, crossed our fingers, and I hit the gas. The SUV followed, still giving death threats as if he had a list of them always handy. But, he looked ahead, and was forced to slow down to avoid hitting the slow moving van in the middle lane. God bless that van, wherever it is. We took the opportunity to cut across the freeway, and swerved around to make it into the exit. The SUV tried to follow but he could not make it in time. We were saved. We took a road back to school, and went home, thankful that we were alive. He never did come to our homes and kill us. I just hope he does not ever read this story.

After that, you would think I would have learned my lesson. But not only did I continue to ditch, but I got better at it. I would fake doctor appointments and notes from my parents, and I started to leave quite frequently. But I got cocky, and it cost me.

The end of the school year was fast approaching. No one cared about classes anymore, my class was just so anxious to graduate and get out of high school. I was in my last period for the day, bored to death and daydreaming about summer. It was a cool day, and I decided that it was perfect weather for a run. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to do it. I was a “big, bad senior”, so I decided to do it. Why not? What could possibly go wrong? So, I went up to my teacher and told her I had a test to make up in another class. She believed me, and let me go.

I did not waste a moment. I obviously did not go take a test, and hopped in my car and drove over to the canal, changed my clothes, and ran a few miles. I returned back to my car, feeling refreshed and happy that I decided to leave class.

I picked up my phone to find that it was vibrating nonstop. I checked the screen to find out that I had numerous messages. I assumed that people just liked me a lot, so I flipped the screen and checked my inbox. Inside were messages the “Get back to class!!!,” “Where are you??,” “You better hide!,” “He’s gonna hunt you down!,” and my personal favorite: “Oh man you are SO SCREWED!” Naturally, I was scared out of my wits. So, I contacted my friends, and it turns out the principal of my school was out and about looking for me. Why? Because ironically, he came to my class to announce that I was the valedictorian of my graduating class, and that I should be prepared to give the graduating speech at the ceremony. I was excited for a second, but still mostly scared.

The thing is that now that the end of the year was upon us, teachers knew seniors did not care about school, and were tempted to break the rules. To keep us in check, they decided to hold our senior events hostage. Anything wrong we did, they warned, would result in us being illegible to attend the senior trip to Six Flags, Sober Grad, and even the graduation ceremony itself. Of course, the worst case scenario was going through my head; I was picturing

how angry my parents would be when they figured out I wasn't going to be at the graduation ceremony. I did not sleep well that night. I was nervous the whole next day at school. I kept on expecting the principal to ambush me from around corners. Finally, at the end of the day, he visited me.

"I had a hard time finding you yesterday," he told me.

"I heard" I whimpered.

He escorted me over to his office, every step seeming as if it lasted millennia. Finally, we sat down at his desk, and we had a long talk. He was very talented at making people feel guilty. He lectured me on leaving without permission, tricking a teacher, and disrespecting authority.

I thought this was it. I saw myself being unable to graduate. I pictured myself in street corners, bundled up and sporting a grisly beard, asking my friends for spare change. This was all assuming my parents would actually let me live. I pictured myself telling my aunts, uncles, and grandparents to not bother coming to the graduation ceremony. On the bright side, I wouldn't have to prepare a speech.

But amazingly, he let me off the hook, and let me go to all the trips as well as the graduation ceremony, noting how bad it would look if the valedictorian was not allowed to walk at the ceremony. So I went to the trips, gave my speech at graduation, and made sure to stay in class. I was very thankful.

After two memorable experiences, I believe I have learned my lesson. It kept the year interesting, but I have never been as scared as I have during these two events. My life and diploma were at stake, something I do not plan on gambling ever again.

~PAULO COSTA

DO NOT LET FEAR CONTROL YOUR LIFE

"ONLY WHEN WE ARE NO LONGER AFRAID DO WE BEGIN TO LIVE."

-Dorothy Thompson

So many times being scared or being fearful of a something new can keep us from a life experience. There comes a point in your life where you have to realize that though something may seem scary, it probably is not dangerous if hundreds of people have done it. We need to be adventurous in life and experience all it has to offer.

As a child, I went to summer camp, a place to make lifelong memories and have a blast. I was so excited for it, a whole week of fun-filled experiences. The itinerary was impressive, not one minute was to be spared. There was river rafting, horseback riding, rock climbing, archery and many more activities. As the week progressed, the adventures got more intense. I remember having an awesome time rock climbing and learning archery, those were simple fun things to do. However, when it came to river rafting I was so scared I was shaking.

After we had taken a hike to the river, I saw the water crashing against the rocks and the icy cold water foaming. Everyone put life jackets on then slowly and carefully stepped into the raft. When all of a sudden an enormous wave came crashing under our raft and shook it. All I remember is terror swept over me. I rushed to get out of the raft. There was no way I was going to go rafting down a river where who knows what can happen. I sat there at the edge of the river waiting until they arrived back. When everyone returned, they got out of the raft laughing and drenched saying what a great time they had. I still had not regretted it yet, people always try to make you feel bad, I do now though. River water rafting looks exciting to do now. If only I had not let fear overcome me and enjoyed the experience.

Then the next day on this list of things to do was horseback riding. I love horses, they are majestic and I was excited to redeem myself. We drove an hour to get to the horse ranch, and then picked out the horse we wanted, and as we all were saddled on, the instructor said, "Let's go." I freaked out, "Wait how do you control this thing?" I at least wanted to know the

basics before I put my life in an animal's hand. She said, "Oh don't worry about it; just pull back on the reigns." We start going on the trail as I am slowly freaking out, thinking of all the possible things that could happen. This could not turn out good. We had just started on the trail when suddenly a bee scared my friends' horse and it freaked out. My friend held on for her dear life until the horse settled down. I freak out even more thinking that could happen to me. I then asked for help to get off my horse. I did not want to die that day. Same thing occurred again where I let fear get a hold of me. Something changed that day, as I sat waiting for everyone to return looking at the horse. I decided I would never let fear keep me from experiencing life again.

A few years later, my family and I went on a trip to Montana. It is a beautiful place and we decided to go horseback riding. My stomach was turning the whole way to the ranch, but as soon as I got on the horse I felt fine. As I started seeing the wonderful sunset and scenery around me, I forgot about the fact I was riding on a horse. I will never forget that trip because surprisingly, I really enjoyed horseback riding. That ended up being the highlight of the trip, and now I want to go back there again. I know that if I put my fears aside I can experience great things. Life has so much to offer and I never want to let fear force me to pass it by.



~ NICOLE SASSENBERG

LENDING A WHEEL

A few years ago, I traveled down to Guatemala with my father's Rotary Club to work with a charity called Hope Haven International, which is a group that specializes in distributing wheelchairs to needy people around the world. I was not expecting much out of this trip, and was excited to see more of the world. I had simply been confined to my everyday luxurious life of waking up in my sturdy home, choosing from a wide variety of food, and driving a few minutes to get to school. This experience was humbling and made me appreciate everything I have.

When we arrived in Guatemala City, I was ecstatic to be in a new country. I have a passions for traveling, and I was dancing around the hotel room because I was so happy to be there. A few things stood out in my first impressions of Guatemala: even though I am only 5'4", I towered over most Guatemalans, and there were police men with machine guns standing at corners of the city. Other than that, I did not have an understanding of the life of the Guatemalan people until I was out of the city and into more rural areas.

When we got to a more remote town, we had our first wheelchair distribution at a church. I could not be of much assistance to building the wheelchairs, but while my father and the other men built wheelchairs, I helped with paperwork and checking people in. I watched men and women crawl, as they had their entire lives, into the church grounds to wait for their wheelchair. I did not know how far these people had come, but for decades these people had been confined to dragging their bodies against and ground and now they were to receive a custom built wheelchair designed to cater to their specific needs. Children came on their parents' back to receive their wheelchair. These parents had dedicated their lives to helping their child, and they were no longer going to have the burden of lifting and carrying their child wherever they went. For the children who received wheelchairs, and their siblings, I brought my collection of Beanie Babies from my childhood. There were also toy cars for the boys and

candy for everyone. The children were, like any child would be, so excited to receive their gifts, but it was for a different reason than having the novelty of a new toy. The children had never had the luxury of many toys or gifts and loved receiving their new belongings. Everyone was so grateful for what we had given them and many were in tears. It made me so happy to see that through our work, we had changed many lives.

After the distribution, we were invited to eat a meal given by one of the families who belonged to the church. They made meat and tortillas on grills made from car parts and I appreciated their effort to thank us. When we were using their outdoor bathroom, we learned that they had purchased toilet paper from a nearby store specifically for our stay. Something so simple in our life was a luxury in their lives.

We also went to a rural elementary school in a forest surrounded area, where the children had very little growing up. With a donation from my high school's Interact Club, which is the high school equivalent to the Rotary Club, school supplies were purchased for every student at the school. Students, who had dressed in their best clothes for our arrival, received a pencil bag with supplies including a toothbrush and toothpaste. I delivered an embarrassing speech using my very limited knowledge of Spanish, which I am sure was almost impossible for them to understand, but they appreciated it anyway. The school had a basketball court that another organization had built, but the school did not have basketballs, so we brought many basketballs and soccer balls for their recess time. The students were all very friendly and grateful, and even though we couldn't communicate well, they still wanted to spend time with us. They were mesmerized by our digital cameras since they had never seen such technology. We would take a picture of them and when they saw their picture on the camera screen there would be an uproar of laughter and talking.

We helped at another location to distribute wheelchairs and I am still grateful for all of my experiences. My times spent with the children in Guatemala inspired me and I found that I want to do something with my life that improves children's lives. Even though I have worked at home raising money for projects such as these, it is more fulfilling to experience the product of my work firsthand and I hope to go on another trip in the future. Through this experience, I

have learned how much it benefits one's life to get out of their everyday surroundings and experience new things, especially helping others. I found what I love to do on that trip.

To donate to Hope Haven International or learn about other volunteer opportunities, visit www.hopehaven.org.

~ALEXANDRA LAWSON



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