

Inkslinger 2011



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The *Inkslinger* is an annual publication of the New England College Writing Department. The essays in this edition have been selected by Writing Department Members to best represent the excellence and diversity found within the first year writing program at New England College.

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Cover photograph by Mark Watman

Being a Boy

Elaine Armstrong

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.*
--William Shakespeare (*As You Like It*)

Months and months of preparation had led up to this point. I had worked on my voice, my walk, my hair, and my outfit, and everything was almost perfect. Except for one thing—the parts. And that’s where the duct tape came in, because duct tape can fix anything. And by anything, they mean *anything*, let me tell you. And so they taped me down—flat. So flat I could barely breathe. We hoped no one would look close enough to realize I was lacking in another department (at least for the first night. We were saving that gag for the final showing). And so I took my first steps out of the closet that served as our green room as Albert—as a boy.

It wasn’t easy being Albert, but it wasn’t really difficult either. He had a lot of the same personality traits as I do: spunky, energetic, annoying, and comical. We also really enjoyed annoying our older sisters as much as humanly possible. We were a great match, Al and I, even though I couldn’t pronounce the town where he was from (Poughkeepsie, NY) until almost the night of the play. We understood each other, even when no one else did. Being Albert, surprisingly enough, was almost easier than being myself. But now that the day was finally here, the day that I would walk out in

front of hundreds of people as a boy, I was incredibly nervous. How had I gotten myself into this? Why, my first time ever on stage, in the first play I was ever in, was I cast as a boy? Well, it all started with the auditions.

For auditions, we had been told to bring a short poem or something of the like to read onstage, as a warm up to get comfortable. I had run to the library only minutes before auditions, and in my hurried search, I had decided to read Shel Silverstein's "Smart"—a choice that would later seem ironic, "Cause I'm his smartest son." Our drama department was short on male actors, so we were asked how many of us girls would be willing to play male parts. I raised my hand tentatively, hoping that I would somehow manage to get a part at all. And so I was cast as the quirky eleven-year-old son of Edna and Herb, a part that was central to the play. Another reason why I was now Albert was because he needed to speak in a robot voice in various parts of the play—and I had been the only one able to execute the voice.

Soon, we began rehearsing, which could get pretty interesting. Half of the time, I would show up in some of the most girlish clothes I had and rehearse the part as Albert. It got more and more interesting as time went on—I had walking lessons from the few guys on set, was told where my pants needed to sit, and had to go searching for clothes to wear. I found them through one of my best friends, who is a huge tomboy. She is always wearing guy's Carhartts and baggy shirts—and she had the perfect pair of tan cargo shorts for me to borrow. As the play drew closer, we began to work more on my costume, which consisted of silver bobble antennae, a baseball

cap, a blue shirt, cargo shorts, a pair of superman boxers, and a pair of sneakers. More fun than the costume were my props—lizards and bugs, a magnifying glass and an old camera. Dress rehearsals began and I worked on how to tuck my hair just right under the baseball cap to give my hair a slightly shaggy, boy-cut appearance. It worked pretty well, but a few of my cast members and close friends decided that I needed a little junk, so they taped a softball to me to make me look like I had a ridiculously huge package, especially when I was supposed to be an eleven-year-old boy. They found it to be hilarious, because I kept having to reposition the softball so it wouldn't fall out, essentially making the “junk” even more realistic (come on guys, you know you do it). So one of our many last night pranks was born.

The ultimate test was born the day of opening night. We were told we could, by choice, wear our costumes to school for the day, to better promote the play. I got up really early—it seems strange, but it took me much longer to get ready as a boy than it normally does as a girl—and donned my entire Albert outfit, sans antenna and props, tucked my hair up under my temporary red sox cap, grabbed a baggy sweatshirt, and headed to school. Everyone's head turned as I walked through the halls, and a rustling wind of whispers followed me everywhere I went. I thought I was promoting the play well, until I arrived at my first class to hear classmates (who I had gone to school with since kindergarten) asking each other who the new kid was. A few of the girls even mentioned how I was kind of cute. This went on for a few minutes, until one of them finally turned to speak directly to me, to introduce herself. “Hi, I'm Lindsey—Wait.

Why do you look so familiar?” I couldn’t help but laugh as everyone came to realize I was actually one of their long-time classmates and not a new student. It turned out to be a rather fun day, and I was able to further assert myself as Albert—if I was able to fool people who had known me since kindergarten, it shouldn’t be too hard to fool everyone else, should it?

In the long run, it wasn’t too hard. I stepped out under the bright lights with my casted family on opening night in full guise to instant laughter. The laughter may have been caused by our outfits—those silver bobble antennae did look pretty funny—or by the fact that my cargo shorts were drooping just low enough to give the audience a full shot of the Superman symbol on the butt of my boxers; I guess we will never know for sure. Everyone laughed as I delivered my personal favorite line in robot monotone, “I am Dac-ron from the gal-ax-y Pol-ye-es-ter. I am a teen-age an-droid. For-tun-ate-ly I have no hor-mones so life is rel-a-tive-ly plea-sant” (Gleason). Opening night went off without a hitch—unless you count my “dad” forgetting the one prop we needed to survive in the desert that was Latigo, TX—the water. It was a good mistake though; everyone thought it was hilarious that “dad” locked the water in the car.

The next showing went even better, and before we knew it, it was closing night. Which means one thing to our drama cast—prank night. So prank number one—making little Albert look as though he was impossibly well-endowed. This is where the duct tape came into play again, except this time, there was a softball involved as well.

Just like that one time at rehearsal, a few of my cast mates made me a duct tape g-string to hold in the “package.” The system worked well until the very end of the play. In the final act of the play, the softball decided it no longer wanted to be in my pants. It rolled down my leg and across the stage floor to the feet of my friend, who then, in character, picked up the ball and said, “I don’t know how I feel about this...” then set it back down and continued with the scene as though nothing had happened.

In truth, being a boy wasn’t something to be survived—it was something to be enjoyed. Anyone who has ever played dress-up or worn a Halloween costume knows how fun it can be to be someone other than yourself, even if just for a few moments. It can be even more fun when the character you are portraying is of the opposite sex. In the end, I was glad to have gotten an inside look at how the other half lives.

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Kashf

Christy Bennett

A man goes out on the beach and sees that it is covered with starfish that have washed up in the tide. A little boy is walking along, picking them up and throwing them back into the water.

“What are you doing, son?” the man asks. “You see how many starfish there are? You’ll never make a difference.”

The boy paused thoughtfully, and picked up another starfish and threw it into the ocean.

“It sure made a difference to that one,” he said.

– Hawaiian parable (qtd. in Kristof and WuDunn 45)

Adversity

That is a big word, adversity. A word I didn’t understand until I had to overcome the mountain placed in front of me while visiting home for my homecoming weekend. My daddy is sick, and I have to come to terms with the fact that every time I say goodbye to him, it may be the last time I hear his voice, hold his hand, or see his face.

Lee K. Abbott, who wrote “The True Story of Why I Do What I Do” about why he writes, captured how I felt when I found out my daddy was sick: “The facts were clear to me, not the flesh” (Abbott 87). My father makes me laugh, he makes me cry, but most of all, he makes me understand the true meaning of the word adversity. He knows that sitting in a hospital bed hundreds of miles away from me kills me, but he is showing me how to overcome adversity, both physically and emotionally.

Beauty

The word that gives me a sense of worth in the morning is beauty. I know that

I am beautiful; my daddy told me so as he saw me walking toward him after I was all dressed up for homecoming my freshman year. He cried that day, and told me I was beautiful. That was the first time I had seen my daddy cry, and I thought he was sad, but he took me in his arms and laughed through the tears only to say to me: “Christy, I’m not sad, I am so proud of you for getting here. You are beautiful, and I love you.” That made my make-up run all over his white shirt. He laughed at that too.

He tells me I am beautiful now too, even through the oxygen mask placed over his nose and mouth, and that is when I truly understood what beauty meant. I call him handsome, because I understand that beauty starts on the inside and works its way out. He is the most handsome man I know, and absolutely the most amazing man I love. Alice Walker put words to my thoughts in her essay “Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self.” She gave me self-confidence and helped me understand that “[I am] beautiful, whole, and free” (Walker 623).

Laughter

My family takes laughter very seriously. We have to laugh, no matter how badly we feel; if our heads are split in half, or if we want to curl up into a ball and cry, we must laugh. My daddy has the best laugh around. He laughs from his stomach, and because he has white hair and a big stomach, I always thought he was Santa. His belly jiggles like a bowl of Jell-O when he laughs hard, but the best part is when he can’t stop laughing for a few minutes, and he starts to tear up. I love seeing my daddy laugh hard enough to cry – his laugh makes me laugh. Even if I don’t know what he is

laughing about, I have to join in.

Now when daddy laughs, his laugh hurts him. He cries not because he is laughing hard; he cries because his body can't handle the strain on his organs. With our family, any time we are all together, someone is bound to laugh. We all try not to make daddy laugh because we know it hurts, but we can't help it. Once he starts laughing, and the tears roll down his face, I have to look away because I can't handle thinking about my father in that much pain.

Hugs

Put me on an island with no food, water, or people, I would die of the lack of physical contact before I died of starvation or thirst. I need to be hugged. Maybe it's because as a child I was held all the time, maybe it's because I love holding people, I really don't know. I love being held by my boyfriend, but more than that, I love being held by my daddy. My daddy knows that special place on my shoulders that he can put his arms that no one else knows. He knows how to hold me in that special way that no one else can. But now he can't hug me. He can't pick me up and swing me around like a little girl anymore. He can't watch the Steelers game in his special chair at home. He can't get up and do our special high-five that ends in a hug every time they score a touchdown. But most of all, he can't hold me like he use to. Because he's too sick.

Starfish

In *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn describe the adversity that women overcome daily. I admire all of the stories in the book, but as I was drawn back into the book recently, I realized that women truly hold up half the sky. Women are oppressed every day, and most men and women outside the third world have no idea what is going on right under our noses. The stories of change, adversity, and pain moved me, and I know what I am going to end up doing with my life now; I'm going to write for newspapers, magazines, or any other forum that will take my writing about women in oppressive situations. My daddy may not have a chance to read *Half the Sky*; he may not even have a chance to read any of my work.

I've had to face a lot of adversity throughout my life, but recently, it seems as if I have had to deal with more issues than normal. First, college was hard to get into. Next, I don't know how I will pay for school. After that, eighteen credits! I may as well just throw myself off the covered bridge! Death by freezing would be less suffering than I am dealing with. The workload is suffocating me. But! Let's add something else. My daddy is sick.

I found out that Tedd Bennett of One Coleman Lane, Sterling, Virginia needs a liver before New Year's Day, or he won't see me get married, he won't see his first grandchild, he won't even see me graduate college. The first one kills me. Who will walk me down the aisle when "here comes the bride" starts playing? Who will hold

my hand and swing me around the dance floor in my big white dress as “Daughters” by John Mayer plays for my father-daughter dance? I hate having to imagine not having my daddy walk me down the aisle and give me away, or not being able to dance with him at my wedding. I need my daddy to live; I’d miss him too much.

I think it’s funny that no one really knows how much they love someone until it’s almost too late. It’s like a game of jeopardy. You wait until you’re sure you know the answer, buzz in, and hope to God you aren’t wrong. As Abbott says so well: “happily-ended or not, stories are the truth we leave behind, like crumbs, to say how we’ve come and what was there to see” (Abbott 87). The adversity isn’t mine. The story isn’t mine. But nonetheless, I want to make a difference to *my* starfish. I want to be able to throw my starfish into the ocean and hope that I made a difference to him.

Kashf

My daddy is sick. He needs a liver. I’m the match. “*Kashf* means ‘miracle,’ and at first it seemed a miracle would be needed to make it work” (Kristof and WuDunn 189). I need a miracle for my daddy. When winter break comes, if he doesn’t have a donor, I will go into surgery to save my daddy. If he doesn’t have someone to give him a piece of their liver to him, then I will be sliced open, and I will give him life, just as he gave me mine.

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Battling Loneliness

Edward Brand

The first thing I noticed was the smell. Putrid and choking, I can only describe the air in and around Osan Air Base as a combination of the stench that arise from rotten garbage and animal manure. Beyond these malodorous vapors, the Republic of Korea is a beautiful country with mountains on the east coast and beaches on the west. Centuries old construction dots the landscape. Temples, bridges, walls and castles are everywhere. There is much to see and experience. Still, there was that smell. And it let me know that I was far away from home.

The military, regardless of branch, classifies most tours of duty in Korea as one-year unaccompanied tours. 'Unaccompanied' is military-speak for 'No Family Allowed.' That, coupled with a time difference of 14 or 15 hours ahead of Eastern Time, depending on the time of year, can make these tours very rough for any G.I. During my nine and a half years of service, I had the opportunity to experience this phenomenon twice.

Most of us had a means for counting down the days until we flew out. Some used regular calendars hung on the walls of their barracks, each morning 'X-ing off' the preceding day. Others carried in their pockets maps of the U.S. that were divided into 365 sections to be colored in with each passing day. No matter the method however, counting down the days did nothing to curb the loneliness that comes with

being away from your family.

We all had to find a way to cope with that loneliness. It would be a very long year if one failed to make the adjustment. There were many ways of doing this. Some people spent their time in the gym. Others poured themselves into various base organizations. A less popular option, requiring a more adventurous type, was to travel throughout the country and take in all the culture “The Land of the Morning Calm” had to offer. I, however, went a different, and by far the most common, route.

Outside most U.S. military installations, you will find two things: shops and bars. In Korea, we called this area outside Osan ‘The Ville.’ From custom tailored suits to cheesy souvenirs, The Ville had everything. And if you could not find it, someone could make it. The best restaurant was, of course, located on the left-hand side of one of the many side alleys (aren’t they all?), with the second-best restaurant on the right-hand side of the same alley. I did my share of shopping, mostly for clothing and the odd piece of luggage but the bars received most of my attention and money. One in particular, was usually my first, and eventually last, stop of the night.

Xanadu was a seedy looking place from the outside, and just as seedy looking on the inside. Years before, the owner used old comic book pages and covers as decoupage on all the horizontal and vertical surfaces save the chairs. It reminded me of the inside of the very first Subway restaurant that opened in my hometown, with old newspapers serving as wallpaper. The main bar area had one pool table, and the bulk of the bar’s seating area. If you took a hairpin turn to the right as you walked in

the door, you entered the back room with six dartboards where I spent most of my time.

Despite its apparent seediness, Xanadu was a home away from home for me. This was the place where everyone knew my name. The owner, Mike, had a soft spot for the members of my unit and those of us that were regulars called his wife Mama. Mama was a beautiful woman who spoke very clear English and very fast Korean. Always ready with a hug or scolding whenever I needed one, Mama was what every second Mom should be. She was almost as good at darts as Mike was, and would prove it on a routine basis, much to the chagrin of my wallet.

The Ville had, and likely still has, a robust dart league. There were several levels of competition, ranging from A-league at the top, on down to G-league. The first team I played on, 'Willing and Able', was sponsored by Xanadu. We all had skills that were better than passable, but as we lacked the consistency that upper level teams exhibited, we found ourselves in D-League. Every Wednesday night we would warm up with the other team from Xanadu before heading off for the weekly match. After each match, we would meet up with the other team back at "The 'Du'" for celebration or commiseration.

As always, it comes back to Xanadu.

Holidays can be especially difficult for those stationed overseas. During both tours in Korea, I found myself with time off on Thanksgiving Day. Luckily, I had my adopted family at Xanadu and did not have to eat in the chow hall. On both occasions,

Mike and Mama opened the bar early and treated us to a catered turkey dinner with all of the fixings. Typical of their generous nature, all that stopped in were welcome to partake of the feast, not just the regulars. The regulars did not just take; we gave as well.

Shortly after I arrived in Korea for my second tour of duty, the regulars had the opportunity to reciprocate the love and support Mike and Mama had shown us. Thanks to the egregious actions of some under-age nincompoop, Mike received a letter from the base leadership threatening sanctions if security personnel encountered any under-age drinking at Xanadu. After hearing about the letter, a few of us decided that we would volunteer our services as doormen and Mike instituted a 100% I.D. check to enter the bar. Someone had launched an assault on our home and we had to defend it.

The Xanadu was everything to us. It was everything to me.

Much like the army perched on the northern side of the 38th Parallel, loneliness was an omnipresent specter, waiting for me to lower my guard so it could sweep in for a decisive victory. Finding the Xanadu and the sense of family that came with it enabled me to maintain my defenses and stave off the loneliness that was ever encroaching on my heart.

I just wish I had been able to go a third round with it.

The Girl Who Stared at the Sun

Rebecca Gould

Life is full of winding roads. Sometimes there are difficult situations that we are forced to face and in the process they may even change us. But the good thing is that if we have the will to take them on we all pull through. This is a story of my walk down just one of those winding roads—my battle to feel accepted with a disorder called epilepsy.

While I have had quite a few experiences that have been tough and resulted in some sort of change, there is one particular event that I will never forget. That is the day I was diagnosed with a seizure disorder. I was about twelve years old and enjoying outdoor recess with the other fifth graders at Spofford Pond School. I was playing tag with my two good friends who were identical twins named Jessica and Melissa Bray. It was a particularly sunny and clear day. I was running fast from Jessica, trying not to become “it.” I was laughing and content as I ran through the mulch with Jess on my heels. Then, suddenly, out of the blue, a weird feeling came over me. The field started to spin and I was very dizzy. My head felt as it does when your foot falls to sleep. I felt something pulling down steadfast on my arm, when in reality there was nothing there. A strange sensation took over my body. I could hear Jessica calling my name,” Rebecca are you alright? Can you hear me?” But as hard as I tried, I simply could not respond. The words would not come out. Jessica and Melissa were two overly sensitive twin sisters and both began to cry hysterically; they were afraid

something awful was happening to me. I could not communicate with anyone.

Teachers appeared and students watched in awe. Everyone wondered what had gone wrong. The principal, Mrs. Harrison, frantically raced out as I started falling to the ground. The school nurse came running over and had called for help. Next I knew, recess had ended and the swarm of faces around me dwindled.

Suddenly, there was a flashing red light and the loud sound of sirens pierced my ears. As I recovered and things grew less blurry, standing before me was a man wearing a yellow suit. He stood strong, but looked very nervous. He lifted me up and tightly strapped me down on an ambulance stretcher. A cold feeling came over me and my head throbbed. Terrified and confused, I hoped and prayed that this wouldn't happen again. Then a bright red fire truck parked in front of me. There was also a tall police officer standing by the window talking to the principal. My mother eventually appeared, but she wasn't herself. She had a look of terror in her eyes and small tears streamed down her cheeks. My heart raced at the speed of light and I felt sick to my stomach as the ambulance bumped up and down. I was driven to a hospital about a half an hour away. After hours of waiting, test results showed that I had a seizure disorder.

I was monitored in the hospital for a few days and prescribed a medication to prevent this from happening again. The pills were hard to swallow at first, but I have been taking them ever since then and my seizures are under control. Although I have had a couple of seizures over the past few years, none can compare to the one I had

at school on that sunny day in October.

This incident changed who I was to everyone at school. When I returned to Spofford Pond, my classmates stared at me as if I were an alien. My teachers treated me much kinder than they ever had before. Even Mrs. Wiles didn't yell at me for leaving my jacket in the hallway, as she had always done. Jessica and Melissa always seemed more nervous around me and worried that I might seizure again. Strangely, they played with me less often than before. What's worse is that a few of the boys on the school bus even laughed about the incident and called me "The girl who stared too long at the sun."

Before this had happened, I had always been quiet and unnoticed. I carried on with my day, minding my own business, completing my schoolwork, and socializing with a few of the quieter girls in class. Somehow, things changed fast for me that day. At least in my mind, I didn't feel like I fit it anymore. I was different somehow and even my two best friends seemed nervous around me. It was humiliating when the boys laughed and upsetting when the girls asked, "Are you alright?" whenever I wasn't paying attention. Upset and embarrassed, I spoke to fewer and fewer people. I stopped enjoying elementary school and especially hated recess time. A few years later in high school, things seemed to return to relatively normal again.

When I look back on this day now, it is hard to say whether or not people were really treating me differently or whether I was so embarrassed that I was acting differently. Whichever the case, epilepsy seemed to have changed my childhood

somehow. It has also made me much more sensitive to people who have disabilities -- to those who may be different. I know from experience that everyone in life wants the same thing – to fit in and be accepted. I promised myself from this day forward that I would never leave anyone out and I try very hard not to.

Surviving the Repair

Luke Johnson

The old Rover turned over and started the first time. Thomas ran over to the driver door and looked at the oil light. It fluttered and then stayed solid red. I was still near the hood and was looking at an oil pressure gauge that Thomas had rigged up. The gauge didn't read anything. I was sincerely sorry for Thomas; this was the last of many attempts to prime the engine's oil pressure. This was it for my brother, hands bleeding, oily and sweaty from anger and frustration. Why would the old classic not prime? He had tried everything, packing the oil pump with Vaseline, using thicker oil, and making a special tool to spin the pump gears. Two months had gone by since he bought it in a sketchy area of Boston for a thousand bucks. He drove it back to New Hampshire and instantly dropped another two thousand just for a raised suspension and new tires.

Thomas was infuriated. "What the hell is wrong with this?" he shouted at me. "I give up; give me a Volvo any day."

This shocked me. I always thought Land Rovers were king. My dad preached it on a daily basis to anyone who would listen. We were a Rover crazed family. Seven Land Rovers sat around the yard, some working and some needing repair. I was brought up fixing Rovers; I could rebuild a hub before being able to spell 'equinox.' It

was what I loved and still love to do on a Sunday afternoon. I had been thinking about getting a Rover myself when Thomas bought his classic. At sixteen, the time had come for me to get a Rover. It clicked. Thomas's Rover was the one for me, with its thirty-three inch tires and sturdy frame. In that moment, I fell in love with it. The time was right to make a move!

Thomas was still pouting about his failure and occasionally cursed at the Rover in low menacing breaths. "Thomas, I can take this junk off your hands for a thousand," I said, still pretending the truck was hopeless. If I could make a deal with him when he was still fuming I could possibly be a winner. "A thousand?" Do you actually have that money?" he questioned in a tone of caution. "If you shake now you'll have it tomorrow in cash," I said, occasionally passing a fake pitiful eye on the Rover. "You've got a deal, but get Mom's okay," Thomas said with an air of doubt. He was right; mom thought that having a car at sixteen was a distraction from schoolwork and my Eagle Scout Project. A phone call would have to be made at just the right moment to convince my mom. I decided to put a learning spin on the call and persuade her that fixing the Rover would greatly enhance my knowledge of mechanics.

The cell phone never felt so scary. It rang and mom picked up. "Hello Luke, is Thomas still at the Mill?" The call dragged on and every passing moment was torture. I finally decided that I had to cut to the chase. "Mom, I want Thomas's Rover. We have already agreed on a fair price." "A car at sixteen. No way," she snapped back. "You need to spend your time concentrating on your school work and Eagle Project."

So there was her answer. My dreams had been shattered and the deal was cooked! That Rover sat pathetically in the yard for another winter, left to rot. In the meantime, Thomas broke the family Rover tradition, choosing to buy a seven hundred dollar Volvo 740. The purchase of the Volvo drove Thomas to sell the Rover to my dad for just over a thousand. I was not to be stopped though—the Rover would be mine if it were the last thing I would do.

Later that year my whole family traveled to Vermont to the annual British Invasion car show. I used that weekend to lobby for myself. I acted real interested in Rovers. I would explain to my mom the difference between various classic Rovers, acting like I were an expert. Finally, I decided it was time to make my move. Over the winter I had raised a thousand bucks by working for a neighbor, which is quite painful at seven dollars an hour. Dad was in a first-class mood that evening and I knew it was time to make the move. I cautiously asked what was going to happen to the Rover. “Oh I’ll probably change it into a plow truck.” This was unacceptable in my mind, so I offered a thousand and my dad accepted after only a moment of consideration. The fantasy had come true; I was the proud owner of an old and broken down 1990 Range Rover.

Reality hit soon after the initial handshake. I would have to fix this Rover that my brother had wasted so much time on. I would have to seek wisdom from the master, my dad. Later that day, I casually brought up the subject of oil pressure. How could my classic be such a pig to prime? Dad told me to attack the problem like a

detective. How did my brother drive the Rover to New Hampshire without any oil pressure issues? When did it lose pressure to begin with? When my brother brought the Rover to New Hampshire, the oil pan seal had a small leak in it. He jacked it up and removed the pan. For some reason or another the truck sat for a week until a new seal arrived. He installed the seal but there was no oil pressure when he started the Rover. This was understandable; oil usually drains from the oil pump if the engine is left open for days. So Thomas followed the manual's procedure of disassembling the pump and packing it full of Vaseline. The Vaseline creates suction when the pump gears rotate, therefore sucking the oil into and through the pump. Another idea was rigging a drill to the oil pump gear and spinning it very fast.

I learned very quickly that these “fail-proof” solutions were not in fact not what was advertised. V8 engines have a tendency to run at low oil pressures. The manual stated that 15psi was good for the engine and 5psi would do at idle. This meant that a small leak anywhere in the engine could have meant no pressure. But I slowly began to think that Thomas could have damaged a part when he packed the pump full of Vaseline. But what part? Once again I referred to the Rover master. “How about the shaft that spins the pump—maybe Thomas damaged it somehow?” I questioned. Dad thought for a moment and then stated that the only way to find the problem was to scrutinize all the parts like a QC inspector. I removed the pump and could not see anything out of order. Starting to lose my cool, I called the master yet again. And once again, he calmly answered my question with one of his own. “Did

you check the actual sleeve where the pump shaft sits?”

I had not. Dad checked and found that Thomas had forced the shaft up the sleeve and had made a large scratch along the way. “That’s the problem right there.” I was shocked that such a little problem could kill a 4-liter V8. The worst part of this realization was the fact that the scratch was in the timing cover, which meant I would have to not only find a replacement, but basically demo the front of the engine.

And so began a long and rough road to owning a running Rover. Funding would prove to be one of the largest challenges of the project. It wasn’t long after finding the scratch in the timing cover that I got fired from my job. Two years of faithful service and hard work did not get me off that misplaced hole I dug with the tractor. I had worked so hard to reach that stage of my Rover repair, only to get fired and left broke. This was a mental low. I would spend hours after school, just writing and rewriting the price of parts that were needed for my beloved classic. The repair was becoming a fixation! Some nights I would just dream of having the seals and parts needed for the repair, only to be crushed by reality when awakened.

Then one Friday night my family was eating at the dinner table. Dad was enjoying his burrito and casually asked me. “Luke, how much are those parts you needed for your Range Rover?”

“About six hundred bucks.” I replied in weary tone.

“Well order you parts tomorrow and you can use this card,” dad said in the same casual tone in between chewing.

“What!” I said, my fork dropping onto my plate in shock. “But why?”

“You deserve the money for parts after the help you’ve given us this summer,” he said.

“Thanks,” was all I could think to say over and over again. It was monumental moment in my life. I now had all the money needed to fix my Rover.

First I purchased a used timing cover off Ebay and the multiple seals needed to rebuild the Rover. I broke a number of parts during removal that I also spent cash replacing. A particularly bad experience was when I broke a bolt during the removal of the timing cover. It was on a morning where I was in an impatient mood. Ideally I should have used an impact wrench to remove the timing cover bolts, but ‘haste made waste’ (as my dad always said) that morning. The snapping sound from a bolt and the instantly limp wrench was enough to make any mechanic contemplate suicide. Many deep breaths and the retrieving of a drill to bore out the remaining bolt was what needed to be done. I tried to keep the drill as straight as possible while applying a good amount of pressure on the bolt. Once the old bolt looked to be drilled completely out of the hole, I ran a tap down and had a new thread.

Once the new timing cover was in place I reinstalled all of the parts that had to be removed to fit the cover. The fan, radiator, AC pump, and all the other vital parts were relatively easy to install. Then came the timing of the engine. I had never timed an engine before, and it was a nightmare for me. It took me four hours just to reseal the distributor. Once the entire engine was together it was time to test it. I rigged up

an oil pressure sensor under the engine so I would know instantly whether I wasted dozens of hours. In a way it felt like a repeat of the last time my brother tried in vain—my hands were oily, sweaty, and I cut my left hand in the fray. I reached for the ignition, but just sat there for a few minutes. I was too scared to try to start it. Just like Thomas when he tried before, I was scared of the same failure that my brother had felt. I turned the key. The motor made a whiny sound as it turned over slowly. I could hear the life slowly draining from starter, slower and slower until it would not engage at all. A low battery was almost more painful than pure failure. Now, I would have to wait 4 hours until the battery trickle charged.

I opened the garage door and charged over to my dad's rebuilt Rover. I would have to "borrow" his battery so I could find if the last 6 months of toil was in vain. I pulled the battery leads off and bolted back to the shed with battery in hand. *Was I going insane?* I was seriously desperate for success and needed this thing to start. Once dad's battery was attached, I sprinted to the driver's seat. As I sat there, I became more and more skeptical. Hope and optimism were starting to drain out of my system. I finally realized that I had nothing to lose so I closed my eyes and turned the key. The starter motor made the same whiny rhythm as before, slowly dragging my emotions down with every rotation of the crank shaft.

Then it happened—it fired to life, smoke pouring out of the exhaust. I was ecstatic knowing that the engine had started, but it wouldn't matter if the oil didn't prime. I snapped out of my trance and charged to look under the hood. The dented

old gauge was at zero. “What the hell is wrong now?” I bellowed, thinking that my excitement was for naught. However, I had forgotten that it took longer than 30 seconds for the priming process to begin. Slowly, the gauge climbed to 5psi at idle. I was so overjoyed that the long process was successful that I couldn’t speak. I could only stare at the oil gauge, knowing that I now owned a fully functional Range Rover. I had survived the ordeal and could now show off the truck my brother couldn’t fix.

During my repair project I was sure that the Rover would not prime. However, the ordeal helped me see that learning is a process that required me to push myself. As I closed the hood and turned off the engine, I realized that the long stressful project that had taken me months to complete had given me a new confidence to tackle and embark on larger projects related to mechanics.

Black and Blue

Ariel L. Matteson

Florida. The summer of 2006. The weather is hot and humid to the point that it is unbearable. I am in Florida to spend three weeks with my mother and my siblings. My life is full of happiness and I'm thankful to have the opportunity to visit. I have no expectation about what will happen this summer. I never expect that my attacker will be my own mother. Days pass, I notice the tension and anger. Her bad temper. While I am looking at her face, I'm thinking that she would be fine as the days pass. I am wrong.

Two years have passed. All I ever want to do is to scream at the top of my lungs: "I hate you!" All I ever feel is anger, pain, and misery. As the anger develops within me, tension is beginning to affect my entire family. My desire is to show the pain that I hold. Every day I'm fighting with my family. I refuse to speak about the incident because I'm extremely stubborn about needing help.

Couple days left with my mother before I go back home to New Hampshire. I'm excited to go back to a land which I am familiar with. I wake up one morning, brush my hair and get ready for the day my world changed into a nightmare. The door opens and my mother walks into the room. I see a face full of hatred. She says,

“Where is the paper with numbers on it!” I look at my mother, I am completely clueless. Then I reply to her question, “Mom, I have no clue what you are talking about.” I have no idea about this paper or even its own existence. *Flash! Hit!* I’m in complete shock. The hits continue. I push my mother away from me. Hope to escape. “Mother please stop! What is going on?” She grabs my hair tightly and I can feel my scalp, from my hair, being pulled. I push away as hard as I can. Her hands grip me and nail me against the kitchen wall. Lost breath. Death. As death began to creep upon me, my adrenaline is raised within. I place my hand across my mother’s hands and remove them from my neck. I yell outside, “Someone help me! I am being abused!” Then I run to a house across the street. I am safe for awhile. Until my mother has the opportunity to hurt me again.

Four years have passed. My anger is slowly destroyed through the years and finally I talk to my stepmother, Hannah, and my father about the pain, the suffering, and the hatred towards my mother. Sometimes I cry about the abuse. I cannot believe what I went through four years ago.

Now I realize how precious life is. Life should be treated with love, not bitterness or hatred. This past summer, I vowed to myself that I will never hurt my children or any family members and only show compassion rather than hatred and wickedness. During the time I was abused, hope was still out there. My hope was and is my father.

Fear. My mother has me again after hours passed inside of someone else's house. She throws me into the car while screaming "I am taking you to the hospital! You are mentally insane! I am putting you into a mental institute!" After I hear those words screamed at me I am scared. Tremble.

At the hospital, I am in a room with a doctor. My mother screams at the doctor and states how mentally unstable I am and need an evaluation. Looking at the doctors as the tears fall down my cheeks, I say with a trembling voice, "Please don't listen to her. She abused me. I'm not mentally unstable." The doctor's eyes open wide as if she sees the fear in me. Then I walk into a hospital room. Cry. Pray to God to save me from this torment.

After being tested, a social worker comes in and talks to me. She tells me to go back home with my mother. I look at her with fear, "I can't! I don't trust my mother. She's abused me and I don't feel safe around her." When I finish talking, the social worker leaves the room. My mother tries to enter. However, the police are around my door and refuse to allow her in. The social worker comes back and tells me that my father is coming. Rescue. My eyes are filled with tears of joy. As I wait for my father, the police officers come in and ask about the event that occurred and I tell them exactly what happened that morning. Time. Minutes pass into hours. I hear footsteps come down the hallway and my dad's image appears. Safety. I leave the hospital with my father and come back to New Hampshire.

As I write this paper I cry. Because I was abused by my mother and was covered in black and blue. Now looking back I see that I became a strong individual. It was the most scary event to occur in my life, however, it helped me to become the person that I am now. I hope for the best and move on each day.

Dear Cancer, I Hate You

Shyanne Millette

Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends.

-The Beatles

April 3, 1992-The Beginning of Shy-Mike

Me being here is half a mistake. My mom wanted a baby so went off of birth control without telling my dad. Then nine months later I came, and ten months after that dad left. Dad was too young and “I think he was scared” (Jordan 357). My mother was a drug addict and my dad was too young to care about me. My Gram took me in, “And now it suddenly seemed that [my] life could be saved” (Kristof and WuDunn 111).

I often refer to myself as a modern day Holden Caulfield. “That’s all I do all day. I’d just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it’s crazy, but that’s the only thing I’d really like to be” (Salinger 173). This is what I would like to do: I would like to be a teacher in the end. This has been my dream as long as I can remember. I do not want children to go through what I did.

August 28, 2009- Dear *Cancer*, I Hate You

The sun was out and I was sitting on the red porch of our beige trailer and I

was letting the light breeze blow through my toes. It was the typical summer day, just two days before my senior year, and Gramp's birthday. He was suffering from small cell lung *Cancer*. This was the man who told me stories about World War II, about being a chef (he made the best egg McMuffins and home-fries), who loved my Gram and loved fishing and horses (both of these things he indulged in with my little sister, but for me it was mowing lawns). I remember when he had his own business and I used to drive one of his mowers, I was never that good at it, but he always brought me along. Even as a baby he had me ride with him on his old John Deere. I assume that is where I acquired the love for tractors. Gramps was a man who worked his whole life, and to hear the word *Cancer* shattered my heart. What hurt the most was that Gramps had had *Cancer* spots on his liver for a year.

That day though, Gramps decided he would live until my graduation. The doctors gave him two to three months and graduation was nine months away. Times were not looking good, "I wanted to be strong. I never wanted to be weak again as long as I lived" (Jordan 360). I was giving Gramps the strength to live and he was teaching me to never look back. The world in front of me was changing quickly.

September 14, 2009- They Killed the Dog Too

I had just gotten back from coaching a soccer game in Franconia, when I received a phone call that my dog of seven years was having breathing problems and was foaming at the mouth. "It [was] she that [made] life bearable" (Walker 620). I jumped into the passenger seat of my Gram's car and our family friend Cretia drove

until we ended up at my mom's small apartment. Mom's boyfriend at the time, the equivalent to Satan, was sitting in the kitchen. My sister always referred to him as "It." He gave me the creeps, and he did not even lift a finger to help. We lifted my 170 pound German Shepherd-Rottweiler mix into the back of my Gram's green Jeep Cherokee and we started the thirty minute drive for the veterinarians. I sat in the trunk with my dog, and as tears covered my face I held onto her. I could feel her heart lightly beat and her hot breath hit my arm, making my arm hair stand on end. Then ten minutes into the drive her breathing stopped. She died right there in my arms, I got on the phone with my boyfriend, Francis, and told him that I thought Annie had died but I wasn't sure. Francis did not know what to say but to just have him there with me on the phone was helping me deal with the task at hand: Annie had died in my arms.

March 2010- Going Down

Life was moving quickly, *Cancer* was slowly killing my grandfather, and I was approaching the real world. "It seemed that I had everything to do at once" (Jordan 355). My sister's birthday had just passed, and senior year was becoming slightly enjoyable. Yet, too quickly things had to change, or it would not be my normal life. Mom decided she was moving to North Carolina to start over and when she told us my little sister, Sarah, was in tears, and I began to wonder what I had ever done wrong to deserve this. Again, I turned to friendship to get through this. Sarah was that friend because she was the only one who could understand the pain. For weeks I blamed

myself for my mother's leaving, and I decided I hated her, and I was done with her. This was not the way I wanted to end my senior year; Mom was leaving her father for my Gram and me to care for. *Cancer* was killing my Gramps, but I thought that all this stress would be the death of all of us.

Thursday, June 10, 2010- Pitiful Community

Gram helped me to be the first generation in my family to go to college, and this is a huge deal. I graduated fourth in my class and had to give a speech at class night. This was my chance to prove to the community that I did it. I had lived past their stereotypes. I lived in a town where everyone knew everything about everyone and my speech would eventually pass to those who were not there. I spoke to the community members who were present about how I made it to where I was without them and with little help from the school. I made them realize how pitiful they were. I wanted everyone to know how proud I was that I graduated top in my class, I wanted them to know I had battles to fight every day. I was different, and "...what I wanted to do was I wanted to live my life so that people would know unmistakably that I am alive..." (Jordan 360). I also wanted them to know I was just as surprised as anyone at my accomplishment, but I was proud. I did just that at the end of the speech, I said, "Dream as big as you can, and know that you can achieve anything." With that I received my standing ovation, and for a moment my life stood still.

June 2010- I Hate Hospitals

Quickly, Gramp's *Cancer* had moved to his brain. He became so sick that he was

admitted to the hospital, and mom came home in May to take care of my Gramps in his last month. Gramps had a decision in his head that once he felt the ground with his feet he could stand, but this was impossible. Just two days before graduation Gramps went into the Veteran's Affairs Hospital and I decided I would visit him, even though I had a secret fear of hospitals. I feared them because I do not like seeing people in sick states who were healthy the day before. This was a fear I would have to overcome. I was eighteen years old and I knew I would have many encounters in hospitals throughout my lifetime. I decided once again my boyfriend, Francis, would help me.

I went in to Gramp's room and at this point my Gramps did not recall much. Yet, when I went into the room he knew who I was and why he was alive. In two days I was graduating and he was going to be there. I did not get very far into the conversation when Gramps said, "Life is not fair." I saw him cry and I broke down. I sat in his wheelchair as he lay on his bed and we listened to the bed deflate and then inflate while he lay there looking at the ceiling. I stared up at the same spot while Francis rubbed my back. I believe in that one spot we both saw God or maybe the spirit of Grampie's Momma and we knew he would make it.

Saturday, June 12, 2010- Big Girls Do Cry

On graduation day I did not cry because I was out of Woodsville High School. I celebrated that fact actually because I hated that hell hole. Instead, I cried because my Grampie had made it to graduation. He made it to the day he wanted. He

presented me with a scholarship as he sat in his wheelchair with my blue John Deere blanket draped over his legs. It was an American Legion scholarship because Gramps was a Navy man.

June 14, 2010- Home To Momma

My cell phone probably went off from nine at night until eleven when I went to bed, but I did not know that. I had been in staff training all day. Then I received the call from my boyfriend and my mother that Grampie had died. It did not affect me as I thought it would because I knew he was doing what he wanted. He was getting back to his Momma. With his time on earth he got what he wanted. I returned home the day after he died and the house was already being remodeled for us to move on. Yet, the wind was blowing the same way it did the day I found out Gramps had *Cancer*. I let it dry my tears instead of blow between my toes.

September 6, 2010- I Did It

Sometimes adversity is what you need to face in order to become successful.

-Zig Ziglar

I am the first in my family to go to college. This was a feat few thought I would make, but I did. I have done the unimaginable and two of the most important people in my life saw it, Francis, and my Gramps. Sometimes when the wind blows just right, or someone's mowing the lawn, I smell Grampie. And I still live. We all do, really. We cannot give up when someone dies, but rather grow stronger.

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The Everyday Hero

Melissa Mower

I carefully take the black frame off my wall and pause before I put it in the box sitting on my bed full of other miscellaneous items. I hadn't really looked at the picture since I put it up at least 3 years ago. I sit down on the edge of my bed and run my fingers over the photo inside. The photo was of me and my hockey coach, Meghan. Although it had been years since the picture was taken, it seemed like it was just yesterday the image of us carving pumpkins and joking around was captured.

After practice, I sat in the locker room and took my gear off. The chill from the rink had faded away due to all our hard work that we left on the ice. The girls were joking around, sharing laughs, and continually trying to engage me in their fun. I smiled and laughed, but really didn't find anything they were saying to be funny. Not one of them picked up on my unusual behavior, as I was usually the one leading the jokes. I quickly finished gearing down and packed my bag. Without saying anything, I walked to the door to leave. The girls said bye and I quietly responded that I would see them in a few days. My body language was shadowing that of Alice Walker's in "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self," as I stared at the ground, avoiding eye contact (617). Meghan, who had been sitting next to me, looked at me with a confused expression. "Mel, I need to talk to you about something we were talking

about on the ice,” she said before I could get out the door. “Sure...” I said questioningly, “I’ll be out at my car when you’re done in here.”

I walked slowly to the front doors of the rink, not ready to embrace the blistering cold weather awaiting me. I flipped my hood up and put my head down as I walked outside and looked through the snow-covered parking lot for my car. I finally found it, threw my gear in the back, opened the driver’s side door and hopped in. As I closed the door, I fidgeted around with my keys trying to find the right one to put in the ignition. I turned the car on, felt the heat start to turn on, and sat there trying to remember what I had talked to Meghan about in practice. Nothing was coming to mind. My train of thought was interrupted as I heard a tapping on my window that made me jump. I looked over and Meghan was standing there, motioning me to turn my car off and get in hers.

“Are you warm enough?” she said with a smile as I got in her car. I nodded and looked at her with a blank expression. “What’s going on, girl?” she said, “You’re not yourself.” *How was it that my friends hadn’t even picked up on the fact that I was having a horrible day, but my coach could?* I sighed and told her all about my day, occasionally glancing over to see that I still had her attention. She sat there, listening attentively, taking it all in. I talked about the problems I was having about deciding whether to play hockey in college, where I wanted to go, and filling out applications.

“I don’t know what to do,” I said calmly. “I want to play, but I have so much other stuff going on that I feel like I’m going to be overwhelmed. Everyone is on my

case about playing.”

“You need to do what you love,” she said. I had heard this speech so often I could recite it along with her. “You need to make yourself happy – no one else. If you feel like you’re going to be overwhelmed, don’t do it. I would love for you to play in college and I know you could. I’d make the trips to your games,” she said with a smirk, “but don’t make decisions off what anyone else says and definitely don’t make any decisions when you’re upset.”

I stand up from my bed and turn to the box that was being packed for my big move to Henniker. I carefully put the frame into the box and paused for another minute as I think about how much I am going to miss my friends here. Jerseys and team photos of the teams I had played for in the past lined my walls. It made me realize how many great friends I had made in the process and how far along I had come. I collapse next to the box and rest my arm on it and begin to reminisce some more.

It was April 23rd and it had been pouring all day. I was in the car with my best friend, Kathryn, as we drove to UNOs. We managed to survive the downpour on the run into the restaurant and as we walked through the door, small cheers came from a long table that was ready to sit ten people. I thanked all the people who were there to celebrate my eighteenth birthday with me, especially Meghan. I hugged her and she

whispered that she couldn't wait until I opened the gift she got for me. After we finished dinner, I moved down to her side of the table to open gifts, saving hers for last.

I ripped the paper off slowly, not really sure what to expect. I knew it was either going to be something really special or something ridiculously funny; we always joke around and give each other a hard time. I pulled out a toy elephant, one that matched the one her three-year-old son, Seamus, plays with every day. "That's from Seamus," she said with a laugh. I loved it. No gift could have topped that, since it meant a lot to me to be given something to remember him by while I was away. "There's something else in there!" she said enthusiastically. I dug through the box and found a small jewelry case. I opened it to see a beautiful diamond bracelet lying within it. "That's for prom," she said sincerely. "I matched it with your dress... Your eighteenth birthday is such a big day, I wanted to make it special for you."

I looked at my closet, where my prom dress was hanging and immediately looked over to my nightstand where the bracelet was. One more day until I had to leave my life in Maine behind for what might be forever. I took a deep breath, trying to choke back the tears I could feel welling up in my eyes. I stood up, picked the elephant up off my nightstand, put it in the box, and folded the flaps of the box in to secure its contents from falling out during the drive. I carried the box downstairs and staked it on my totes full of clothes and other necessities. I stared at the boxes that

literally had my life packed away in them.

I woke up immediately to look over at the clock that was blinking 4:30. I was overwhelmed by several contrasting emotions: nervousness, excitement, and hesitation. In five hours, I would be settling into my dorm room, getting ready to start pre-season for field hockey, and undoubtedly missing the gang back at home. I got ready and walked downstairs, where I found my mom and dad carrying my larger totes out to the car. I put on a straight face and acted like I was having no doubts about leaving. I looked down at the lone brown box I had brought down last night. I picked it up and heard a knock on the door. Thinking it was my dad coming back in with his hands full of my stuff, I opened the door and was surprised at who was standing on the porch. My heart sank. Tears automatically came to my eyes as she reached out for a hug. Meghan had come to say goodbye. She handed me a card and we spoke very little. We didn't know what to say to one another. For once, we were both completely speechless. Her card, though, said it all. She told me how proud she was of my accomplishments thus far and how excited she was to hear about my future. She didn't leave out that she was going to miss me and to remember she's always there if I need anything.

My hero is a modified version of the superheroes kids grow up learning about through comic books and television shows. My hero is brave, strong, resilient,

passionate, and has many special features to make her different from the rest. Being a former division one hockey goalie at Providence College, Meghan is stronger than most women her age, both physically and mentally. Nothing gets to her and nothing goes by her. She easily picks up on the little things others often overlook. Resiliency is also a dominant characteristic of my hero because she's always strong enough for both of us in tough situations. She never looks at just the bad things that happen, but what good things come from tragic situations. She stands her ground, never allows anyone to talk her out of what she wants to do, and uses any negativity or doubt directed toward her to enhance her competitive edge. She epitomized the personality described by Joan Didion in "On Self-Respect," because she doesn't look at reputations as being important, and has dug deep to sculpt a person she's comfortable with over the years (204). Other people's opinions don't matter to her, which allows her to be respected by herself as well as others.

On the other side of the spectrum, at the end of the day, my hero is passionate and extremely genuine. I don't know of anyone who has a bigger heart than she does, even when it comes to complete strangers. If Meghan can help someone, she will. Her example has made me a better person in the five years I've known her. She will never leave anyone out in the dark and stands up for the ones she loves. My hero is always there for support, advice, and a shoulder to lean on. She saves the day on various occasions, just like the perceived hero we find in comic books.

In this day and age, teenaged kids need positive role models in their lives. In my

case, my role model is my hero. All the qualities that make her admirable are quite obvious through the stories told about her previously. My hero is a woman who can keep calm at any given moment, never lets anyone tell her what to do, cares more about others than herself, and will never let anyone down. Unlike Kristen E. Hughes' distinct perspective depicted through "I Will Be My Own Hero" on heroes, I believe it's important to have someone to emulate (50). I can't imagine living my life while being my own hero. It takes a lot of time, commitment and conversations to find someone to relate to and feel comfortable with to the extent that I am with Meghan. The time was completely worth it. My hero is four hours away but never lets that affect our friendship. My hero is the woman in the black frame that's sitting in my dorm room; the picture I look at each and every day.

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My Companion

Jake Panzini

Everywhere I go I am followed by my lifelong companion. I would not mind but everywhere we go he makes noises and movements that leave people confused and sometimes concerned. Even when he is stared at he still causes a disturbance for me and sometimes others. You won't see my companion with me when I enter the room or walk by on the street, because my companion is not a person, it is my Tourettes.

Everything was normal until I entered the third grade. I was still the same person, but I began having the uncontrollable urge to nod my head repeatedly. This urge to nod my head was a shock to my teachers and parents. At home, my parents could not comprehend why I was acting so strangely. My father would try to explain to me that it was my imagination, and sometimes I would even be scolded for this new behavior. I remember one specific time when my father was trying to persuade me into believing that my head nodding was caused by my imagination. After hearing him tell me this I thought for a while that it was only in my head, and that I could stop at any time. After talking myself into believing my tic could be controlled, I ran out into the kitchen to tell my father that it was gone and that I would not do it anymore. That was not more than two minutes before it started again.

When I began the fourth grade I still had the same symptoms. As the school year progressed I began to develop new habits. Some of these new habits were much

more obvious than the previous head nodding. I began to have vocal tics that consisted of strange and disruptive noises. When my new tics began, it became more obvious to my classmates and teachers that I had some sort of problem. I recall one day before a spelling test, my teacher crouched down beside me and clenched my arm tightly and asked me if I was okay and if something had been bothering me. Since I did not know how to answer her I told her that everything was fine and that I was simply nervous because of the test. She did not fully accept my explanation and called home to my parents to set up a meeting. Following the discussion between my teacher and parents, I was brought to a neurologist to be tested. I was put through a series of strange tests that I still cannot quite remember, and after they were all complete the doctors explained to my parents that I had Tourette's Syndrome. The doctor went on to describe how Tourette's Syndrome was a neurological disorder that caused compulsive motor tics often seen as vocal tics and body jerking or twitching. Finally understanding what was causing my strange behavior was relieving, but it was only the beginning of my journey with Tourette's Syndrome.

After fourth grade ended, I began my new career in middle school. Over the summer before fifth grade, my tics had progressively become much more intense. I had upgraded from head nodding and quiet noises, to arm jerking, sniffing and throat clearing, and very disruptive vocal outbursts. These new tics that had been so difficult to deal with at home became a nightmare that I experienced Monday through Friday, six hours a day. At the immature middle school age my peers were less than

sympathetic and understanding to my disorder...and I was far from understanding of their ignorance. Kids in my class would call me out on my tics and sometimes tease me or mock me, which caused embarrassment that cannot be described in words. When I was confronted by someone who pointed out my tics in class or made a joke about me, I would lash back with the harshest comments I could think of to try to make that person feel as bad as I felt. As you can imagine, I had a large number of issues. The first time that a verbal conflict ever became physical was in sixth grade. A seventh grader pointed me out of a crowd and mocked me by shaking his head and imitating my vocal tics. Rather than being mature and educating this person, I looked over at him and quickly called him a big nosed rat boy.

It was not long after this comment that I found myself behind the library surrounded by a mob of screaming middle-schoolers, and squared off with a big bad seventh grader. It would be normal in this situation to be scared, but I distinctly recall having no fear whatsoever of that kid or any of the other kids surrounding me. All the stress from dealing with my Tourettes and all of the things said to me over the years had piled up so heavy that I no longer feared other people, I only feared their words. Face-to-face with this seventh grader, he looked at me and called me “twitch” and shoved me. No sooner did he put his hands on me did I haul off and punch him right in the mouth. He fell to the ground almost instantly and I took this chance to jump on top of him and slam away. My first fight was the end of this punk seventh grader, but only the beginning of the next stage of obstacles I would have to

overcome.

When I moved into seventh grade I still had to deal with the same teasing and stress as I did before, but after my victory in sixth grade I had a new way of handling myself. Instead of ignoring comments or saying things back to kids who teased me, I almost instantly resorted to threats or violence. As middle school progressed from seventh to eighth grade the teasing had lessened a substantial amount because other kids were beginning to realize that a joke or comment could result in a fist in the face on the way to our next class. Although the teasing subsided at the end of middle school, it was not due to understanding. It was only because other students wanted to avoid conflict. As a result of the tension with my classmates I did not have many close friends that I could trust. I felt that everyone was out to get me and that everyone thought I was strange or different because of my Tourettes.

The next chapter of my journey with Tourettes was freshman year of high school. When preparing for high school the only thing that I could think of was how I was going to deal with older kids making fun of me for my tics. As a way of defending myself I entered freshman year with a chip on my shoulder because I felt that I was going to have to prove myself immediately before I was out-numbered by taunting upperclassmen. Just as I suspected, two weeks into the new school year, a group of juniors began taunting and mocking me. It started off as just exchanging words in the hallway or in the cafeteria, but as the days dragged on it got worse and worse. Not only was I embarrassed by the things these kids said, but a lot of the kids

who I considered friends began to avoid me in fear of being grouped in with me and harassed by these kids. There was one kid out of the group that stood out the most to me, because he seemed to be the most relentless and cruel, and after several weeks of exchanging words in the hallway the conflict finally came to a head. I was in the gym lobby and this kid was standing with his regular group of friends. As I walked by he called out “twitchy!” As soon as I heard this I turned around and started punching him in the face as fast as I could. The fight went on for several minutes before it was broken up and the outcome left me with three staples in the top of my head. Despite my injury I felt as if I had proved something by fighting with this person who took time out of his day to tease me. The rest of my freshman year went on without any issues with classmates, but I still felt alone in many ways because I still did not have a group of friends that I felt were trustworthy. I still socialized with most of the kids in the school and laughed and joked, but I still considered myself alone because at the end of the day I knew I had to fend for myself.

When I reached my junior year in high school I felt as if the whole school was turned upside down. I began to receive more respect from my classmates and much more understanding from my teachers. I felt as if I had formed a bond with many of my teachers and especially my math teacher Mr. Dibiase who became one of the most influential people in my life. It was half way through my junior year that I realized that I had pushed Tourettes out of my path and dragged it behind me, as opposed to constantly trying to run around it and hide from it. I will never forget my senior year

when I needed a letter of recommendation and Mr. Dibiase took almost a month to finally finish one for me. It took him so long to write because he put so much thought and sincerity into it and this gave me an unbelievable boost in my confidence. It was when I was accepted into New England College, and one of the school guidance counselors announced it over the intercom and awarded me the “Pioneer Pride” award that I realized that I had survived Tourette’s Syndrome so far, and that I had made my classmates, teachers, and community proud.

The Road West

KT Rich

I knew buying a car was going to get me in trouble; traveling eighty miles an hour or more can make running from your problems a lot less exhausting. After I was given my first bike at age six, whenever conflict would arise in the Rich household it was never a surprise to find me the next town over. That's why it's no surprise to my parents when they see the open letter from the Offices of the Dean at the University of New Hampshire, and the bold letters stating *Academic Suspension*, that I am already in Illinois. The mode of escape is my Ford Ranger pickup. I purchased it with my college savings, as a congratulatory gift to myself, after receiving a full ride to UNH. Every time I go over seventy miles an hour the steering wheel shakes and I'm apprehensive of the touchy fuel line that caused my car to die in the middle of the highway half a year earlier. But with a six foot bed and a topper, I can't think of a better place to call home.

I-80 West in January is brutal. Icy roads and endless snow storms make me glad the bed of my truck is loaded with my belongings, less chance of flipping the truck. My final destination will be Salt Lake City, Utah. I have a job lined up as a wilderness instructor for a company called Second Nature. I will be working with at-risk adolescents, backpacking for eight days at a time with six days off between shifts. I'm telling my friends and family that I took the job because I wanted to do something

meaningful with my life, but I took the job for the schedule. With six days off at a time, I can be more than just a weekend warrior when it comes to outdoor recreation and my home on wheels will force me to stay out of cities as I'll have nowhere to sleep. I hit Nebraska and, with eight hours of endless flat road ahead of me, I think back to UNH.

It's finals week and it's easier for me to count how many classes I've been to than how many I haven't. My Exercise Physiology final is tomorrow at eight o'clock, but it's a lost cause. My highest grade on a test in that class was a 68, might as well go to Leah's birthday party tonight. My three other finals don't look any more promising than Exercise Physiology, but my academic liaison for field hockey hasn't been cautioning me about eligibility, so I'm sure I'm set.

My shot at college was over, time for the real world.

I'm stuck on I-80 West in Nebraska. Only the right lane is plowed on this two lane highway, yet on my left eighteen wheelers keep blowing by my thirty mile an hour pace. For the past twelve hours I have sat in silence, focusing all my attention on the black ice that keeps me spinning my steering wheel like a six year old pretending to drive his parent's car. I've seen three cars spin out behind me and one eighteen wheeler careen into oncoming traffic. I decide to stop for the night in a Wal-Mart

parking lot. I jump into the bed of my truck and thank god for my negative forty degree sleeping bag. I shut my eyes and dream about the life I have let slip out of control.

Field hockey was my job at UNH and it didn't end once the season was over. My schedule began with running practice every morning at six until class at eight. Then I would sit in classes until twelve, eat lunch, and run to the field house for an hour of lifting. Practice followed lifting and at six o'clock we were released in order to grab dinner before reporting back to the field house for study hall, with my coaches, from seven until nine. Everything was structured; everything was decided by my coaches, except for the hours between nine at night and six in the morning. I took this time to destroy my body with drugs and alcohol.

It's my third month as wilderness instructor and one of my students just punched me in the jaw. I guess that's what you get when you opt to work with adjudicated youth. This job is supposed to be my resume builder for future outdoor recreation positions, but I'm beginning to feel like I'm becoming more qualified to be a prison guard than an Outward Bound instructor. I'm antsy to get off of work this week. I have a road trip planned with my friend Ellen who I've met in Utah. We will be traveling to Lincoln, Nebraska to attend a concert of one of our favorite bands, Hoots and Hellmouth.

We are two hours outside of Lincoln and Ellen asks if I wouldn't mind

stopping to visit her mother. She has some pictures she wants to show her. Ellen and I have only known each other for three months but I do know that most of her teenage life was spent in foster care and her mother was constantly in and out of psychiatric hospitals. Her mom lives in a rundown motel with one of Ellen's younger brothers, Kyle. As soon as we enter the door, Ellen's mom rushes to our side and complains about how she needs to get Kyle out of here, the motel manager will kick her out, he doesn't like Kyle skateboarding in the parking lot. Ellen is trying to compromise with her mom, "Kyle cannot live on the streets again!"

Again? This mother has kicked a fourteen year old boy onto the streets before?

"Have you warned Kyle that he needs to stop skateboarding?" Ellen asks.

"No, but he'll just keep doing it anyway, he's out to get me."

"Mom, I know Kyle doesn't want to live on the street with you so if you just tell him he'll stop."

"He watches too much TV, Ellen!"

"What? Why does that matter?"

"I don't want him to live here, he watches too much TV, I can never watch my shows."

"So he can skateboard, *you* just don't want to put up with him anymore?"

"When you put it like that you make me sound like a bad mother."

She is a bad mother. She has ten children, most of whom were taken away at birth when she failed her drug test. Ellen talks about times when she was twelve when

she wouldn't eat for days at a time because her mother locked herself in her room and didn't want to grocery shop. Or mornings when her mother would be viciously beating her brothers because they wouldn't get out of bed for school. All Ellen ever wanted growing up was to be part of a family. She talks about how she has let go, for the most part, the idea of having a mother and father. I can't believe this. I can't imagine growing up without the safety net of a parent. Most of the risks I took were because I knew if I failed my parents would always be there to catch me. Why, then, did I disown them?

I spent most of my teenage life working towards one goal: playing field hockey for a division one program. During high school, I was dedicated to the high school field hockey team every fall. I had practice after school but most of the time I didn't feel like I had worked on my skills enough that day. So I would go back to the field in the evening and spend two hours hitting the ball and dodging around imaginary defenders. Once high school season was over, my real training would begin. I competed in national festivals with a club team during the winter and spring in order to be scouted by college coaches. In the summer, I spent my weeks in training camps traveling to places such as Spain and Holland to compete against the best field hockey players in the world. But unlike most parents who asked to be paid back with a college scholarship, my parents only ever wanted me to enjoy field hockey. Both my parents took a course to become certified referees for field hockey just so they could

understand the game better. They weren't projecting their athletic hopes and dreams onto me; they were simply passionate about something that I had chosen to be passionate about.

I've been working for almost a year now at Second Nature and a student I worked with for his entire twelve week stay is getting ready to leave. Cameron wasn't a model student, but he was compliant with the rules of the program. His dad had knocked him and his sister around for years and only stopped when Cameron learned how to fight back. When his dad's fists wouldn't cut it anymore, he took to publicly humiliating his kids by frequently screaming at them in restaurants or in front of their friends. Cameron is a year away from turning eighteen and though his dad seems to be making a huge effort to show his therapeutic work, it is too little too late for Cameron. Cameron is staring into the fire that we are circled around to cook dinner and to no one in particular he says "He's my dad, he's *supposed* to love me. I'm *supposed* to love him. I'm just incapable of feeling emotion." This kid had gone through so much physical and emotional abuse in life that he had learned to become numb to pain. While Cameron adapted to the abuse each year, his emotions became entangled in his pain and, one by one, Cameron learned to block them out.

Cameron became a turning point in my time out west. Throughout my journeys I had made small realizations about the life I was letting slip out of control, but I had also made sure to quickly push them to the back of my mind. I was traveling down a

dangerous path, the end of which led to an existence like Cameron's. By shutting out emotions like failure and sadness, I would stop feeling as grateful for emotions such as happiness and success. I was turning into an emotionless robot.

It was time for me to fight to stay alive inside. Cameron's situation allowed me to start putting the pieces together. It started with work when I recognized that the reason I had stuck around for so long wasn't for the six day weekend but because I believed in the therapeutic power of the wilderness. It had just been easier for me to detach myself from this idea than face the reality of students, like Cameron, that were beyond the repair our program could offer. I also understood that my indifference towards my academic success at UNH just made it easier for me to forget about an amazing opportunity that I had let slip away. And finally, I was so scared of saying goodbye to my friends and family on the east coast that I picked up and moved without a word.

Fifteen states, another country, and two years later I'm back on the east coast. My second year at Second Nature had me applying the therapeutic devices I was teaching my students to my own life. I spent the year reconnecting with friends and starting a dialogue to begin to repair what I had destroyed in my indifference. If there was ever a definitive end to a chapter of my life, this would be one and like any good book this chapter seems to have ended too quickly, leaving me wanting more. These first few pages of the next part still turn quickly; they are filled with familiar faces of

close friends and family, catching up over lunch or dinner, learning of the latest news, and with any luck, preludes to more adventures that will warrant sleepless nights further down the road.