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Scholastic Writing

Right?

The first picture I remember ever taking was of a brilliant sunset in sixth grade. Life was simple then. Life was the leveled path where the conglomeration of footprints were the most visible, just before the incline began and where the footprints would soon fade. The persistence of clouds painting a picture in the sky with oranges and pinks, filling up the vast emptiness with blues and purples, making me smile from ear to ear, snatching my camera to capture the moment, reminds me of those times. The times before the first step up, before the heavy-breathing, before the aches and the pains.

The Lone Star state made hair staticky, faces sweaty, and hands sticky the moment the blazing sun awoke. My body was shutting down after laying awake in the late hours of the night, my brain too jumbled to power off. Eyes droopy and head pounding, I urged my feet to advance, adding new footprints to the old at the beginning of the trail. Through the murky soil, dampened by the earlier rain, I plastered a smile on my face, fake-laughing as my dad cracked jokes, while we took step after step until we reached the first incline. I look down. The mass of imprints seems to enlarge as people deny the challenge ahead, retreating to their vehicles. I look up. The 3.2 mile hike seemed daunting from the start; the blinding sun made the peak of the cliff invisible. I suddenly want to follow the crowd; blend back in like a chameleon being preyed on. I look ahead. It's only 3.2 miles, right? A variation of this question has lingered in the back of my mind for some of the 6,387 days of my life, as it would in anyones. Just keep going, right? Don't follow the pack. Be individualistic. Right? My steps got shorter as the hill got steeper.

Marching parallel to the massive mountain, I quickened my strides. The piercing laughs and noises coming from my family became too much to handle. I was on the edge of explosion, desperately wishing the hike would come to an end. At this moment, I wanted to run ahead; I needed to run ahead. To get away; to distance myself. To be alone; to go. Now. My heart was pounding. Just get away, right? My head was pounding. Just be alone, right? My feet were pounding the ground. Just go, right?

The next few minutes were a blur. Hands tingling, shallow breathing, yellow sun. Feeling alone, blurring vision, brown rocks. Tears streaming, face reddening, green trees: feeling tired.

Suddenly, the 3.2 mile hike to the peak ended; I arrived at the edge. I was physically exhausted, and my lucid mind was trailing behind along with the rest of my family. My feet were too quick for my melancholy mental capacity, as I became completely absentminded as I trekked along, alone towards the apex. By the time I reached it, I was unaware of my surroundings. Motionlessly standing there, the heavenly miniscule angel that perches on my right shoulder crawled across my body, through my mess of a mind to the left side, becoming dark and infernal.

6,387 days.

3.2 miles.

Seemingly different measurements– one of time and one of distance– but when you really look, is it?

Those 6,387 days I have lived could've ended in a split second; perhaps, even at the end of 3.2 miles.

I'm gone.

I no longer felt the solid ground under my cushiony shoes. I was levitating in the air, falling like a single raindrop in a vigorous storm.

The next thing I remember is sitting on the uneven dirt as my brother's tiny head materialized behind the treeline, seemingly miles away. How did I get back up? How did I not topple all the way over the edge? It's an unsolved mystery that will forever remain that way. Although my knee throbbed and my arms dripped with blood, I reflectively realized it was better than being impaled by the slivers of dead trees, ending up mangled five hundred feet below.

I ploddingly staggered down the decline, rejoining my family and contemplating the incident. Though a bit shaken up, the possibility of what could have been was truly shocking. That could have been the end of it all; yet, it wasn't. Why?

My mind became still. The hammering I felt in my chest and brain just a few minutes earlier suddenly vanished. I was connected with my body once again; feet moving as I told them too, safely along the path. I took a deep breath. I laughed. I embraced the loudness that once deeply overwhelmed me with open arms, even if just for this singular moment. By the time we went from the rigid, footprintless path five hundred feet above, to the sloppy, squishy, mud by our car, the sun had begun setting and the sky had transformed into a jaw-dropping view. The oranges and pinks, blues and purples, all blended together, taking my breath away— peacefully this time. A pair of birds flew across the sun, creating a silhouette, never once parting, never once veering. No matter how many times thoughts may flee the brain, they will come back together. With time, patience, and hope. As the colors faded, and the birds soared into the distance, a quiet smile crept across my face as I stayed near to my family, step by step, and I knew that I had been reprieved; it was not my time to go.

3.2 miles.

Day 1.

The picture I took in sixth grade has turned into albums and albums overflowing with beautiful sunsets. Between the rolling waves of the ocean, to the boundless mountain lines that occupy the land under the sky, is a little girl whose face brightens every time the sky lights up. I made it past the first incline, the first peak. But life is more complex. To pave my own path, to put the first footprints down in my own story, roller coasters of emotions and challenges will be overcome. But, I get to watch the sun set day after day. Right? The same sun that turned what could have been my last day into a new beginning. And that is a blessing in itself. Right? Right.