

A Midsummer Night's Thought

As I recall, it was on a frigid summer day that I discovered who I am. And yes, I remember that on that blustery summer day I realized who I want to be, or at least, how I want to live. I realized things that come from the basic foundation of my being -- who I am at the core. And on that day, and on through the shape-shifting night, the values and ideals of a clouded mind were unveiled.

Like the evasive white rabbit, my memories often escape me, and it takes a good deal of searching to accurately recall the timeline of my life. But some, some memories are bright and crisp. I remember my mother's face; it's my farthest and deepest memory, or series of memories, rather, for my mom's face has always been the same. She's still that little girl from Indiana and you can see it when you look at her. From the first moment she gleamed her cherubic smile, it has stayed as her defining characteristic and the personification of her personality and congenial nature. It has given her a sense of intransient youth, redolent of the feeling evoked when a shy child can no longer hold back his smile. That's what comes to mind when I think of my birth and of my childhood as a whole -- her smile, her face. There's a picture of her and me just after I was born, a picture of her smile next to my head. It is, of course, only associated with my birth and not an actual memory, but it might as well be, because I've been looking at it for so long that it has filled the emptiness of the time before memory, the time of mere existence. It's filled it with a tangible image and has given me the certitude that I can say that her face has not changed, not really, anyway. But there were faces there on my birthday that have changed. The face of a content man: my father, inwardly excited, calm in appearance; his shiny, olive-black hair and kind, calm eyes. And a proud little boy, lovingly clinging to the crib in which I lay, with impish cheeks and my dad's kind, cool eyes. I was born into an environment of love. That's what has shaped me and taught me to be who I am.

Christmas stands out in my memory. Christmas was special. As a child it holds a place as a perfect time, when the care-free mentality of youth was brought to an extreme and all was right with the world. When it didn't matter how early it was, but rather how awake we were. For two little kids -- and one big one -- three in the morning was the latest we could wait. "Don't you remember when you were a kid and you got up this early on Christmas?" Dad would suggest. "Hmm. No, I don't think so," she said, smiling; she knew; she understood, that we didn't care how tired we would be tomorrow, but that we certainly weren't tired now. And so she let us. Let us quit our attempt at sleep at such a time of excitement, and sneak a look at what to us was as marvelous as Aladdin's cave. Nothing compares to that anticipation, that feeling, that sight. For us, it was happiness that has not yet been paralleled; it was perfection of emotion, something almost tangible, to hold tight to, and remember. It's the holidays that characterize my childhood; I suppose because they embody everything good and pure there was about it.

For the first time, what I was being taught in school came to affect me as an individual. Middle School was a little scary early on; it felt like I was at a strange summer camp for too long a time. But as time passed I grew accustomed to the school as I had the last, and new things came to me from all areas of education: music, literature, and an appreciation for the heart and love that only a good teacher possesses. It was the first time I devoted myself to something and the first time I developed in skill as well as maturity.

It was when I began my continual journey of the drums, and began something that set me apart from almost all others. It wasn't something widespread like guitar, which three fourths of all people attempt to play. It was power and soul and rhythm; a commanding thing running through all of life; a tool; a medium of the mind and of the hand. And I was to be its master. But not yet; I was only beginning. I was only just beginning to see and to use the thing that is so much a part of me now. In the same way, seventh grade was the beginning of my inclination toward English. Novels and grammar and writing, vocabulary and poetry. A teacher who came to change my idea of learning and of how I thought. English was the first class I found to have real meaning and purpose. I learned of gerunds, of verb forms, of SAT words, of hobbits and orcs, and most importantly, of passion. Passion in the form of Mrs. Deye. "You wear your heart on your sleeve, you know," she once told me. She was that kind of person who, in addition to being quick with seemingly endless knowledge, would take notice to things your parents might even not. She would talk to me, just talk, like an equal, and most importantly she would listen. She had a quiet, composed sort of kindly demeanor about her, as a wise, elderly librarian has after years of whispers and books. She was a teacher in the truest sense: she didn't merely tell us about the intended subject, she indirectly taught and prepared us in the most essential areas of life, as if success as a person was her learned subject. It was she who introduced me to myself, through the vastness of literature, the expressionism of poetry, and the deeper meaning of drama. Her teachings stand today in much of the way I think -- a different way of seeing things, and that is something I hold as infinitely valuable.

With this newfound sight of the world, what was next but to pursue the visual arts. The most valuable days of my high school career have been spent in the creation of things that I usually never finished. Potential masterpieces of pen and ink, of clay, and of paint. Maybe it's because I won't allow myself to create anything that has not completely satisfied me, or because I work in spurts of motivation and interest that are easily lost. Maybe it's both, but despite that, I continue to begin and create pieces because it is what I love. I love creating something out of nothing -- seeing something in my head and breathing life into it. I suppose I've always loved it, I mean, I've done it for as long as I can remember, but it wasn't until I spent enough time alone, enough time with the intended purpose of pure contemplation that I saw things very clearly -- until I went to Alaska. I, like Thoreau, went into the wilderness because I wanted to live. I wanted to breathe air and see things and climb mountains which no one had before. I didn't wish to be alone, but there was a time in which it was only me and my thoughts. At that time the air was strong and cold as it cut under my makeshift tarp. I lay quiet, deep in sleepy thought, while the world around me was howling and dimming. It was night, about ten o'clock, but not in the normal sense. It was still half daylight, twilight, and the faint swirling of aurora borealis was all around. As I lay, I thought. I thought about my astronomy class junior year, about the vastness of space, and the minute value of human existence in relativity to the universe around us. I thought about life, about the transience of life and the importance of living, truly living. Doing what is right and what is truly important in our ephemeral lives. I thought and I wrote three things: live every second as if it's my last; awake every morning like it's my first; above all, take nothing for granted. I decided how I want to live. Yes, those things sounded good to me. But then I thought of something else, just a random thought and I grabbed it before it left; I thought of my

mom's face and of a painting I had done of her. I captured her essence in that painting and I remembered that that was the most satisfaction I had ever felt -- capturing her as a person. And so I realized that that is what I want to do -- draw, paint, whatever it is, I just want to create. To express and portray feeling, deep feeling. Capture everything -- faces, emotions, moods -- and make it my own. It's what makes me happiest, so that's what I'll do. I have put thought into it as a serious career; after all it's a large business. But when I think of it like that it makes it seem so... cheap. It takes away from what it truly is that I love; and so I don't really care what college I go to; how much money I'm going to make.

But to create -- that I care about.