

1-1-2013

A Painful "Yet to Be"

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Class of 2013

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Granberry, Joshua R. (2013) "A Painful "Yet to Be"," *The Mercury*: Year 2013, Article 14.
Available at: <http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2013/iss1/14>

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Author Bio

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Joshua Granberry

I imagine us sitting in a restaurant, like T.G.I. Friday’s or Ruby Tuesday, something subtle, yet surrounded by random pockets of people. I don’t want it to be all quiet or dramatic; I’m just more comfortable when there’s background noise to turn attention to now and again. I order a beer, just to show that I’ve grown up in some manly or prideful “I-can-hold-my-own” kind of way. I’ve already let her know that I’ve had something to talk to her about, but I wanted it to be just the two of us. I don’t care much for what my stepfather or stepbrother will think afterward. I should, but I don’t. I figure I’ll start with my mother by saying:

“I’ve been hiding something from you for some time now...”

Did I say I didn’t want this to be overly dramatic?

“Don’t think I intended this to hurt you in any way, but I did what I had to do at the time. I love you no less because of it, but have grown to understand and appreciate things without harkening back to painful memories. Give me the time I need to speak, and I’ll reciprocate with everything you’d like to know. Can I please have that?”

“Josh, I’m not quite sure I understand what’s going on right now.”

“Me neither, Mom, but please bear with me. I’ve been in contact with Robert. I’ve seen him recently, and plan on seeing him again...”

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The past few Christmases haven’t been my favorite; the time before last when my mother and stepfather nearly split, my brother and I spent almost the entirety of our vacations at our aunt’s house. Family dinners and time together were infrequent then, and prompted me to reevaluate the stability of my family unit. I came to some startling conclusions, some of which I still wrestle with to this day. But given this “god-awful” experience, I think it’s no wonder that I wouldn’t spend my following winter vacation at my new friend Stephen’s house, where smoking and drinking would be plentiful, and my mind could be left to contemplate other, less troubling scenarios. During my time there, I went home for four days: the day before Christmas Eve through the day after Christmas. The rest of the time was spent away from home, away from the constant stresses, failures, and fighting that ensued any other time. So, when Stephen prompted me with a proposition to road trip to Houston to deliver his, what he termed, “quasi-girlfriend’s” belongings, I couldn’t resist. Time spent away from home was one thing, but getting lost on the wide-open road, without really a clue of

where we were, well, that's something in a class totally of its own.

The decision to road trip to the Lone Star State was not without stresses, however. Though Christmas supported me financially for the duration of break, it was not enough to both road trip and purchase textbooks for the coming semester. I didn't want to miss this opportunity to adventure with my friend, but I also wanted to learn a thing or two in the coming months at school. So, I compromised. I compromised in a way that has snowballed into something much greater than I had intended.

I decided that, while in Houston, I'd get a hold of my father and ask him for textbook money. After all, I had seen the man only a few times in my entire twenty-plus years of existence. And according to my mother, he owed a small fortune in child support payments. I really didn't feel bad asking. In all actuality, I drove a somewhat sadistic pleasure from the idea. I'd simply visit, say hello, take the check, and leave. He'd hear nothing back from me, nor I from him. I felt bad in some way, but he owed me anyway, right? I called him the night before we left, gave some bullshit excuse of an answer to the question of why I had ignored him after my high school graduation, and established a meeting time with which to secure the deal. I told my Mom where we would be going, how long we would stay, etc., but I very intentionally left out the details concerning my father. She had her own stresses, and this was my vacation. Plus, it's not like I loved the guy. He'd left us from what I understood. He never called or attempted to make amends for his past actions leading to my mother and him splitting. He owed this to me. And did I feel bad about lying at the time? No, because I wasn't doing it out of compassion for the guy; I needed money for school, plain and simple.

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My heart was beating as if I were experiencing a mild panic attack. It was surprisingly busy in the hotel lobby at 7:30 on a Wednesday night, so I hoped he'd find me as opposed to me seeking him out. I had only sat down when he came from the entranceway and approached me. I could tell he was my father. Something in his face just made me see so much of myself in him; I could not only see a physical resemblance (one that I had been longing for), but also a stoic sense of mind, where overt emotional response was sacrificed in place of a balanced and accepting worldview. He was a calm man of average height, leathered and tanned skin, and severely balding. But given his line of work as a heavy haul truck driver and age, he looked great, everything except his face, which seemed so much more worn, worn in a never-coming-to-terms-with-the-past kind of way. It was noticeable, yet comforting at the same time. I could tell he had been wrestling with his past, and it was constantly on his mind.

When he came up, he fidgeted, looked at the floor, and stuck out his hand, saying, "I don't really know how to do this... How're ya doing?"

"Fine," I said, shaking his hand. "How have you been?"

"Nervous as all hell! I couldn't sleep last night, I was shaking on the drive over here... It's really good to see you."

"You too." I actually meant it. For some reason, in that brief moment of initial interaction, I felt like I had known the man my whole life. Not in deed or memory, but in a very strange, you-think-like-I-do way, as if I had known him in a past life. It is a strange feeling to know that you are intimately tied to another individual, even though you have never seen that person before.

He introduced me to his wife and stepdaughters, and my half-brother, whom I met for the first time that night. The same feeling I had with my dad just right inside the hotel lobby reappeared again when I saw my half brother. It felt amazing and depressing all at the same time; I had never had this off-the-bat appreciation for someone before. It was an unnerving mood to have, but at the same time very comforting; I had reunited with a family I had never known. Before, I had wanted nothing to do with them; I thought they had betrayed me, that I had been a mistake on behalf of my father. In seeing them, I could tell this was definitely not the case. After some mild catching up at a local restaurant, I caught myself not wanting to leave.

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During the four days spent in Houston, I spent nearly all my time with my father: going out to eat, hanging in his garage putting back beers and cigarettes, talking of my baby youth as if at one point in time there were no animosities between my mother and him. When he was at work, I spent what time I could getting to know my half-brother, and my "step-mother," who, before, I thought ruined my first family, but who I quickly discovered was herself a struggling mom, just like the one I had left behind in Pennsylvania. What was supposed to take an hour at most became an emotionally rewarding visit, one that reconnected and reestablished lost ties and relations. At the same time, however, I was conflicted with what I would tell my mother. Sure, I was fine beforehand lying to her about my visit with my father; she would have approved of me going merely for the money, since he "owed" it to us anyway. But things had changed now that my visit was more than expected, one where the money became overshadowed by a giddy feeling of being like a kid again in the arms of my father. What was so unnerving to me was not the lie that had been told, but her impending misunderstanding of the situation. I'm sure, given the past couple of years, that she knows I am dissatisfied with the way things have turned out with our family.

And maybe, subconsciously, I sought out this chance to reunite with my father in order to supplement the downhill trend my family's stability has taken. But the thing that pained me the most is having my mother, the woman who cared for me all my life, who was my shoulder for so long, and I hers, the one who took care of me and held on strong when everything else seemed to crumble, know that I lied to her, and visited another family from which she had distanced herself as much as humanly possible.

My mother is a beautiful woman, and has cared for me more than any other individual to have walked or will ever walk this planet. Yet, her inability to leave the past in the past has always been a downfall for her, and has been the cause of many conflicts between her and everyone else she has come into contact with. While I don't want to hurt her by being with the man that had betrayed her trust, I still can forgive past wrongs, which I've realized never really involved me to begin with. That is the point I'm afraid my mother will miss...

When these thoughts of eventually confronting her came to mind, I immediately felt sick to my stomach. Had I betrayed the only person who has unflinchingly cared for me my entire life? Eventually, I would hope, she would come to terms with what I had done, and why I had done it. Eventually. The initial shock and sense of betrayal she is bound to feel had scared me away from telling her for almost a year. To complicate matters, I have recently flown to visit my father in North Carolina for a weekend. Another enlightening and memorable visit, another stomach ache and restless month of worried attempts at sleeping.

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I have had family members die, friends lost in the shuffle of life and petty drama, and now have a grandfather suffering from cancer. These are all things I think about. But the most painful, most wrenching thought I can have now is the image of me confronting my mother about my secret dealings with my father, her ex-husband, the man who broke her trust and failed to support his child. In my eyes, they were a young couple that fucked up. Plain and simple. But no one ever really feels good about betraying the trust of someone dearly close to them. I know my mother will understand what I did in time. But with each passing day it becomes harder and harder to approach her, to get the setting and timing just right so I can ease this on her already hefty plate of worries and concerns. My hope is that I can continue with my double life with both my parents having full knowledge of it. My fear is that I will be resented and seen in a much different light by my mother. If I lost her and her trust, would it have really been worth it? This is a pain that has yet to be...