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Precious Knowledge

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Precious Knowledge

Abstract

An essay about my name and its true meaning...

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

Third place winner of the 2013 Virginia Woolf Essay Prize, judged by Jon Pineda.

Stephen Lin

Precious Knowledge

The petite middle-aged woman squints over her clipboard as if unable to read her own handwriting, “Shoo... deh? Am I saying that right? Is there a Shoo-Deh?” It’s a regular morning at Doherty Middle School and my seventh grade teacher is taking attendance. I wince at each of her failures and avoid making eye contact with any of my peers (perhaps she’ll assume that I have transferred or simply died). She persists, a baby trying to say its first words. As she takes several more stabs at the pronunciation, more and more eyes fall on me, and I hear snickers here and there. Finally I give in, “Here, Mrs. Roberts.” The woman is small but incredibly tenacious. She hands me a name-tag, the white flag of surrender and shame: A humiliating badge of defeat I must carry for the rest of the day.

The hallway stretches out for miles before me, my first class so far beyond my reach. As I walk the path, the crowds disperse, giggling and whispering; my name-tag seems to act as a People-Repellent. My peers buzz away from me. Outside the classroom, my enemy awaits, a smirking little gremlin named Andy Cook. He greets me mockingly, “harro prease.” The guy, or boy I should say, had the kind of face you just wanted to punch. He was one of those kids that learned at a young age that he had a decent sense of humor, and that that sense of humor could bring him popularity. The world raised and bred him to something ignorant of human emotion. The pig squealed in pleasure as his minions guffawed at his fake accent, his beady eyes feasting on my pain. So begins the roast. “A-shoo-doggy-douche bag,” he sneers, as I watch his maturity skyrocket.

Since elementary school, my name has evolved from Shoofy, to Stinky Shoes, and now this. Things do not change. I deny him the satisfaction of a response, but he continues to pester. If there is one thing I have taken away from middle school, it is that the small can be the most persistent. Finally, in an act of desperation, I tear off the name-tag, throw it in the trash, and ask my teacher if I could go by my American name. During recess, I find, to my horror, Andy waiting by the basketball hoop with the name-tag I left in the trash. He spends my one hour of free time, my sanctuary, following me around and mocking my every movement with an exaggerated, squinty-eyed face. The end of the school day stretches further and further out of my reach as the torment continues.

That evening I return home, a young Atlas, and shrug the weight of my first world problems off of my shoulders. The smell of a home-style Taiwanese meal pervades my nose as the sound of my mother yelling at the television floods my ears; the Celtics are playing. I gaze at my parents, their faces worn from a hard day's work and the sacrifices made to live the American dream: ESPN and Taiwanese food. I am humbled by their presence, two honest hard-workers 8000 miles away from home. "Dinner is ready," says my father, "Shu-Dih." He says my name with close attention to pitch; there is warmth in his voice. I linger in comfortable silence just to hear him say it again, "Shu-Dih?" It means precious knowledge: A gift that only love and sacrifice can give.