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Author Bio

My name is Drew Warren and I am a senior at Gettysburg College. Although I am not an English major, I have turned to writing throughout my life as an escape from reality. My writing is a reflection of the bleak existence that many people endure everyday.

A Friday Afternoon in Tulsa, Oklahoma

DREW C. WARREN

It was a Friday afternoon in late July in Tulsa, Oklahoma and the annual summer carnival had recently arrived in town. The sun began to set over the horizon as the rays of sunshine blinded Jackson. In the rearview mirror of his 1997 Ford F-series truck, a decrepit and shallow face stared back at him. Jackson snatched the last Marlboro 27 from the cigarette box he bought the day prior and, resembling that of a zombie-like figure, wandered towards the carnival. Jackson felt an intensified high kicking in after shooting up just a few minutes prior. An extreme sense of euphoria rushed through Jackson's body and all of his concerns escaped from his mind. He felt calmer now than he had at any point throughout the day. He was even high enough to crack a slight grin. The psychological and physical pain that Jackson lived through on a daily basis quickly vanished. His untied shoe laces from his Timberland boots dragged across the cement parking lot as he felt the cool breeze hitting his chest through his ripped Lucky Brand flannel.

The excessive high that Jackson felt fifteen minutes ago had been replaced by a pulsating headache, so he decided to smoke his last cigarette. He meandered around the carnival, which was full of young children and middle aged parents who looked almost as miserable as he was. He brushed his hand against his left pocket to ensure the needle and dime bag were still where he originally put them.

Jackson spent the next twenty minutes pacing anxiously around the carnival. He knew no one, not even himself.

"Hey man, how about a ride on the Ferris wheel?" A carny, who was working the ride, asked him.

"Umm sure. Give me a second," Jackson replied.

He once again tapped his hand against his left pocket to make sure the heroin and syringe were there.

"Are you okay, man?" The carny asked as Jackson noticed the man staring directly at his bruised forearm.

"I'm fine. Can I get on now or what?" Jackson snapped.

The Ferris wheel came to a halt and Jackson stepped into an empty carriage. Jackson's high was fading away as the Ferris wheel climbed into the sky.

As the Ferris wheel moved in a counter clockwise rotation, Jackson was able to get an enhanced view of the carnival and the surrounding Tulsa landscape. The Ferris wheel stopped to let other passengers off and Jackson's carriage rest motionless at the peak of the wheel's rotation. He sat slouched in his seat as his eyes narrowed in on two young girls who attempted to knock their father into the dunk tank. He slowly closed his eyes and his mind drifted off as it usually does once he begins to sober up. The two young girls reminded him of his own daughter, and how much his life had changed in the last few years.

Jackson understood the expression "life can change in a blink of an eye" better than anyone. It was a Friday afternoon in Tulsa, Oklahoma when Jackson's daughter, Addison, was struck by a stray bullet after two rival gang members got into an altercation at the annual summer carnival. Shootings were common in the city of Tulsa, yet Jackson never imaged that it would one day affect his life. He would read about shootings in the paper. He would turn to his wife and say something along the lines of "Imagine what the family is thinking," or "Man I wouldn't be able to go about life after that." The sad news is it did happen to Jackson, and his life was effectively over on that one particular Friday afternoon in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Life moved quickly after that. Jackson and his wife, Abby, got a divorce. She always told Jackson that she needed to get away from it all. For Abby, living in Tulsa was too difficult; everything she did reminded her of Addison. She moved to Jacksonville with her mother and found a job as an elementary school teacher. Abby never turned to the bottle or the needle as an escape. Rather she sought refuge from her family. Jackson took a different approach.

He lost his job after showing up to work drunk one too many times. It started with Miller Lites, then slowly escalated to the Jack Daniels. Once Jack Daniels wouldn't do the trick, he turned to moonshine. Moonshine quickly turned into harder drugs until, finally, Jackson got to the point where he was at now. A few beers used to disguise the pain that he was feeling after losing his daughter. Now the only thing that helped was a needle in the arm and the exorbitant feeling of heroin ripping through his veins. Jackson had been in and out of rehab over the course of the last few years, yet talking about his emotions never helped. The loss of his daughter clung to him like an itchy wool garment. His mother, who lived in Tulsa, tried her best to tend to Jackson's every need, but not even his own mother could pull him out of the bottomless pit that he lay in. She finally stopped giving him money after she realized that he was stealing a few bucks from her

purse every chance that he got. The final straw came when Jackson lost almost \$10,000 in one night at the River Spirit Casino Resort in the outskirts of the city. Jackson recalled an expression his father used to say. If life is a casino, dying is like cashing in your chips. Jackson had no chips in the figurative and literal sense. It took Jackson's mother months of Social Security checks to pay back the pissed off croupiers. If Jackson were to die right now, he would have no chips to cash in. He had no job, money or ambition. Similar to that one night in the casino, it seemed as if his chips had run dry.

At the top of the Ferris wheel Jackson sat overlooking the carnival. The exact location where Jackson lost his daughter. He never dared go back to the carnival or even drive by the parking lot where the carnival was held every year. Tonight, however, was different. Jackson felt propelled, as if guided by an angel, to go to the carnival tonight. He was restless and uneasy the entirety of the time he was there, yet going to the carnival was enough to make Jackson content with himself. He thought perhaps this was the start of him moving on from what had occurred here almost three years ago. Jackson felt his left pocket. Perhaps this was just a great place to shoot up he thought as he smirked to himself.

"Hey man it's going to be a few more minutes. We're having some trouble down here with the circuit breaker," the carny yelled to Jackson.

He could barely make out what the carny was saying, but he got the message.

"Ya, ya. Screw you man," Jackson murmured to himself.

The air was relatively still as Jackson felt the slight breeze hitting his chest through the holes in his ripped flannel. He could see a cauldron of bats swarming in the distance. He took off his belt from around the loops in his jeans, which keep his baggy pants around his slender waist. Jackson proceeded to tie, tightly, the belt just below his shoulder joint. He usually tried to clean the needle before injecting himself, yet considering that he was on the Ferris wheel he realized that he would not have the chance to sanitize the needle that had been jiggling around in his pocket for the last hour.

Jackson preferred to shoot up in his old pickup truck where he had an assortment of supplies to safely get high. After his first overdose, just five months ago, the hospital gifted him enough alcohol wipes and clean needles to last the remainder of his life. The doctor explained to Jackson that shooting up with a dirty needle could stop Jackson's heart within minutes. Instead of wiping down his forearm, he spit on his bruised veins, patted in the saliva and sighed to myself

as if to say, "Well that's good enough."

Jackson inserted the needle into his vein with the bevel facing up, at a fifteen - degree angle. Faster than a lightning bolt could hit the ground, he was high. This time was a bit different, however. The strong sense of euphoria, relief, and calmness that he usually felt was now replaced with nausea, itchiness, and drowsiness.

"Sorry for the wait, man. We fixed the problem. We'll have you back down here in just a minute or two," the carny yelled up to Jackson.

Jackson heard the man's voice, but was too disorientated to make out where the sound was coming from. He could have sworn that he heard Addison's voice in the midst of the loud screams coming from the carnival. He became more paranoid as the Ferris wheel began to turn in its usual counter clockwise rotation. He gripped the railing of the carriage as if preparing for a car crash. His heart was beating like a wild animal trying to escape his chest. He looked at his hands and noticed that the color of his fingertips resembled that of his jeans. The world around him was spinning faster than a dreidel. Jackson began to gasp for air as he fell off of his seat and onto the metal floor of the Ferris wheel's carriage. He laid on his back, struggling to fill his lungs with air. A singular rain drop hit Jackson's forehead. He knew that he was overdosing and realized that his life was rapidly coming to an end. His breathing would stop for a time only to reemerge like a drowning victim coming up for one last breath. Rather than panicking, he laid there, patiently awaiting his demise, contemplating. He reflected on his life, knowing that it would all be gone soon.

The Ferris wheel came to a halt and it was Jackson's turn to finally get out. The carny opened the latch to the door only to see a limp and pale body laying lifeless on the hard metal floor.

The Office of the Medical Examiner proclaimed that Jackson died from an overdose on that Friday afternoon in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In the *Tulsa World*, it was written that a middle-aged man died from an overdose at the local carnival, alone and unclaimed.

The following Friday children and parents of all ages rushed to the carnival to enjoy the games and rides. The Ferris wheel moved, as it always did, in a counter clockwise rotation. The only person that ever spoke of Jackson again was the carny who was working the Ferris wheel that night.

"What a poor son of a bitch," the carny would tell his friends. "He even died with the needle still in his arm."

In a few years, the carny would stop sharing the events that he witnessed that night. New stories would be told, and Jackson's story

would become insignificant. No one would ever speak again about what occurred on that Friday afternoon in Tulsa, Oklahoma.