1999 Honorable Mention Personal Narrative

Our Moon

“Hello?” Her stressed and tired tones channeled across the phone wire.

“Hi,” I answered.

“Hellooooo! What’s up?” With the recognition her voice instantly became light and easy.

“Nothing. Hey, guess what? I have to write a personal narrative. No one here knows me well enough to help, so I thought I’d call you.”

“A personal narrative, huh? What are you gonna write about?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I called you. The only recent life-changing occurrence that comes to mind is…well, you know what it is. That’s not what I want to remember as the most profound thing that ever happened to me.” I knew she understood exactly what I was referring to.

“Hmm. I don’t know; there’s tons of stuff you could do. Why don’t you write about the time you sang? Yeah, do that!”

“Well…I don’t know.”

“How about…” her words casually carried me with them as I leaned back in my chair and twirled the phone cord around my finger. Our voices transcended the time zones, and for a moment we were side by side on the pastel plaid of my bed again, lost in language, staring at the glow-in-the-dark solar system spiraling its way around my room.

I laughed at some of her suggestions, and eventually the question was abandoned as we moved on to other topics. She started to tell me about her weekend and the retreat she had gone to. My eyes wandered around my dorm room, still searching for ideas. Eventually, as Brooke’s broken sentences filled my head, my senses rested on the pictures of two girls—one with dark, curling hair and deeply tanned, muscular arms, and the other
slightly smaller, more pale, more light—sticking their heads out from behind road-signs or outstretching their arms from a shopping cart. I smiled, and stopped Brooke mid-sentence. “Hey, I’ve got my story.”

“Oh, yeah? And what might that be?” She questioned.

“You’ll see,” I joked. “But I need to go now.”

“Yeah, that’s probably a good idea. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Alright. See ya.” I hung up the phone, looked blankly at my computer screen and let its whiteness spellbind me. The darkness of the night seeped through my partly opened blinds. It was a full moon again, just like it had been the night I had left.

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I stared out the car window at the moon, holding her letter in my hand. Her words, written in the voice I knew so well, echoed in my head. “…Today, we both separate, going down different paths of life. It’s weird to part after travelling the same way for so long.”

I glanced down at the computerized image of a blue moon set against the pitch-blackness of a night sky. It seemed so lonely, so cold. “This moon is for you. It’s our moon, always there even when you can’t see it.”

I gazed back up at the sky. I remember thinking how ironic it was that it was a full moon—the last lunar phase before it started all over again. I wasn’t sure if I wanted, if I was ready for a new moon yet. Not if it meant being thousands of miles away from the only person who knew me better than I knew myself.

A cloud covered the moon, then moved past as the car crawled along the endless freeway. It was the first time I didn’t complain my mom was only driving 65 miles per hour: I didn’t care as long as I could be that much closer to home for that much longer. I looked at the clock. It had been only thirty minutes since we had pulled out of my driveway. Only eight hours to go. A bump on the road lifted the car, then gently let it down. Nothing in the back jostled: there was no room for movement among the boxes, the bags, the pictures containing the memories of my last eighteen years.

Yes, I was on my way to college—that mythical landmark of life that never seemed like it would really come. But it had. Memories flooded my mind. Memories of first loves, of late night study sessions, of
elementary soccer games at recess, of Hot Tamales, of sunburns, of water-skiing, of cow costumes and tutus. She was there for every one of them. I thought back to the hours just before I had left when we realized that, after eight years of friendship, we had taken no pictures of just the two of us. Then I smiled as I thought about the entire roll of 36 exposure film we had just spent, recording us doing all the stupid things we’d always done as well as the ones we’d always talked about doing. There in my mind was the pair of crossroads—Brooksboro and Greensboro—that we’d discovered one-day years before. We always laughed about taking a picture in front of the sign that “joined” us together, the sign where her first name—Brooke—and my last name—Green—met at perfectly perpendicular angles. We had just never gotten around to it until that morning.

“Funny how the pictures we took today were of the roads where we met.” I mused at how unnatural that sounded. I couldn’t remember, in the jumble of memories surrounding our friendship, a definitive beginning. It seemed as though the moment we “met” had been instantly blurred and blended with all the moments to follow. But, as I drove eastward out of Nevada toward my new life in Utah, I couldn’t help but wonder if this journey would be the first step in the definitive ending of the friendship I had depended on for so long.

Dark shadowy craters etched themselves into the moon’s surface, contrasting the brilliance of its glow as my eyes attempted to unravel its mystery. It seemed so pure, so peaceful, so innocent. I closed my eyes and tried to paint the world without a moon. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t envision my life without Brooke either. I had lived vicariously through her sometimes: She had taught me to dream, to live my imagination, for she had always seemed to manage the impossible. She even conquered the seemingly impossible feat of understanding every complexity that comprised me, could speak the tacit language that was so foreign to everyone else who knew, or thought he knew, me. Really she was the only one who tried to learn it.

The moon hid behind the mountain on the side of the road. I looked at the clock again. Four more hours. My mom pulled off the freeway into a gas station. “Are you ready to drive now? I need a rest so I can drive your sister’s car later.”

“Sure.” I got out of the car, and walked in to find the bathroom. The moon looked so much better without the city lights blocking it, when I could actually see the brilliant circle of light spreading itself from the
edges. It reminded me of all the nights we had spent at Lake Shasta, sleeping under the stars on the top of the houseboat, delving into the meaning of life and pretending to be intellectuals. Who is God? Do soulmates exist? Or is it possible to fall in and out of love? What makes a friendship last? How does one truly measure the passage of time? So many questions we had unraveled in our own minds, never really solving any of them. Mostly we would just confuse ourselves to the point where we thought we understood. I questioned myself as I wandered back out to the car and slipped into the driver’s seat. The leather was cold and unresponsive. Would I be able to let others beside Brooke into the world of my thoughts? Even more, would others be able to understand me like Brooke had? The questions went unanswered.

My mom got in, and I headed back to the loneliest road in America. Rusted Root was playing on the stereo. I wanted desperately to blare the music, to roll down all the windows, and to sing at the top of my lungs just like we always used to do. I would have given almost anything to feel the bitter cold against my skin, to have the wind-forced stream of tears blazing its path across my temples. But then I glanced at my mom sleeping in the passenger seat, at the old age settling into her face, and decided against it. I tapped my thumbs against the steering wheel instead. With each beat came a new memory, a new feeling of vacancy. My loneliness was pounded into me. At that moment friendship turned from something tangible, something I thought I understood, to something abstract, like one of those words it seems nobody could ever really define—like love, or beauty, or truth. I tried to think of a definition in my head: friendship is companionship, honest evaluation, compassion and consideration, enjoying another’s company even when nothing spectacular is going on. I moved to more personalized definitions: friendship is the power to understand without a word, without an explanation, without a request for understanding. It’s staring at the stars, pondering the constellations, drawing out your future; friendship’s forgiveness for faults before they’re even apparent, sorrow for heartaches other than your own. Friendship’s a soul—lost, discovered, and carried home again. It’s a way of life, a universe of its own. Still something was missing.

The steady humming of the road beneath the wheels mesmerized me, and for a time I drove thoughtless, trying to keep the car within the path of the moonlight. It was the first time that I had actually thought about the
impact of Brooke’s friendship on me, and I realized that it had truly been one of the defining elements of my life. Without her I could have remained the diffident “new kid” of Jesse Beck Elementary School’s fifth grade class, the outside observer devoted to her books and little more. The moon would have looked different to me had Brooke not been the eyes through which I discovered it, the voice describing its wonder and shaping its image in my blindness. I was overwhelmed with a feeling of gratitude for Brooke as I continued driving that night, a gratitude for her helping to create the “me” I envisioned I had become, an identity I could respect and depend on. The spirit she had helped me to discover was still with me, and, as I looked into myself, I found parts of her—her work ethic, her strength, her hope, her passion. I realized, as the car wound its way closer and closer to Provo, the genuine importance of friendship, the significance of having someone that I truly needed. The famous words of John Donne—“No man is an island, entire of itself”—took on an enhanced meaning for me as I traveled that highway. I had always prided myself on the fact that I didn’t “need” anyone; that I was the one who would first defy the impossibilities of such social isolation. I saw myself as a rock—impermeable, protected. But, staring up one last time at the fading moon, I discovered that all the while Brooke had allowed me to believe I was an island, dependent on only myself, she had somehow been silently and secretly changing that truth within me. I had needed her—needed her to slay my social fears, to uncover the secrets of my passion—and I had needed humanity.

The clock read 4:30 a.m. when I pulled into my aunt’s driveway. The moon had nearly disappeared, and the early hours of the morning found themselves lit by that ever-gentle glow before sunrise. As I walked into the house, I didn’t even look to find what was left of the moon. I knew that it was still there, just like Brooke had said. And that it always would be.