

Reminisce

Grades 11-12

When I reminisce upon my childhood, the most prominent memory that emerges is that of sharp edges of gravel tearing into the soles of my feet as I sprinted across my neighbor's unpaved driveway dressed as the Green Power Ranger for what seemed like the thousandth time that week. As the sun set and the streetlights overhead flickered on, bulging blisters and embedded pebbles ached with each and every step on the impossible journey to the glorious summit that was my front door. I would never learn from the night's gaping wounds and the tears that soon flowed as a result. Instead, I would immediately rush to my room to begin choreographing the next heroic episode of my Power Ranger odyssey.

Ever since, I have valiantly worked toward forgetting the blisters and cuts that wreaked so much havoc over ten years ago in an attempt to create a pure memory that is no longer corrupted by incredible discomfort. But as I dig deeper to remove these weeds, the more I realize that they are intertwined with the very roots of my identity; they even find their place in my very first conscious memory.

My first memory hazily places me, a three-year-old child, standing at the edge of a gravel street staring at the streaks of blue revealing themselves under a withering red coat of paint on my grandmother's dilapidated mobile home. My mother was in her trailer snoring, and a powerful rumble of hunger forced me outside to search for the only beacon of stability I knew: my grandmother. I stepped from the soft, damp grass and onto the jagged gravel that instantly pushed itself into my delicate feet. With the determination of a lion and the agility of a newborn giraffe, I stumbled across the street alone and found myself at the bottom of the towering steps leading to

my grandmother's front door. Before I could even step foot on the first step, I seemingly grew wings and soared to the very top of the stairs and into my one and only refuge.

I did not grow wings. Instead, it was my grandmother who picked me up and brought me into her home to feed and clothe me. That was the day my adoption process began.

Much like the pebbles that I ripped from my wounds, I find myself attempting to get rid of this memory and the emotional turmoil that accompanies it. At sleepovers when asked about my first memory, I would hastily fabricate one filled with pure happiness and joy. Perhaps, I would speak of a nonexistent memory from Christmas in which the gravel was replaced with soft, glistening snow but never the truth.

I also found this toxic tendency transcending beyond this single memory and repressing several other aspects of my identity. When engaging with people who came from other places in the world, my accent faded, and I denied my rich roots in Appalachian culture. If I was in a room full of strangers, I grew weary of my effeminate gestures and imprisoned my heart to never reveal the supposedly abominable emotions I felt. This repression weaved a dark blanket to conceal all aspects of who I truly was.

However, I have stopped digging so deep to rid myself of all the weeds, for I brought myself to the surface to realize they were elegant roses this whole time. I now embrace my difficult upbringing in Appalachia as a crucial aspect of my life that sculpted me into the persevering and resilient person I am today, and I advocate for my community to ensure no child drowns in fear and self-resentment simply for who they love. The aspects of my identity I so arduously worked to eliminate now serve as the kindling for my passion to change the world and reveal to everyone the unique and elegant roses that grow within them.

Though, I now stand at the edge of yet another unpaved road. Only now, my grandmother's home no longer stands before me. Instead, it sits behind me, the windows illuminated with the bright smiles of family and loved ones. I look to my feet to see formidable calluses in the former place of the excruciating blisters and cuts.

The path ahead of me remains consumed in a thick and daunting fog no matter how determined I prove to be in looking beyond my immediate journey. My mind helplessly resorts to the same mindset I possessed in this exact position as a child. Feelings of dread and trepidation quickly invade my mind, and I find myself defenseless in my efforts to fight them away. I tense in anticipation of my succumbence to the overpowering mental conquest. I close my eyes.

Suddenly, a blinding light penetrates my eyelids, and the suffocating fear soon disappears. I open my eyes to mysterious, bright beams encompassing my entire body. I frantically glance around to identify their source, and I discover they are emanating from the windows of my home. I realize they are comprised of overwhelming sentiments of love and support from my loved ones. They embrace me tighter and tighter until I look ahead to find my path illuminated by the glow of the beams.

I hesitantly step onto the gravel that once sliced into the soles of my feet to only feel nothing. The radiance that surrounded me served as a cushion between my soles and the treacherous mountains of rock below me. I step again, and again, and again...

I continue to retain ignorance of my ultimate destination, but regardless of where my path leads me, I know my confidence in my identity and support from my family and loved ones will remain constant.

I take another step.