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College of DuPage

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College Life

by Nick Rascia

(English 1101)

My father was a well-intentioned man. Maybe not the best role model, but he genuinely cared. He never did well in school and so he did not expect it out of his children. When I graduated high school, he cautioned me that the best years of my life were coming to an end, and I had better enjoy them. It was time to get a serious job or go to college. Until that point, I hadn't really thought about what direction my future would take. I would always hear stories of the tragedy that awaited those foolish enough to "take time off" and fall into a dead-end job. My father wanted me to work, but encouraged me to try school for a semester or two to see how I liked it, and advised me to at least take some "fun" classes where I could make new friends. However, how I would get there and how I would pay for it was completely up to me.

I decided that I would go to college. It was more of a last minute, unplanned decision, but it sounded better than the other option. Given that the summer after high school might be the last with my friends, I decided to make it the best. Life was full of experience, and learning happens outside the classroom too. Somehow I managed to find time in my busy schedule of parties and chaos to register for college. I was too lazy for and totally uninterested in general education classes, so I chose subjects that interested me, but were not required.

My twin brother also registered for school, mostly because he was sold on the idea of making friends and being around people. Many people, when they think of identical twins, may conjure up an image of the "double mint" twins: identical clothes, identical mannerisms and thoughts. I preferred to think of my brother and myself as two sides of the same coin. He was the singer in a punk rock band; I was more prone to reading and people watching. We looked the same, but saw the world through different eyes.

All my life, I was expected to share with my brother. We had to share birthdays, allowance, car privileges. He was ten minutes older, and he liked to remind me that he was the oldest, as if it meant something. He had a tendency to impose "sharing" on me, and because of differences in our personalities, we had a tendency to clash. I was hoping my college experience would give me the opportunity to break away from him, to form my own identity. How was I supposed to do that when we had to share the same school?

The night before classes began, my friends decided to have one "last hurrah," one last party before school began. All my friends were there, and we danced and bonded and laughed well into the night. At one point, I realized that I still had no way of getting to school, seeing as how I did not own a car. By stroke of luck, my brother's friend, who was a mutual friend of mine had just got a new (yet very used) car, and offered to give us a ride to school in the morning. My mind put to rest, I returned to the rest of my friends, and the night slipped away into a soothing blur.

I woke up to the persistent and piercing sound of the alarm clock, and the roar of my friend revving his loud engine in the driveway. I opened one eye. It was 6:30 a.m., was it really necessary to wake up this early? Trying unsuccessfully to shake off the foggy clouds that seemed to envelop me, I stumbled to the bathroom, where I checked my hair and my breath. I looked like a complete wreck and smelled like a beer-soaked ashtray. As I simultaneously swished mouthwash and vigorously shook my matted hair, I swore to myself I would never get up this early unless it was a matter of life or death. I kicked my brother, still sleeping on the floor. He grabbed his book bag and shuffled outside to our waiting ride.

The air was crisp and chilly. My body shuddered as I closed the front door behind me. The grass was frozen stiff and coated with a fine layer of frost that crunched under our feet as we ambled into our waiting ride. I watched the sun reluctantly pull itself out of the horizon as I drew little pictures with my finger on the foggy window. My friend was blasting screeching guitar riffs, possibly with the good intentioned notion to keep me awake. Somebody told me once that the road to hell was paved with good intentions. At this moment I couldn't have agreed more.

We arrived at school and agreed to meet back in 5 hours once classes were out. My friend promptly left for his classes and I was left with my brother. We stood in front of the looming building before us. He looked at me with a half grin.

"So, this is college."

"So, it is", I replied as I lit my cigarette.

"College of dreams, baby." I turned around so he couldn't see me rolling my eyes.

"Whatever." I was nervous to be sure. At that point, I had no clear sense of direction at all. I didn't even know what I was doing back in school, let alone what I would really do when I got there, and all the people I asked could not seem to point me in the right direction. I wanted to go home, but there was no turning back, no ride even if I wanted. How was I supposed to succeed with no goal, no clear path before me?

As I finished the day, on the ride home, my brother and friend were excitedly talking about parties and girls, and all the things they believed college life should be. My friend pulled onto the highway and accelerated to the car's top speed. My brother opened up his window and howled as the wind rushed into the car. I sat in the backseat and watched the world move impossibly fast. The future was uncertain and scary. Where did I fit in? What was I good at? I could only hope that these coming years would give me the answers I was desperately seeking.

I closed my eyes and smiled for the first time that day. I looked ahead and saw the road stretch on. We were flying heedless into certain doom. I opened my window, feeling the wind batter my face and blow through my hair. We were moving at 90 miles per hour, driving towards our destiny. That's when I realized it. I was free. Free to make my own choices. My identity *was* my own, should I decide to take ownership of it. The world was mine, and full of infinite possibility. To fail or succeed was my own choice. Either way, I would learn. I could take comfort in at least that. I closed my eyes again and let the wind lift me up and carry me away.