Cousins

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College of DuPage
It was the blue jay that she had loved as a child. It was Jeff she had loved as an adult. Still, as she watched the blue jay romp about outside the branches of her window, the remarkable beauty that it displayed could not be forgotten, not even by her grandfather's words. For the first time in what seemed to be an eternity, she saw the beauty that marked this bird. Its brilliant blue that brought color to her life.

She had read up almost instantaneously with her last thought and dashed into the kitchen. Her fingers fumbled nervously with the buttons on her phone.

"Jeff, I really do want to go to lunch with you."

Cousins
by Carolyn Belletee

Randy sat solemnly at the edge of the cow pond, his piercing blue eyes staring aimlessly into the glasslike water. The deep furrows of thought burrowed heavily into his forehead. As he blinked away, his glance and mind were carried to the farm. It was apparent that little had changed since he had left to go to college six years ago in 1962. Cows still chewed placidly on the sparsely growing blades of grass. A few ducks wandered about the edge of the pond quacking incessantly and nipping at a fly or beetle which carelessly landed within the reach of their beak. This was where Randy had grown up, his years of childhood bliss and learning were all around him.

The letter from his Aunt Mira, which he had been reading, was laid carefully in his lap, the tender bits of reminiscing about the summers her son Jeffrey had spent on the farm popping out at him. It was impossible for Randy to keep his thoughts from going back on the summer, which would forever remain a part of the memory of Jeffrey's visits.

It was the summer before Randy would begin high school. Most of the boys in his class were working on the farms, which their families owned or rented. Once in a while, a few of the boys would get done with their chores early or else the weather was too miserable to work and they would go out and just mess around for a while. Generally, Randy spent most of the time by himself. His family lived on a small farm in isolated country.

The best part of that summer for Randy was when his cousin Jeffrey came to visit. Jeffrey was a city boy from Chicago, which fascinated Randy. He was a wealth of knowledge, and Randy enjoyed asking Jeffrey about the city. He was the sort of friend who wanted to share with Randy about his life. Jeffrey's visits had brought an about him. It was impossible for Randy to keep his thoughts from going back on the summer, which would forever remain a part of the memory of Jeffrey's visits.

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Randi searched his mind quickly for whatever remnants of the life-saving techniques he had learned earlier while in the Scouts. Back pressure, arm lift, back pressure, arm lift. Over and over Randy repeated the words as he frantically worked on his cousin's still body.

"Oh God, please save him!"

Randy had pulled Jeffrey from the water by his feet and his head was still facing down the bank partially in the quagmire surrounding the pond. Slowly Jeffrey's body slipped closer and closer to the water with each push Randy made on his back. Realizing the possibility of his cousin slipping back into the water, Randy scrambled back to pull him further up the bank. Back pressure, arm lift, over and over again.

"Jesus, he has to come to! Mom's going to really be pissed. Jesus, God help me! What more can I do?" The words tumbled one on top of another from Randy.

Time seemed to drag on forever to Randy. His arms ached agonizingly. His lungs were on fire from gasping for air, hoping that gulps of air would strengthen his physical being.

"Oh God! Oh God Damn! Please save him God." Prayer and profanity mingled incongruously with one another.

Exhaustion had nearly overwhelmed Randy. He was barely able to lift his own arms to apply even one more stroke of artificial respiration when bubbles began popping on Jeffrey's mud-caked lips. Slowly responses began to come from Jeffrey's body. A bizarre combination of quivering and belching shook Jeffrey's body. Barbaric gutteral sounds emitted from the colorless gaping mouth. Randy was delighted, amazed, and appalled at the mannerless utterances attempting to form words on his cousin's lips.

The quivering movement caused Jeffrey to once again edge toward the water. Randy quickly grabbed for Jeffrey's ankles and pulled him up the bank. Further this time from the danger of the water.

Finally, Jeffrey opened his eyes and sputtered water and mud from his mouth. Coughing, sneezing, and belching to clear the clogged passages essential to his life. Jeffrey only gazed up at the sky, staring blankly as if hypnotized by the closeness of death.

"Randy? Randy?" he mewed softly as if the words themselves were an excruciating effort.

"I'm right here Jeff. Hang on guy, you're going to be okay. I've got to get help."

"I'm so tired Randy. I want to sleep. Let me sleep, okay?"

Randy's concept, that at this point sleep and death were synonymous, drove him as if he were obsessed. "Hey, Jeff, you can't sleep. Don't shut your eyes Jeff. Jeff!!"

With every word, Randy vigorously shook Jeffrey, hoping to make the sleep from him and the life back into him.

"Just let me sleep. Sleep." The words trailed off as Jeffrey began to doze.

The only way Randy could think to keep Jeffrey from sleeping was to keep him talking. But how could he keep him talking and go for help at the same time?

"Jeff, you've got to stay awake. Jeff, keep talking about something."

"Why? Leave me alone. Let me sleep."

"Talking will keep you awake. I got it, do you know the Preamble to the Constitution?" Randy quizzed.

"Sure, sure, but I want to sleep."

"Jeff you start reciting the Preamble, and I want to hear you keep on reciting. Got that Jeff? Keep reciting over and over until help comes. Jeff? Get with it Jeff. Start reciting now."

Randy shook Jeffrey violently to revive him from his stupor. Jeffrey slowly began the recitation.

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice..."

No sooner had Jeffrey gotten past the first few words than Randy was streaking toward the house. His lanky, bare legs not seconding or breaking stride once. As if he were a quarter horse, he wildly galloped toward the house, toward help, toward protection.

The volunteer firemen were summoned and were met by Randy's mother and older brother at the cow pond. They had found Jeffrey lying at the edge of the pond, his body mummified in a casement of mud hardened and cracking under the sun's rays. Jeffrey was still reciting the Preamble just as Randy had intimated he do.

How long ago that all seemed now. Randy sighed with relief of the memory's end and with the sadness of the present time. He forced himself to pick up the letter, re-reading it word for word. Then, as if he was overcome by some unknown power, he wildly shredded the letter over and over until minute pieces of words were all that remained, telling of Jeffrey's death in Vietnam. With a futile ferocity, he flung the scraps onto the cow pond and watched them float aimlessly, a duck occasionally pecking at a scrap here and there. It was a hot humid day as Randy galloped quickly back to the house, never breaking stride, never looking back, never wiping the tears from his cheeks.