

you want to make your point clear try not to have run-on sentences especially without using commas to separate and pause and especially without semi-colons to show a divide in two independent clauses that you feel should be linked and not separated with a period which will end a sentence. I have also learned using "this" or "which" to try to address the previous sentence as one idea is lazy, which is what I don't want. This can be hard sometimes, though. I have learned using the passive voice is bad, information which was given by my professor and was received by me. I have learned essays can be written about morals, which aren't about right and wrong, but are tidbits like chocolate chips ( I also learned about puns). For example, one moral dilemma is determining whether euthanasia is just like euthenamerica when it comes to fighting authority figures. I have learned gender doesn't really make a difference, and wrote a paper about it trying not to offend women, because they are overly sensitive. I have learned humor makes people laugh most of the time. I have learned that I definately don't want to have to many spelling errors or misuse of words because then people percept you differently. I have learned its time to stop since this journal has come to it's second page. I have learned a good way to start an essay is to ask a question, but is it a good way to end one?

## MY YOUTH THROUGH A RIVER FLOWING

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Two nights ago it got chilly for the first time this September. The cool air will turn the leaves brown, red and gold, and soon after the trees will shed their colorful coats to welcome winter. My birthday is coming next month, and this time of year causes me to travel back to years gone by. I'm going to be twenty-five, and this fact along with the shocking reality of my mortality loom over me. When I was younger, I wanted to be older. I couldn't wait to be sixteen or eighteen or twenty-one, but for the first time in my life, I don't want to get any older. As I sit here and begin to dwell, a journey begins at the base of my imagination and creeps into my memory. For a moment I reach for my youth. I see the lush green hills of the Saint Joseph River Valley and feel the bumpy dirt road that

snakes a mile and a half from my Uncle Jack's house down to the river in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

At seven in the evening on a Friday night I would ride, rather uncomfortably, in the back seat of my dad's blue Jeep Wrangler. I could be seven or twelve or seventeen. My younger brother John would ride shotgun and fill my dad's ears with continuous streams of information about dirt bikes, fishing and baseball practice. I thought only about the bait in the ice chest under my feet and my fishing pole lying patiently across my lap.

As we started to descend into the valley, passing the apple and cherry orchards of Uncle Jack's farm, I anticipated reaching the bottom and seeing the last bend in the dirt road that would lead us to the campsite. Bushes loom on both sides of the road where my grandpa and I picked blueberries on Saturday afternoons while everyone else lounged around the trailers gossiping about family and playing cards.

To get my brother to stop yammering, my father told the story of a dangerous wild cat with huge fangs that lived in southwestern Michigan. No such thing existed, but it was good for a scare. The road is heavily shaded by trees on both sides, and as he drove on further I would realize how far it was from the campsite back to the house. At about this time, my dad would cup two of his fingers down and under to illustrate how large the fangs actually were. He called this variety of mountain feline the "Wompass Cat," and he always warned that we had better beware.

Grandpa would greet us at the campsite as we unpacked tents, sleeping bags and fishing poles. The headlights of approaching trucks made their way down the dirt road and increased as the sun melted on the horizon and disappeared. By nine o'clock everyone who was going to be there was there; by ten the majority of our gear was situated and a fire was going. I'd grab a couple of "beevos" ( family terminology for beer ) and head down to the river with my pole and my grandpa and do some fishing while the others officially kicked off the weekend.

The mornings were always special on the river. At 5:30 a.m., the only things awake would be the sun, the fog on the river, and my grandpa making coffee. Seeing his large tall frame and broad shoulders bent over the fire where the coffee would perk, I would anticipate its aid in drowning a mild hangover and choking down my first cigarette of the day. This is when he shared his memories of growing up in rural Alabama and camping alongside the Tennessee River and compared it to the times we had on the St. Joe. Of course, fishing the St. Joe. is much better in the South, he'd say, but he enjoyed it no less on the St. Joe.

Saturday morning would drift into Saturday afternoon. The lazy sunlight would wash over the wild daisies and violets that grew here and there, sometimes inspiring deep thoughts of life and death and God. I can see my reflection in the moving water of the river, forcing me to question things I never even had imagined. I experienced some great epiphanies on that river bank.

Saturday night when the humid air cooled, we feasted on fish and burgers grilled on the Coleman stoves. There would be plenty of beer, and we all gathered around the campfire to fill the air with our stories. My grandpa told the funniest ones. He was a mild man for his size, and his worn blue eyes still sparkled. He had lines around them as well as the corners of his mouth from smiling all the time. He told our history from his side of the family. He told tales of his mother, a Cherokee Indian Princess who was half-Irish on her mother's side. Her father was the Chief. She died when my grandpa was fourteen years old but left him with many stories. Her great-great aunt was the mother of Frank and Jesse James. Their sister is buried in the same cemetery as my grandpa and his mom in Walnut Grove, Alabama. He would spin tales all night until the sun woke up and we all fell asleep.

The next morning we began the farewells at noon while gathering and repacking our belongings. The pickup trucks would start to trickle away up the hills and out of the valley, until we would be the only ones left. Dad, Grandpa, John and I leaned up against the Jeep and drank the last of the orange juice and made plans for the next weekend. The wildflowers appeared the same as when I first saw them that Friday: soft periwinkle blue and bright yellow petals swaying gently on thick, humid breezes on fields of tough, long green grass. The river would keep flowing, even though we were leaving.

We would hug Grandpa good-bye, and he'd climb into his truck and follow us away from the campsite. I would look back at him and those blueberry bushes until we rounded the first bend and they were no longer in sight.

That half mile road from my Uncle Jack's house to our campsite was basically made by us, and year after year the dirt tire tracks sank deeper and deeper into the earth, so they created a sort of grass-covered knoll that ran between them. In the last couple of years the tracks had sunk so low that it was almost impossible to drive a car down to the river.

Everything has since changed. Everyone has gone away. My Dad now lives in San Diego. John is in the Navy. In the last three years he has

been everywhere except home. I moved to Florida, got married and divorced, and am finally back at home finishing my degree at Valparaiso University. Grandpa has since passed away, but I have a feeling if I wanted to see him I could drive up to the St. Joe this Friday night. He'd be waiting there with enough bait to last until Sunday afternoon.

## SOLITUDE

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Every summer, in late August before school starts, my family stuffs the mini van, secures the canoe to the top and heads off to the great north woods of Minnesota. The five hour drive from the Twin Cities to the Canadian border is just the beginning of our week long family bonding time. Not only is the trip time well spent with the family, but it is a relaxing time for ourselves away from the hustle and bustle of the big city. We make the common stops for food and gas, and finally arrive in a small town, Ely, on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) on the border of Minnesota and Canada. This will be the last night's sleep in a warm, comfortable bed for a week. We will also fill up our water bottles and water jugs with clean, drinkable water in the motel room and prepare to leave behind all of the accustomed luxuries.

We awake early the next morning and drive by car as far into the BWCA as possible down the Gunflint Trail, moving from a smooth paved highway onto a bumpy gravel road where the rocks bounce up and hit the bottom of the car and the dust trails behind us, to find a parking lot of packed down grass. Here we not only leave the car, but the comforts of civilization. We pile all of the week's necessities into the tiny, silver canoe and paddle our way to our new home for the week. With our family of four and all of our gear, we set off on our summer vacation to enjoy the true beauty of nature.

The trip to our new home for the week is not an easy one. The canoe cuts through the glassy water making ripples that can be heard if you listen close enough, which is relaxing, yet, at the same time, very tiring. We canoe for half a day from lake to lake, through lily pads, weeds, and cattails and open lake water where the wind can catch the tip of the canoe and set us off sight, but we will still get to our campsite. The portaging (emptying the canoe and carrying everything to the next lake) is