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Tree Warriors

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Tree Warriors

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Deep in Given's Woods stood a tall majestic tree. A tree with branches that extended like fingers reaching to touch the world surrounding it. Green crisp leaves, as green as emeralds, dangled from the branches above. This tree meant so much to me, not for its beauty, but for the friendship it gave me."

Cover Page Footnote
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First Prize Winner

Tree Warriors

Deep in Givens' Woods stood a tall majestic tree. A tree with branches that extended like fingers reaching to touch the world surrounding it. Green crisp leaves, as green as emeralds, dangled from the branches above. This tree meant so much to me, not for its beauty, but for the friendship it gave me.

That June, I finished fourth grade with straight B's. Patti Green, the class brain, told me I was going to fail, and that I would be stuck with the class bully, John-John, who had been there for 2 years. I proved Patti wrong and taught her a lesson about being mean to people.

Josh, my best friend, helped me teach Patti a thing or two. On the last day of school, Josh and I brought a frog from Givens' Woods. We waited for the right moment to pay Patti back. There it was! She was talking with Sally and Paige by the swing set. I walked over to the girls and started up a conversation. While I was distracting them, Josh put the frog in Patti's bag. After I saw that he was done, I asked Patti if I could sign her yearbook. She got up from her swing and swaggered to her bag. At this time, I could see Josh smiling from behind the bushes by all of the bags. Patti picked up her bag and unzipped it. As she pulled the bag open, she let out an ear piercing shriek. She dropped her bag, ran, and then tripped over a stick. Her skirt fell over her head and everyone laughed. I walked over to Josh and high-fived him. Ms. Black, our teacher, was helping Patti up from the ground while trying to get everyone organized to board their buses home. As Josh and I stepped onto our big yellow bus, we waved to Patti with smirks on our faces. Patti realized what our smug expressions were for, so she stuck out her tongue. "I hope you learned your lesson, 'Miss Know-It-All,'" I yelled out the window as our bus pulled away.

After I got home that day, I called Josh right away. "Want to meet in Givens' Woods?"

"Okay," Josh said, "Bring your walkie-talkie."

"Okay. Don't forget to bring the helmets," I said.

"I won't. I'm leaving now," Josh said.
“Bye,” we replied in unison as we hung up the phone. 

“Mom, I’m going to play with Josh,” I yelled as I ran from the house. “I won’t be home for dinner.”

“Not too late, Dave,” my mother yelled.

“I know,” I hollered as I peddled down the street on my mud covered BMX bike.

I rode up to the woods and left my bike next to Josh’s, which was right by the flimsy pine tree struggling for sunshine. As I walked through the woods, I wondered where he was. He wasn’t by the tree. I looked up to see if he had climbed it, but there was no sign of him.

“Josh!” I yelled. “Where are you?” No reply.

I began to hear a whimper. “Josh?” There he was, sitting behind the tree, holding his right arm. He had tears streaming down his face that kept landing in the same spot on the forest’s floor.

“What happened, Josh?” Was it your dad again?

“Yeah,” he mumbled.

“Why did he hit you this time?” I asked.

“When I went to get the helmets out of the garage, I accidentally knocked over his jar of nails and they spilled onto the floor. He called me an idiot and said I can’t do anything right.”

“You’re not an idiot, he is! Why does he always have to hit you?”

“Because I just can’t do anything right.”

“That’s not true, Josh. You put the frog in Patti’s bag without anyone seeing you. And, you could spell ‘dictionary’ when ‘Smarty Pants Sally’ couldn’t. Maybe it’s time you told someone about this, Josh. Your dad might hurt you really bad someday.”

“No Dave! Please don’t tell anyone, it’s not his fault. He’s not the same since Mom died.”

“That doesn’t matter, it’s been three years Josh. This isn’t right.”

“Please don’t tell. Please!” Josh pleaded.

“Okay, okay, I won’t. But, if he hurts you again, I’m gonna tell.”


“Yeah, on the Tree Warriors Code,” I said. Then together Josh and I recited: “I am here to protect The Mighty Tree from all invaders. If they enter our zone and destroy it, they will pay!” This was the Tree Warrior’s Code. We made it up since we played in the woods so much, by this big maple tree. Josh and I had played here since we were seven. These woods felt like our safe zone, and a place to escape to. At least that is what Josh thought of it as, a place to hide from his dad. We were the Tree Warriors in these woods; we were invincible. We played in Given’s Woods till about 7:00 p.m. and then rode
our bikes home.

"You sure you don't want to stay over tonight, Josh?" I asked.

"Nah, I have to get home. I have chores to do."

"Okay. Meet me in the woods tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. Maybe I can bring my dad's old army jacket."

"Cool, see you, Dave."

"Later, Josh."

When I woke up the next morning, I asked my dad if I could use his jacket. He lent me two, one for me and one for Josh. I was so excited. I packed my backpack with the jackets and the walkie talkies. I hopped on my bike and raced to the woods.

I arrived in the woods at exactly 1:00 p.m. Josh wasn't there. 'Maybe he's caught up in chores,' I thought, "I can't wait for him to see these jackets." 1:15 p.m., 'Where is he? Maybe he's working really hard?" 1:37 p.m., 'This is crazy, maybe he forgot?" 1:59 p.m. "What a jerk, he stiffed me," I said aloud to myself. At this point I was mad. What a pal, doesn't even show up. I rode my bike home, with a scowl on my face. I pulled into the driveway and stormed into the house. As I stamped through the hall, I could hear crying. 'Who's that?' I wondered. I walked into the kitchen to find my dad hugging my mom, who was crying.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Oh, Dave," my mother managed to say, with tears rolling down her face from her swollen eyes.

"Why are you crying?" I questioned.

"It's Josh," she replied.

"What about him? He didn't meet me in the woods."

"I know, honey," my mom cried out. "Josh was taken to the hospital, his father pushed him down a flight of stairs. He died Dave; Josh died."

"What?...No, he couldn't...What? He's gotta meet me in the woods! No! He's fine!" I yelled as I raced out the door. 'This can't be happening,' I thought. I rode my bike back to the Given's Woods. I ran to our tree. I leaned against the tree and slowly slid down it crying. I couldn't believe I just lost my best friend. I had talked to him only yesterday and now he's gone!

I cried all day and sat in the woods until sundown. As I got myself together, I left one of the jackets my dad gave me at the tree. "This is your's, Josh," I said. I rode home, somber with swollen eyes and a tearstained face.

That Friday was the funeral. It was so depressing. My whole class was there, even Patti and John-John, who was wearing a suit that was too small for him. Josh's father didn't show; he was in
prison for what he did. I was glad. His dad didn't deserve to be there. After the ceremony, when everyone dispersed, I walked up to Josh's casket. "This is for you, pal. If you ever need to talk to me, you know what to do." Then I placed one of the walkie-talkies on his casket.

Things were pretty hard after that. It took me a while to get into the swing of things again. But, by Christmas time, with the help of a psychiatrist, I was feeling better. I had coped with the loss of Josh. Things were starting to look up. I even kissed Patti Green under the mistletoe at school. I wished I could have told Josh about how Patti closed her eyes and I kept mine open. I also wish I could play Tree Warriors with him again. The woods aren't the same without him. But I know that if I ever need to talk to someone, I can go into the woods with my walkie-talkie and talk to Josh. I know he can hear me because he's a Tree Warrior, and Tree Warriors have superhuman hearing...right, Josh?!

--Tamara Sieplerski

Second Prize Winner

The War

"To the end of our health, the campaign 'gainst myself; armed with bourbons and scotch and rums...and the band played on."

--from "The Drinking Song" by Moxy Fruvous

6:45 p.m. Friday

A man enters my doorway, the dim blacklight and moonbeams shower his silhouette, he holds the vodka and lemonade. The battle begins.

waiting on the shelf
at attention
the shot glass

8:00 p.m. Friday

They are following:
the party goers, they file in
to wish me luck, to forget
the luck they never had, and
stock the fridge with beer.
First blood drawn.

my refrigerator:
the battering ram
waiting to bust

9:30 p.m. Friday

Here we are sharing a man's cell; his home
is a shelter for one and
all are but accepting realities,
embracing ambiguity.
Prisoners Of War.