The Last Bonfire

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay’s first paragraph.
"Gather dry wood, make some stacks. Kindling cracks as we feed the starving flames. Need more, need more! Larger, I say. Place it in slowly as to not smother the young inferno. The heat grows thicker as the August air crisps and darkens. Orange light beckons to my friends, running across the field. 'Watch out for groundhog holes!' I warn. They approach with sweet hugs, six-packs of Honey Brown and bottles of Woodchuck Cider."

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Stars above watch our fire grow. The flames reach their fiery arms toward Heaven's gate as Dave plays his acoustic guitar, and we sing along. My brother drives the jeep around and lifts the back mechanically. He sits there, and swigs some Woodchuck. Pop, pop, sparkle, and flash--the hymns of the fire. Just lay silently, listen to the crickets, watch the fireflies make love in the air.

"Are there many leeches in the pond?" Asks Geremie as he begins shedding his outer layers. With the fire as a spotlight on his bare bottom, he runs into the stagnant pool as a line of bullfrogs applause this courageous act with kerplunking back into their home. "Hey! Someone come in with me! It feels good!" He laughs and splashes Sarika, who is wrapped up in a red, flannel blanket. Three other people join him, then four, then six! The water feels warm against the chilled air. Spongy mud squishes between our toes while sunfish nibble our ankles.

"Someone feed the fire! It's getting kind of dim!" My brother throws on a branch from the old apple tree, and then there was light. Since Dave is now floating on his back in the middle of the pond, Brian turns on the jeep radio and The Allman Brothers sing their song to me.

Jesse breaks out the marshmallows and chocolate, enough to bribe me back to shore. S'mores begin toasting on freshly whittled sticks. I like to make mine torches burning violently in the air. Dave sits and goldens his with precision. My brother holds them right above the flame so the shell of the marshmallow remains white, but the insides slide down the stick when you try to pull it off.

The hours tick by and we let our blaze die down to reddened coals--just enough to light up individual faces. Pink Floyd softly echoes from the jeep, placing us in a trance. Everyone is lying on their bellies wrapped in blankets, enjoying the moment we created.

Phil will be the first to leave next week. North Carolina is his destination, his wrestling scholarship, his ticket out. Then Dave and Jesse are off to Rochester where I will join them two weeks later. Sarika's family is moving to Buffalo and she will go to school there to become a nurse. Geremie will live down the street at the State College to study Biology. Nate is remaining home with Mama to be a constant reminder of our high school days.

All is still now, except for the simmer of the cooling coals, Dave's snoring, and the song of morning birds awakening the world. The sun peaks over the wooded hills, and then gathers up the courage to start a new day. The air is fresh. Steam is hovering over the still pond. I snuggle deeper into my Navy sweatshirt, observe my sleeping chums, and allow crystal tears to creep down my cheeks. I will miss this. I will miss them.

-Melissa Japp