The Coolest Playground Ever

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The Coolest Playground Ever

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

"I remember when the days lasted forever and it was always sunny. Recess was always too short, but it tired me out and made me feel good on the inside. For a brief time, way back when I was short and chubby with bangs that fell in front of my eyes, I attended a Catholic elementary school, Holy Ghost, with possibly the coolest playground ever. It was always sunny and I always felt good after running myself tired."

Cover Page Footnote
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I remember when the days lasted forever and it was always sunny. Recess was always too short, but it tired me out and made me feel good on the inside. For a brief time, way back when I was short and chubby with bangs that fell in front of my eyes, I attended a Catholic elementary school, Holy Ghost, with possibly the coolest playground ever. It was always sunny and I always felt good after running myself tired.

The playground was built by volunteers from Holy Ghost Church. Using wood, bolts, chains, and old tires, a handful of people put together the coolest playground ever. The ground around it was covered with little stones that always stuck in the crevices in my shoes. Although the materials weren’t cutting-edge or bright with colors, it was still the coolest playground ever.

The coolest playground ever consisted of a castle with towers and bridges. Touching the sky, the lookout towers allowed the boys to spot enemy girls. We would scale the metal and wooden rungs of the ladders in an effort to overthrow the boys. However, no one would stay up too long because bees often invaded the towers to make their homes. The bees sometimes blocked off the bridges too, narrowing the paths of escape to the metal slide that got too hot after mirroring the sun all day. It didn’t bother the boys too much because their navy blue pants protected their legs. Plaid skirts could not put up the same defense against the searing metal.

A long, octagonal bridge connected the castle to a ship. Old steering wheels were strategically placed, so one could look out and navigate away from pirates and scalawags. A spiral slide that was partially covered on the top, so it didn’t get too hot also served as an escape when the unwanted party attacked and took over the ship. Oftentimes, we would try to climb up the slide the wrong way to sneak onto the ship, but at the same time, someone would be coming down. A colliding mess of navy blue pants, plaid jumpers, and yellow blouses and polo shirts would come tumbling down, landing on the little stones at the mouth of the slide. Then we’d brush ourselves off and try it again.

While the boys dominated the castle and ship, the girls took to playing in the gazebo. It was a marvelous mansion, a stranded raft on an ocean, or a platform surrounded by flames ever licking at our toes. It was cool and shady in the mansion-raft-platform. The wood along the edges of the benches was smooth, so smooth that the wood almost felt soft to the touch. We could run our fingers along the wood and not have to worry about getting splinters stuck in our delicate skin. The boys wouldn’t bother us there.

One place that was not gender specific was the tire swing. We only had one and it was the most popular thing to do in the coolest playground ever. Suspended above a bottomless well or a pit full of venomous snakes, we swung the tire around and around until we felt ill with dizziness. Someone would grab two of the three chains it hung from and snap it around with all his or her might, causing the four to five riders to throw their heads back, unable to battle the centrifugal motion. Even after it rained and the bottomless well and snake pit filled with water, the boys would scoop the little stones up in their hands to fill it in. Being more creative, the girls scooped massive amounts of little stones in their skirts and dumped it in the pit. Several scoops later, the most popular thing to do in the coolest playground ever was once again usable.

Next to the tire swing were the regular swings. The light blue seats were nice and big so they didn’t dig into our hips and thighs. We could soar higher than the birds and the wind would catch our skirts on the way down. When two people were lined up exactly with each other and swung simultaneously, we would say they were married. Of course, the boys never liked this, so they rarely graced the swings. The swings, like
the gazebo mansion-raft-platform, belonged to the girls.

In front of the castle lay the catacombs. These tire mazes zigzagged the ground in the very front of the coolest playground ever. Each tire was on its end and about half way buried under the little stones, forming an upside-down "U." Being a little claustrophobic, I never really liked the tire tunnels. However I had no difficulty running and hopping along the tops. These too often absorbed the sun's rays and became hot to the touch. Neither pant nor skirt mattered, as long as the runners stayed on their rubber-soled feet.

This is how it used to be.

Now strange little children play where I once did on sunny days, tiring themselves out. No more boys and girls dressed in navy blue pants, plaid jumpers, and yellow blouses and polo shirts. The Holy Ghost school is now Generations Daycare. After attending that school from kindergarten through second grade, I had to switch schools before I entered third grade. Bishop Clark closed my school because there weren't enough students enrolled to keep the school alive. Bishop Clark took the coolest playground ever and gave it to someone else.

Not too long ago, I returned to the playground that strangers took from me. I went back and I played just like I had always done. Everything was the same, but at the same time, everything was so different. Or maybe it was just me.

Walking through the freshly mowed grass, I set foot on the little stones. No one was around. The screams and shouts of delight from my classmates had faded over the years. There were no boys to defend the castle and ship, no girls to make-believe with in the mansion-raft-platform. There was no one to grab two of the three chains the tire swing hung from and snap it around with all his or her might, causing me to throw my head back, unable to battle the centrifugal motion. It was quiet.

Somehow over the years, everything shrank. The towers of the castle that once graced the sky now were only a few feet above my head. I could climb the ladder in only two steps. Watching my head to avoid whacking it on the wooden frame, I still crept my way through the castle one more time. The bees still held their reign and the slide was still hot enough to burn what bare legs came its way.

I couldn't fit through the octagonal bridge anymore. I managed to hop on top of it and crawl over to the ship. I took hold of the steering wheel and whirled the ship starboard. Spotting virulent pirates, I dove head first down the spiral slide in an effort to abandon ship. My body was too long for the curves of the slide and I got stuck. The pirates took me captive and threw me in the catacombs. I briskly jumped out and ignored my imagination, remembering my claustrophobic fears of long ago.

Regaining my composure after the pirate attack, I kicked my way through the even littler stones to the tire swing. I sat on it and spun a bit, but quickly stopped after it made my stomach queasy. This time there was only room for me.

After I had my fill of reliving my childhood adventures, I retired to the gazebo for lunch. Gazing at the coolest playground ever, I realized that it hadn't changed at all. The castle with its catacombs and towers and escape routes hadn't changed. The ship with its steering wheels and spiral slide hadn't changed. The tunnels and bridges connecting the two hadn't changed. Even the old tire swing still remained suspended from the ground by the three chains in the exact same place. It was sunny out and I felt tired.

The coolest playground ever will never change. The chains are a bit rusty and some have a protective plastic covering on them. The wood has been worn and smoothed from years of use. But those things don't really matter. Children will come and go, making that playground theirs just as I had. They will play in the sun and get tired out and feel good. Before I left the coolest playground ever, perhaps for another ten years, I stood and looked at it. It will never change; it was sunny out and I felt tired and good.