

## ONE DAY AT PIONEER PARK

AS MY COUSIN JAKE AND I JUMP OUT OF THE CAR AND TAKE OFF FOR THE WALL, MY GRANDPA GRABS US AND SAYS, "DON'T FORGET YOUR PENNIES!" WE EACH TAKE A HANDFUL AND BREAK INTO A DEAD SPRINT. OUR ADVENTURE AT PIONEER PARK ALWAYS BEGINS AT THE OLD, CRUMBLING SANDSTONE WALL, WHICH SURROUNDS THE TENNIS COURTS.

WITH GRANDPA'S HELP, WE CLIMB ONTO THE WALL AND BEGIN OUR WALK. PENNY BY PENNY, JAKE AND I FILL THE CRACKS IN THE MORTAR, TAKING TIME TO MAKE A WISH OR SAY A PRAYER WITH EACH ONE. THE CRACKS ARE NUMEROUS AND VARY IN DEPTH. SOME OF THEM BARELY HOLD OUR PENNIES, WHILE OTHERS GOBBLE THEM UP LIKE ENDLESS BLACK HOLES.

UPON FINISHING OUR WALK ON THE WALL, WE HEAD OFF TO THE CREEK. TO ANYONE ELSE, THE CREEK IS SIMPLY A MUDDY RUNOFF FROM THE DITCH ABOVE THE PARK, BUT TO US, THE CREEK IS A FLOWING STREAM FULL OF SLIMY GREEN FISH, WHICH TO MOST, LOOK MORE LIKE MOSS. WITH OUR POLES IN HAND, WE SCAMPER DOWN THE HILL TO GET TO THE CREEK. JAKE AND I PROMPTLY LOWER OUR STICKS, ERRR... POLES, INTO THE WATER. WE WIGGLE THEM AROUND, HOPING A FISH WILL TAKE THE BAIT, WHICH MOST OF THE TIME, ONE DOES. ONCE WE ARE SURE WE HAVE A BIG ONE SECURED ON THE LINE, WE REEL IN OUR CATCHES. GRANDPA AMBLES DOWN THE HILL TO COMPARE THE FISH. HE HAS A PEACH RING FOR THE ONE WITH THE BIGGEST FISH, AND OF COURSE, ANOTHER ONE FOR THE SECOND PLACE FINISHER. TODAY, I'M NOT SO LUCKY. JAKE'S MOSS FISH MAKES MINE LOOK LIKE A MINNOW... BUMMER.

AFTER ENJOYING OUR PEACH RINGS, IT'S TIME TO HEAD FOR THE MERRY-GO-ROUND ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CREEK. JAKE AND I TAKE A FEW STEPS BACK AND GLANCE OVER AT GRANDPA. HE SMILES AND SAYS, "DON'T FALL IN BECAUSE THIS OLD MAN WON'T BE ABLE TO COME IN AFTER YOU."

"YOUR NOT OLD, GRANDPA," WE SAY. TO US, HE IS A REALLY BIG SIX YEAR OLD. HE GIVES A WINK AND A SMILE, SO WE KNOW IT'S OK TO JUMP THE CREEK, EVEN IF WE DO FALL IN.

"BET I'LL JUMP FARTHER THAN YOU," I SAY TO JAKE.

"NO WAY. YOU'RE A GIRL, YOU CAN'T JUMP FARTHER THAN ME CUZ I'M A BOY!"

WITH ONE SWING OF MY ARM, JAKE IS ON THE GROUND. I LOOK OVER AT GRANDPA TO SEE IF I'M IN TROUBLE. WHEN I SEE THE GRIN ON HIS FACE, I KNOW I'M NOT, SO I TAKE OFF, AND CLEAR THE CREEK EASILY.

"GET UP JACOB," GRANDPA SAYS, "YOU HAD IT COMING."

JAKE CAN'T ARGUE WITH HIM, SO HE SCRAMBLES TO HIS FEET, AND HEADS OVER TO THE TROLL BRIDGE WHERE GRANDPA CROSSES THE CREEK, AND CROSSES WITH HIM.

JAKE GLARES AT ME AS HE CLIMBS ONTO THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE RED, BLUE, AND RUST COLORED MERRY-GO-ROUND. I SMIRK AT HIM, BUT AT THE SAME TIME I KNOW THAT PAYBACK AWAITS, SO I BETTER BE READY.

GRANDPA GIVES US A PUSH, AND OFF WE GO, SPINNING AROUND AND AROUND. JAKE AND I TAKE TURNS JUMPING OFF AND PUSHING THE MERRY-GO-ROUND. ALMOST AS SOON AS THE HUNDREDS OF CIRCLES MAKE ME FORGET THE SPAT BY THE CREEK, PAYBACK HITS ME IN A BIG WAY. I STAND

ON THE EDGE OF THE MERRY-GO-ROUND, PREPARING TO JUMP OFF, WHEN SOMETHING SMASHES INTO THE BACK OF ME. LYING ON THE GROUND, THE PARK SPINNING AROUND ME AND MY BODY THROBBING IN PAIN, I HEAR A GIGGLE. I COLLECT MYSELF ENOUGH TO SEE JAKE STANDING OVER ME WITH A SLY SMILE ON HIS FACE.

"GOTCHA," HE SAYS. I LOOK TO GRANDPA FOR HELP. HE SMILES AT ME AND WINKS, BUT SAYS NOTHING. FROM THE LOOK ON HIS FACE, I KNOW WHAT HE IS THINKING. "GET UP KATIE. YOU HAD IT COMING."

GRIMACING IN PAIN, AND STILL ON THE GROUND, I START TO LAUGH. I HAVE TO LAUGH, OTHERWISE I MIGHT CRY. "THAT HURT REALLY BAD," I THINK TO MYSELF, "BUT I CAN'T LET JAKE KNOW IT."

JAKE REACHES OUT HIS HAND, AND PULLS ME TO MY FEET. WE WALK OVER TO THE GREEN WOODEN BENCH WHERE GRANDPA SITS, AND PLOP OURSELVES DOWN BESIDE HIM. "READY TO GO?" HE ASKS. I AM. BLOOD DRIPS FROM MY HANDS, AND ROCKS ARE LODGED IN MY PALMS. "YEAH," JAKE REPLIES, "BUT CAN WE WALK THE WALL ONCE MORE BEFORE WE LEAVE?"

"OF COURSE," GRANDPA SAYS WITH A SMILE.

WE HEAD BACK TOWARDS THE CREEK. THIS TIME, JAKE JUMPS OVER IT. I LIMP ACROSS THE TROLL BRIDGE WITH GRANDPA, HOLDING HIS HAND. JAKE RUNS OVER AND GRABS HIS OTHER HAND. WE MAKE OUR WAY UP THE HILL AND ARRIVE, ONCE AGAIN, AT THE WALL. WE START AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE WALL, SO THAT WE CAN FINISH WHERE WE STARTED. PLACING ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER, WE RETRACE OUR STEPS. WE CHECK FOR OUR PENNIES IN THE CRACKS. A FEW OF THEM HAVE DISAPPEARED.

GRANDPA COMES TO THE RESCUE. HE ALWAYS BRINGS SOME EXTRA PENNIES ALONG. WITH A RUNNING START, JAKE AND I JUMP OFF THE WALL, IGNORING GRANDPA'S WARNINGS NOT TO. WE BOTH HIT THE GROUND HARD. AFTER A FEW ROLLS, WE COME TO A HALT. NERVOUSLY, WE LOOK BACK AT GRANDPA, EXPECTING TO BE REPRIMANDED. BUT TO OUR SURPRISE, HE STILL HAS A SMILE ON HIS FACE. HE REACHES INTO HIS POCKET AND HANDS US EACH A PEACH RING.

"YOU GUYS WANT MILKSHAKES?" HE ASKS. JAKE AND I JUMP UP AND WRAP OUR ARMS AROUND HIM. HE LOOKS DOWN AT US WITH THAT SAME SMILE AND WINKS AT US. "RACE YOU TO THE CAR!" JAKE YELLS.

AND WE'RE OFF. WE BOTH TOUCH THE CAR AT THE SAME TIME, AND RATHER THAN ARGUE, AGREE TO CALL IT A TIE. AS WE PILE INTO THE OLD, ORANGE DATSUN, WE TAKE A DEEP BREATH OF AIR, AIR THAT SMELLS LIKE OIL, OLD LEATHER, AND HAMBURGERS. GRANDPA PLOPS DOWN IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT NEXT TO US AND STARTS THE CAR. JAKE AND I LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND SMILE. WE CAN'T WAIT FOR THE NEXT ADVENTURE.

IN MEMORY OF JACOB ALLYN BECK

MY COUSIN, BEST FRIEND, AND PARTNER IN CRIME