Student Writing Conference

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DELAWARE VALLEY COLLEGE
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Outstanding Essay Award Winners

FIRST PLACE
Maria Cramer
“Perry County Type”

SECOND PLACE
Thomas Porter
“Man’s Role”

THIRD PLACE
Emily Peters
“Mortality for an Immortal”
MARIA CRAMER

Perry County Type

At twelve years old I thought I was pretty much grown up, but I guess I wasn’t because I didn’t even know what a hick was when Ezra Match called me one.

Ezra Match and I were members of the Thursday Group, a collection of gifted homeschoolers who met on Thursdays for a book club and theatre class. At that time, the Thursday Group was the most important thing in my life. I had been a member for the last couple of years. It took place at the Match Residence, a rancher in a mature development in Harrisburg. I really liked Ezra—he was a striking figure, tall with a big hook nose and long hair. He was lean and bony and he was left-handed, which in the group of homeschoolers I knew at the time was considered to be a mark of brilliance. Everything that came out of his mouth was witty and I was glad that I could keep up with him. The other kids in the Thursday Group were fascinating too. To name a few, there was Peter, Ezra’s partner in crime, sandy-haired with a pointy nose; Laura, the super skinny modern dance enthusiast; Emma, child of hippies who could play the entirety of “American Pie” from memory on her guitar and was rumored to have once had hair so long she accidentally sat on it. I held my own, playing the best imaginable drunk in Roman comedy.

They were all from the same suburban neighborhood; they could walk to each other’s houses. They went to concerts and plays in Harrisburg together. I was able to come to most of the events, usually by begging my parents to drive the forty-five minutes to Harrisburg.

In that year of my life, there at the Match house on Thursday mornings, sitting on the big, deep, threadbare couch in their dingy den, I had more fun than I had ever had with anyone before. We would talk about politics, literature, and acting. I looked forward all week to the hilarity and discussion we would always have. The kids in the Thursday group were more exactly like me than any kids I’d met before.

It was early spring. The snow had melted off the ground maybe the week before and the grass in the Matches’ front lawn was yellow and sodden. It was still cold in the air,
though it looked like the sun might heat it up in the couple of hours the book discussion and theatre class would last. My dad dropped me off at the driveway and I did not look back at our old faded Honda Accord as I walked up to the house and went on in. I walked under the lintel decorated with the words “The Match Clan.” Another exciting day. I went into the little dark kitchen to see what Ezra and the rest of the group were up to. My friends looked up when I came in. Though they had been talking a moment earlier, they stopped and smiled at me.

Ezra grinned. “How’s Perry County doing this morning?” he asked.

I looked at him, trying to think what he meant. He was in full-wit mode and his face reminded me of the comic Greek mask we’d studied a week ago. Everyone else burst into laughter.

“Fine, I guess. What do you mean?” I asked, while I hung up my coat next to the front door. I was eager to be in on the joke, but what did he mean about Perry County? Of course that was where I was from, but I hadn’t ever given that much thought. They could be from Perry County too for all I knew.

“You know,” said Ezra, “Perry County. Where your family tree grows straight up. Come on, Maria, duh. You’re a hick.”

“What’s a hick?” I asked, baffled.

They all laughed a lot on that one. “A country person, duh,” Ezra said. “A hayseed, a redneck.”

It finally got through to me what he was saying. But how on earth could he say that? Every week I took theatre with him and discussed books like Crime and Punishment—it was obvious I was not a redneck.

My mouth was dry and I was blushing so badly I probably did have a red neck. “You know I’m not a hick,” I said.

Ezra laughed and so did everyone else. “Okay,” he said. “Who wants to hear a Jewish joke?”

When my dad came to pick me up that afternoon, it was hot in earnest. I looked in the driveway and saw our car. I saw that it was old and faded and covered with dirt. I saw my dad in the driver’s seat reading the New York Times, waiting for me. I threw my coat up over my shoulder and walked to the car. The next time someone called me a hick I would know what it meant.
Man’s Role

All over Bucks County the air has begun to lose the comfortable warmth it once had, as the final days of the Indian summer come to a close. Perched in a hunting stand fifteen feet off the ground, I scan the nearby foliage for movement. Level with the ground is the captivating October sun, which is being tailed by a full moon in the never-ending race of the heavenly bodies. Trees stand lonely with their leaves lying on the ground as old reminders of another summer that passed into oblivion. No sound reaches the ear, save for the crunching of leaves, which shatters the perfection of the quiet wood. It would be in my chase of the White-tail that I would partake in my transition into manhood.

Only twenty yards from my hunting stand, a creek trickles next to a muddy bank covered with prints of muskrat, raccoon, and whitetail. Each of these tracks that litter the bank leave behind stories of the past. Up in the tree, my position is equivalent to that of a bird of prey: I can see but I am not seen. My camouflage is my feathers while my bow and arrow are my talons. Unlike the simple stick and string that the Indians used, my bow’s construction is different.

At the end of the two limbs are two circular pieces of black plastic. These are wheels that the spider-black string is wrapped around various times. Each wheel takes an even burden of the weight when the string is drawn back, so that a boy of my small stature can hold the pounds needed to bring down a large animal. That is not how I remember my bow, for I recollect the innumerable arrows that flew from the arrow rest during practice sessions. Numerous trips were taken to Monday night youth archery at the archery club. Here, I acquired skills that altered my uneven arrow grouping to precision. What I didn’t comprehend yet was what the bow would become when I ended a life with one quick twang of the string.

From above the forest floor I watched as the soft grey squirrels hopped along clumsily in such a frantic search for what might be nothing at all. My body had lost the feeling of apprehension after sitting for about two hours with no notable sightings. Soon my father’s whistle would come from his spot nestled in the pine trees to signal the end of the hunt. Long hours had taken a toll on my eyes, as they started to glaze over from sleepiness. Then, I spotted something that was foreign to the surrounding foliage.
Across the creek was a brown shape that must have just walked out from behind a tree. A white flash reflected back to my eyes every few moments. After closer observation I came to the realization that the white flash was the flick of a deer’s tail. In that very instant flowing through my body was a mixture of nervousness and delight. Under the skin of my arms the bones were as fragile as the sticks that lay on the forest floor. Quickly, my heart rate soared to a level that I felt during a running race even though I was sitting down. Here, my moment had come that I had waited for so many years.

Grabbing for my bow, my arm moved as slowly as sap rolling down an evergreen. During this time, three deer moved through the woods towards my stand. While I was nervous beyond belief, the deer walked nonchalantly as if they were on an evening stroll through the park. One of the deer stopped just below my stand to browse the undergrowth for nourishment. The limbs of my bow came to life in unison as I drew the string back to full draw. What I saw as I aimed was an image that no foam deer target could prepare me to shoot.

Heaving in and out was the hairy brown chest of the animal that represented life itself. Mystery was written in those marble black eyes of the deer for it couldn’t be determined if it could see me or not. The doe was inspecting every spot on the ground until it was sure it didn’t miss any food. So many places this deer had traveled in its life and now its time was going to end on the earth. My mind was racing with questions that had no right or wrong answer. Around the air must have frozen because my breath came out as smoke into the still night air. Unlike the loud sound the gun produces, the twang of an arrow string is a whole different effect. It didn’t even feel as if the arrow had left the bow, but sure enough the deer stumbled.

Inside, I didn’t know what to feel, for the action that had just been carried out. As I descended the ladder, I had the sensation that I would fall off in weakness. The cold night wasn’t producing the shivers I was experiencing, for the anticipation running down my spine took control of my body. Nearly forty yards away the deer had taken its final steps and fell to the ground. As the hunter standing over the hunted, I knew that my life wouldn’t be the same again. Taking the life of the animal was not by mistake but by intention. For the rest of my life I would carry this mark that many in my society would not.

Whenever I had imagined the moment before the hunt, I always thought of the time after the shot. I thought of my father and me putting the deer in the truck and bouncing down the uneven farm roads back home as we talked with exuberant voices. It hadn’t become apparent to me until this moment why the sport was considered tradition. A step into adulthood resulted because I was leaving my childhood innocence behind. A child wouldn’t have the maturity to accept the death of the animal by their own hands. However I realized that sitting on top of the collapsed body was not a pool of blood but only my new beginning.
EMILY PETERS

Mortality for an Immortal

Angie was more than a cousin to me. She was not simply my babysitter, and she was not just my friend. Angela D’Aquila was the person I could rely on to be in my life forever. Granted, she had her flaws; she smoked, she fought with her mother, and she had run away from home on numerous occasions. Yet, to me, she represented the cool seventeen-year-old “grown-up” who didn’t order me around constantly. I remember her red, curly hair blowing in the wind as she drove me around in her car which stunk of cigarettes. I recall thinking it was weird that she liked to eat macaroni and cheese with ketchup, and marveling at her perfect, clear skin. I remember believing she was immortal. So when my mother entered my room to tell me that Angie had passed away was an unforgettable event. I was seven years old.

It was time to get ready for a typical day at school. I always dreaded school in the past; never wanting to sit in the uncomfortable seats, never wanting to listen to the teacher’s droning voice, and always longing to be with my mother. Yet, for some reason when I awoke that fateful morning and stared at the kitten-bordered walls of my room I was in high spirits. I wanted to go to school, and didn’t care that I would be forced to leave my mother for the day. In fact, I was in such a good mood that I proceeded to mess up my Minnie Mouse sheets by jumping on the bed, all the while singing, “It’s gonna be a happy day …” to a fictional tune I had invented. However, fate had other plans for me that day.

When I was in the process of jumping on my bed, my mother entered my room. I knew something was wrong. She looked odd without her glasses, and her straight, black hair lay in disarray. Her lingering tears gave her red, swollen eyes an unwelcoming shine. My mother’s face was red, and her cheeks were tear-stained. I stopped jumping.

My mom sat on my bed and said with a cracked, tired voice, “Honey, something happened to Angie last night.”

I sat next to her, trying to comprehend why on earth she could be so unhappy on a day of such joy, and I asked, “What happened?”

My mother’s tears flowed more steadily and after collecting herself she said, “She was in a car crash. A police officer ran a red light while responding to a call and hit the side of...
her car.”

I sat silently; too innocent to fathom what was to come and too afraid to ask.

After a few seconds she continued, “Honey, Angie was badly injured, and ... she didn’t make it.”

“What do you mean?” I asked innocently.

“Emmy, Angie is dead.”

That warm, happy feeling inside of me morphed into a cold, dark place. My surroundings melted away, and I no longer heard my mother’s sobs. My memories jolted me back to one of the many cheerful times Angie babysat me. She always let me eat ice-cream before going to bed, despite my parents restricting orders.

“It will be our secret. Don’t tell your Mom and Dad,” she would always say with a smile, as she dished me out some chocolate ice-cream.

I was jerked back to the present. I did not cry. I couldn’t understand why my mother was so upset. Angie was not dead; she was the one person I knew could never leave me. She was always a part of my life; she was always there. So how could she be dead? My age made it impossible to fully understand death at that time, but I knew that I would never see my beloved cousin again.

“It’s on the news now,” my weeping mother informed me.

I did not say a word, but raced to the television in my parents’ bedroom. My father was slouched on the bed, not saying a word, too mesmerized by the screen. With all of his work on the ambulance and at the firehouse, he seemed to be calmer than my blubbering mother. However, his face was serious and this gave me a sense of the grief within him. This did not ease my troubled thoughts. I gazed up to the television and my worst fears were confirmed. No one could have prepared me for the awful sight I saw on the screen. A strange woman’s voice was speaking in the background, but all I could see was my cousin’s car. The car was demolished; it looked as though it had discovered a stampede. There were scratches on the paint, the roof had been cut off, and one of the seats was missing. It was the driver’s seat, Angie’s seat. Her side was barely recognizable as part of a car, but had taken the outline of the police officer’s vehicle.

“Why didn’t he stop at the red light, Mommy?” I asked. I didn’t understand; the man was a police officer, he knew not to go through red lights.

“Officer Scribner was responding to a call. He was speeding and went through the red light and crashed into Angie,” my mother said with bitterness etched on her tongue.

Upon hearing these words, I felt a sense of betrayal. Police officers were not supposed to speed. Police officers were not supposed to drive through red lights, and they certainly were not supposed to kill innocent people. Scribner. It didn’t take the death of my cousin for me to feel hatred for this man; his icy name said it all.

My place of cold darkness engulfed me into nothingness. Angie would not, could not, return to me. She would no longer come to babysit me and give me ice-cream before bed, she would no longer eat macaroni and cheese with ketchup, and she would no longer give me rides in her car. She was not immortal like I had imagined. I realized then that nobody was. Nobody can be with you forever, and Angie’s death forced me to realize that ugly truth. Life is not fair. Life is too short. Life had caught up with me at seven years old.