

“Why?” My brother repeated.

At that point, I needed to leave. I knew the final answer and what was about to happen. I took a short walk and waited for the argument to die down. When it did, I went back into the room.

As a family, we made our final decision.

So we let her go.

Eighth Grade Writers

Erika Zavala

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Awake

Opening my eyes to a new day, I did not know what was in store. Not knowing that anything could happen, anything at all. It started off like any other. I open my eyes from slumber and I am now back to reality. I am awake. I am met with muffled words that take me a good second to process, when I finally do understand these words, my heart sinks.

“Chiquita muero,” sobbed my mother. I immediately sprung out of bed to see my mother at the door to my room, tears in her eyes and grief in her tone of voice.

“No, you’re joking,” I replied in denial.

“Chiquita wouldn’t leave me, not so suddenly.

“Lo siento, Erikita,” she paused for what felt like decades, “pero ella se ha ido.” Gone? How is that possible, she can’t just leave like that. It’s not possible, I’m dreaming I know I am. I can’t

be awake right now. My mother, then, informs me Chiquita's just down the stairs and to see her when I'm up to it.

I sat on the bridge of my bed, deciding whether I should see her or not. I figured, I should see her since she's not dead, I'm sure of it. They're playing a prank on me, once I get to the bottom of those stairs I'll be met with some sort of surprise party.

I went halfway down the stairs, not even at the bottom yet, and I can see it. Her petite, lifeless body, belly facing the floor. I rush down the stairs, it's almost like I'm at a crime scene. She's sleeping, I know she is, but she usually doesn't sleep like that, maybe she's trying something different, but why is she on the cold ground floor.

Then out of nowhere, I feel a liquid leave from my eyes, at first slowly and then it gradually picks up the pace, uncontrollable tears streaming down my face like a waterfall. There's a great pain in my chest that makes me realize no matter how much I can deny it, I know this isn't a dream. It's reality. It's a living nightmare. It's called being awake.

After an hour of arguing and weeping, my family and I decide on burying Chiquita in the backyard. I grabbed my brother's sweater and it was old, baggy, and ugly, but it was what I wore the last time I took her out for a walk. So at that moment it felt like the most beautiful sweater in the world. It's still hard for me to wrap my mind around this, life without my dog. How can I go on without her in my life? I don't have any answers, at least not right now. I threw the sweater over my head and headed to the backyard, to say my last goodbye to Chiquita.

Sydney Hughes

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The lights were blinding, almost as blazing as the sun. The floors were smooth with a coat of marley. There were hundreds of pupils gazing at the stage in front of them. There were a handful of girls scrambling around the darkness backstage. There was a large backdrop hanging, moving gently from the action on stage. There I was.

My heart pumped rapidly. It wasn't the speed of my heart when I was about to take a hard test, or when I was performing a dance at a regular competition. It was a mix of that, plus another layer of built up fear. It was Nationals, harder than practicing at the studio, harder than Regionals. I stood with my legs trembling. My costume suddenly started pressing into my skin, making the room hotter and hotter until I was sweating. There were multiple drops of water on my forehead starting to drip down through the sheets of makeup on my face.

In the background I could hear the announcer speaking. His strong voice bursted through my eardrums as I heard the sound of my name. A cold rush swept through the air at that very moment, and I took a step onto the stage, quivering. The audience roared as I approached the stage, but they all looked like shadows in the darkness.

This isn't a bad thing, it is just the nerves, I tried to convince myself. Goosebumps crawled up my arms as I sat down to the beginning position. The music started playing loudly, and I found my body starting to move. I was unaware of the movement, but my body seemed to know.

My mind tagged along to the movement, and I imagined the studio around me. The mirror in front, the speakers on each side, and my teacher watching carefully.

By the middle of the performance, I was convinced that I was dancing inside the light blue walls of my dance studio, just me and my teacher. The actual performance was a blur. I wasn't overthinking anything, rather going along with the music. I hit my final position.

There was a moment of silence.

Then there was an explosion of clapping. There were shouts and rumbling throughout the entire auditorium. The claps echoed against the wall until all I heard was cheering for me, for me.

As I took a step moving towards backstage, I snapped back to reality and everything became clear. I felt a way that I couldn't explain, a way that I never felt after coming offstage. I felt calm and relieved. Of course there was happiness and excitement in the relief, but I finally took an actual breath. This was not the anxious breath that I took before the performance, nor the breath of exhaustion after dancing. It was a calm breath, a deep breath that consisted of breathing in calming thoughts and breathing out the rest. My muscles shook out all tense feelings, and the goosebumps vanished from my arms. I felt truly reserved and detached from the feeling of being judged by the panel of judges sitting before the stage.

The feeling was one of those climbing a mountain. There was a pile of nerves built up inside before climbing. The journey might have been frightening, but there was always anticipation. It got difficult by the top, but when you got there you felt great. In fact, you didn't quite realize how you got there, the mountain just brought you there. You grinned and took in the breathtaking view of high mountains and deep valleys. I was on top of that mountain.

Lillian Sampson

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I noticed that Robin Williams had written “carpe diem” next to his handprints at the Chinese theatre. Perhaps it was alluding to one of the best movies. Or, perhaps he just wanted me to seize the day. Likewise, it did convey a mood for that vacation. One that I felt was strongly represented in the streets around me. In the city of dreams, I was a dreamer. My mom’s boots walked over the stars pulling me with them. I attempted to snap photos on my red cannon. Someday, I thought. Someday.

We were passing people every moment. All looking down. Everyone in LA looks down and walks slow. Not like New York at all. In New York everyone has somewhere to be but, in California everyone’s already there. I’d live in a condo near the city. Maybe my name would be among the lights. For now, I had nothing more than a cellphone, my camera, and of course, the boots. Discolored in a few places. The soles were torn slightly but, I still wore them because my mom liked them. It wasn’t enough for me.

Names like Hugh Jackman and Michael Jackson were around. I’d point them out to my family as we passed. We were heading to our dinner at a restaurant where the men all wore button ups and the women all wore earrings. We were late for our reservations, obviously. Still, the boulevard beckoned for me to walk ever slower. To gaze into store windows and onto the street. I was steps behind my parents. My feet began to float on air. Slowly the shops would get smaller and cheaper. Then I saw him.

There was a boy. Sitting in an alcove next to a store. I saw him and he saw me. Thoughts shot through my head like needles. He had caramel curly hair grown out just a bit. A cardboard sign neatly written with the word "hungry." He couldn't have been more than sixteen. His cheeks were concave and his cheeks dotted with freckles like some type of jasper stone. He had a blanket draped over him, it wasn't cold. However there was one thing that destroyed me.

Those eyes. The Wedgewood piercing blue. I felt as though I'd seen the whole world in all its glory. It was utter anguish. They wear watery and surrounded with such dark circles. The light sapphire stones glowed to me with the pain of a million men and women. So real. One of the most beautiful things I'd seen.

I wish I could say I stopped walking. That I handed him some money, got him something to eat. I looked away. Down at the ground again. Down at the stars which were dull in comparison. Until he was out of site. I looked on. My mind screaming back at me. Many people that day could do that without thought. Many people that day wouldn't see those eyes. Suddenly there wasn't any beauty on the streets. Suddenly the people pointlessly walking looked... pointless.

There was another side of LA. When I walked further down I looked and I saw it. Where the colors got dull and there's somber people on the streets. That day, I began as an optimist. I was so happy to wake up in my mountain of white pillows in the hotel suite . I was happy to buy a twenty dollar pair of sunglasses and go to a fancy restaurant. After I saw that boy though, then it was just objects. It was just temporary.

The atmosphere no longer echoed “carpe diem”. Instead, I felt alone.

Clayton Alexander Tomlinson

Alexandria Middle School

“Wake up! Everyone should pack up before the rain starts!” shouted Kai. In a matter of seconds, our peaceful camp erupted into chaos. Everyone rushed to climb into shoes, throw on rain jackets, and clear out their tent. My group wasn’t synchronized; Jake was stomping all over the tent looking for his watch, Henry was trying to roll his sleeping bag, and I was wondering why we were about to hike a four thousand, eight hundred three foot mountain during a rainstorm. Eventually, the campsite was clear. Everyone was ready, and we set off to climb Mount Moosilauke.

As we neared the mountain, it began to drizzle. Soon, the rain battered the van, drowning out everyone’s voices. When we finally reached the mountain, we had to wait for the downpour to cease. Finally, we walked to the trailhead. The rotting sign gave only two facts: the height of the mountain and the distance of the trail. Elizabeth, one of our counselors, explained, “We decided to hike the more challenging trail because it will help us save time. The trail is very steep, so everyone needs to be ready to give it their all.” With those words of advice, we stepped onto the trail.

For about the first half-mile, our caravan trudged over the beaten path. Evergreen trees loomed over the trail. Slick roots laced the dirt beneath our feet. The roar from the waterfall blocked out any communication. Suddenly, the group stopped.

The dirt trail was replaced by the bare rock of the mountain, polished smooth by erosion. Soon, our counselors discovered rusted pieces of rebar to climb the ledge. When it was my turn, I started tremble with fear. Determined to summit the mountain, I ignored my better judgment. I grabbed a rod and managed to hoist myself up. The formidable hike continued.

When I started the hike, I thought a three-mile trail wouldn't be that hard. About halfway up the mountain, my legs told me how wrong I was. Heavy as lead, they resisted my commands, threatening to give out at any second. There were many times I thought I would give up; the only reason I persevered was my determination not to be the first one to quit. Finally, after hours of hiking, the evergreen trees parted, and I was blanketed in fog. The top of Mount Moosilauke was nothing like I expected. Instead of lush vegetation, rock structures were scattered across the landscape, surrounded by an impenetrable haze. Even so, the hike was worth the struggle.

As we descended the mountain, I felt joyous. Having conquered a task I once thought impossible, I was in a state of euphoria. However, the demands of hiking soon filled my mind. Instead of concentrating on my achievement, I devoted my mind to avoiding uneven roots and uprooted trees. Surviving the trip down became my main concern; celebrating would have to wait.

After hiking for another hour, my legs finally gave way. Just as I stepped over a boulder, my knee buckled, twisting my ankle and gashing my knee on jagged stone. The pain helped me focus; I didn't stumble again. Luckily, the rest of the trip down went smoothly, and we arrived back at the trailhead. "Congratulations, everyone," exclaimed Elizabeth, "You just hiked Mount Moosilauke."

Looking back on the trip, I never really understood how I made it to the top of the mountain. During the climb, I was certain I wouldn't be able to finish. Luckily, I was wrong, and I learned a valuable lesson. Even if the task seems impossible, stay determined; you will eventually overcome the challenge.

Arianna Bagagem

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The Hurricane

I remember I was not as scared as my siblings were at the time. The rain was pouring out of the sky, it was nonstop. I was confused at first, I was only 7 years old. My sister was 5, my brother 3. The loud noises and crashing branches scared them, but not me. I was just confused. The situation we were in really dawned on me when a tree in our backyard crashed and completely toppled over. Now I was petrified, because I knew how strong this storm really was. If it could take down a whole tree, it could take down me. That night, we weren't allowed to sleep in our bedrooms. We all huddled up in the living room like penguins. My parents stayed awake all night, packing up our things as we slept.

That morning, we woke up at around 5 am. My parents loaded us into the car and we drove off. My sister started crying. I remember looking at the road, it was flooded. We drove slow and careful, but vision was blurred and all we could see was rain for miles. We arrived at our destination rather quickly. Everything had moved so fast I don't even remember being fully awake. The rain hit my face and I recall that, that was when I was fully awake, when I realized I was at my aunts.

“Tia Dulce!” She gave me a hug when we walked in. My mom trailed in behind us, soaked from the rain, she had a tired look on her face.

“Hi Dulce,” she smiled. My aunt led us to her living room where she sat down with my mom. I remember walking around her house, looking for my cousins.

“They are still asleep, they should be awake soon.” My grandma came into the room with a tray of old portuguese tea and grapes.

“Hi Avo.” She smiled at me sweetly.

The night went as followed; my cousins woke up and we played Uno all day long. My dad fell asleep in the living room and my mom, aunt, and grandma all made dinner in the kitchen. It was still raining, and the sky was black and dreary. The waters had flooded the streets, and the neighborhood in general.

Soon after we ended the game, my aunt called us to dinner. We all herded into the kitchen and ate our food. The kitchen glowed with lights and little rooster tea cups hanging on the walls, waiting to be filled with teas. My aunt, mom, and grandma played old Frank Sinatra and old portuguese songs as we ate. The room was loud, everyone was laughing.

That night, all of us dashed upstairs. My little cousin and I shared a bed, my brother and older cousin, and my sister slept with my mom and dad. I felt safe that night, I felt as if everything was okay, that everything would work out. I slept thinking of all of the fun things my cousins and I would do. .

Some time ago, my mom and sister got very sick. They had to go to the hospital for weeks on end and my brother and I were very scared and upset. However, my grandmother came and stayed with us through these times. It was then that I realized that during a hard time, having family or people you love and care about there with you can make the situation much less scary.