

## Brave Heart

No matter where you go, who you meet, or where you live, there will always, always be somebody better than you there. Somebody you can compare yourself too and you will always come up with them being better at something than you are. At the same time they could be comparing them self to you and coming up with similar results, but for you, it doesn't matter. In your brain, in your thoughts, you just know that they are somehow better than you and you will never even come up on the ranks beside them, not even close.

I sit next to an overachiever- in fact, an extreme overachiever. I can study for 5 hours a day and somehow she will have studied for 6. If I get a 40/40 on a test, she'll get a 42/40. I can try and try and try and if I get a a perfect score, she'll make hers seem like a much bigger deal because, well, according to her, it is. She doesn't realize that she's great in everything. She doesn't realize that she has a friend who sometimes feels as if she got a 0 instead of a 4 because her friend's is, apparently, a much larger deal.

There's then the factor of getting mad at people for a reason they can't identify because it's your personal anger- you think they're better than you are. You can't exactly tell them that because they're immediately going to say a variation of, "Stop thinking that! You know you're better than me." And they could be fishing for a possible compliment there from you, or they otherwise are simply unkind and agree to your saying that they're better than you are. But most people can relate to the first reaction more. And somehow you just can't put a lid on that can of anger, and it can sometimes ruin good friendships and hurt someone else's feelings. And that can feel awful to you.

I'm considered tall- at least, that's what my doctor says. I feel as if being tall adds an element of having to be exceptional to your life as well, beside other things. Since you're tall, you have to be at a high reading level or high whatever because, hey, you're higher than others. And then being tall also adds the element of not blending in whatsoever, even if you don't happen to be that tall, just a bit hovering over everyone, like myself. Whether in a crowd or at a concert, the manager of the group will usually notice you. Somebody's eyes with flit to you and make you feel uncomfortable under the spotlight. And then you are wishing to be smaller and thinking everybody else is better because they are smaller. And that just seriously sucks your self confidence away, if you started with any at all.

There's also the times when you just feel like sobbing because you think everybody else really is better than you. You notice your friend singing with her heart and belting out such a good rhythm or somebody putting down their self much better on the dance floor. They're better than me. That's the first thoughts swimming into your brain.

And then the last thing: internal versus external. I may appear as a strong girl who debates to get everybody on her side and doesn't matter if she appears not knowing something or looking dumb because she can immediately fix it. That's the external. But the internal is something else, someone who can't fight the feeling that someone will always be there to be better than yourself. Someone you can't change no matter how hard you wish. They'll always be there. But sometimes you just have to go into life with a brave heart and think: they're not. They're really just not. Even though you know that the bigger part of you is always saying: Yes they are. They really are, and you can't change it.

## What Do You Have To Say?

Speaking. It comes easy to some. By easy I mean, they do it regularly in front of people or just by themselves. That is, only some people. It's hard for me to speak in front of people. When you are a student and the teacher asks the class a question you can usually see the room start to fill with raising hands wagging excitedly in the air. I have seen this room definitely more than once. I am most never one of those kids. It just isn't my thing. Those kids tend to not care if they end up having the wrong answer and everyone in the class knows it. They don't worry too much about that fact (what people might be thinking), but to me that is what it is all about.

I remember one time when I was in class and we were reviewing the math homework from the night before, my teacher had chosen me to go up and show what I had done to the class. I hadn't wanted to. If you were wrong the class would say they agreed and if they didn't they would say that they disagreed. I started to not be as worried as the butterflies started to fly out from my stomach, for I figured that I was right because it hadn't been a very hard assignment. I placed my sheet up so that it could be projected and explained what I had done. Then I waited. Waited for them to say that they agreed.

"Disagree!" Everyone shouted at the same time. My butterflies flew back and I could feel my face start to burn up. I was wrong and the whole class had seen it, but not only had they seen it, they had been there to tell me themselves.

Teachers sometimes tend to call on the kids who don't talk very much. Whenever they start to look around for someone to give the answer I just hope that they won't end up picking me. Even if I have an answer. Thoughts start to stream through my head. *What if I'm wrong? What if people start to laugh? What if all they remember is how I got that question wrong?* Now of course these are just things that go through my head, but they are still there. It is not easy to be a shy kid, and how I wish that I wasn't one of those kids, but that's who I am.

I remember another time when one of my teachers asked me a question and I was so confident that I knew the answer and that I was right. I was so excited because I thought that for once I could actually raise my hand to answer something and I didn't have to worry about anything. I was actually one of those kids who was frantically waving their hand around in the air. Sure enough, the teacher called on me because I am a person who basically never raises their hand so when I do, I usually get called on. I said my answer proudly.

"Nope," was what the teacher had said. That basically wrecked my day because I had felt so incredibly happy for working up my nerves to actually just say an answer for the class and my teacher to hear.

It's a big accomplishment for me if I raise my hand to answer something even just four times in the day. I have family members who aren't afraid to speak at all, in fact they think that it is fun, but unfortunately I did not get that jean.

When the teacher calls on me and I didn't ask to be called on a nervousness starts to go through my whole entire body. My hands can start to get a little clammy and the room will start to feel really hot all of a sudden. Even if I do know what the answer is my mind will go completely blank and I won't know what to say. Then of course the teacher will think that I don't know the answer and move on although, sometimes I honestly don't know the answer to the question that has been asked.

It's not even always just when people call on me in class. Let's say there is something that I want, or I'm wondering and I need to ask the teacher for, I get freaked out. I worry that the teacher might say no and that is embarrassing, or that the question I'm asking might seem like a really stupid question to them. I care what my teacher thinks about me, really no matter what. So that factors into not getting the answer right, and asking a possibly dumb question. Like I was saying how I get nervous to go ask the teacher something (sometimes) I will ask my friends to do it. There have even been times when I don't want my friends to ask for me and they ask not for themselves, but say my name and what I want which embarrasses me on a whole other level.

All in all talking isn't the easiest thing to do in front of people for me and it really never has been. I will try to get better at it, but for now that is just how it is going to be.

## Afraid of The Mirror

Mirrors... those shining silver plates in which you can see your reflection. We all have a face, we all know what we look like, but at one point or another we end up judging ourselves, due to the way we look, due to the way we act or even due to the way we feel or look on the inside. What if I'm not good enough, what if I didn't do well on my exam, what if I disappoint my family, what if (beat) I feel like a failure? I ask myself these questions each and every day and I don't feel good about it after, I want to talk to somebody. I want to let it out but something always stops me from doing it, and it's that special little emotion that hits you like a freight train when you least expect it...*fear*. I am afraid of what people will say or even what they will think.

Will they give me a superficial, "Don't worry it will all be fine", or will they wonder is she insane? But you know the one thing they won't bother to do? Listen. They won't bother to listen to what I have to say. They won't try to understand that I'm talking about the internal instead of the external. I don't know whether to say never mind or to continue talking, but either way they won't listen. They're going to be on their phone looking at Instagram or Snapchat and then have the audacity to say, "I'm sorry... what did you say?"

Everyone acts like they understand what I am going through but they don't. The speech sounds little bit like this, "I completely understand what you are going through. I've been your age once and I know exactly what is happening with you, your friends everything..." and it goes on and on and on and on and on and on, but let me ask you this, have you had test anxiety so bad that you felt like you were going to die of fear, have you gotten so mad at yourself that you wanted to punch a wall just to distract you're self for the pain for just a split second... no you haven't because you have no idea how high the standards are; This doesn't only apply to adults it applies to my friends as well.

If I do bad on a math test, and I try to tell them hoping they will listen and just comfort me. They won't listen either. Their speech goes little like this "don't worry almost everybody here got a bad score on the test; if anything your mom won't be mad at you she will probably just say its ok, maybe there will be a make up test." That isn't how she will respond. She will be *disappointed* and wonder how I did so horrible on a test. Everyone on my mom's side of the family got straight A's all of their life, and everyone on my dad's side of the family got B's all of their life. I have gotten who knows what so far. I feel like I'm the screw up between clans, The odd ball out, the runt of the litter. I feel like I don't belong, I feel like I'm letting everyone *down*.

I clam up. I won't open up to any one. Sometimes I tell people nothing's wrong but they can clearly see that I'm not ok. This happens to everyone. The thing is that it just makes the problem worse. It is like that moment when you finally start to brush off the pain of what just happened on your end, then when it finally seems it sneaks out of your mind some one says... are you ok? All the memories keep rushing back pain, agony, hurt, heartbreak, love, hate, fear. Its all there once again rushing through my mind. You being pulled underneath the waves dying over and over again growing and waiting to be set free.

I ask myself why am I horrible at everything and I just can't seem to answer it. You know why I look at myself, you know why I have to get the tiniest glance of what I look like, because I don't know what I look like every day I look into the mirror hoping to see some one different, only I don't. This never ending cycle of let down, failure self-doubt, regret, hatred, fear. Think of it like a virus, do viruses disappear after awhile do they know what they're doing to your cells... no! All they know is eat, kill and multiply. It feels like a giant pit in my chest. I get this burning feeling in my body and the fire doesn't die down, it just burns, and burns, and burns until I'm nothing but a smoked pile of ash.

*Mirrors... those shining silver plates in which you can see your reflection. We all have a face we all know what we look like, but some times no matter how bad we want it we can't change.*

## **The Series of Uneventful Events**

My parents always tell me how “great” it is to relax, but in my world the word relax actually means bored. I am constantly bored, I don’t like that down time to just sit, read, or take a nap. My parents do not tolerate the word bored, they tell me to play cards or draw. I even get bored of watching videos or playing Xbox! I can’t stand being bored, I want to be skydiving, shooting zombies in the zombie apocalypse, or scuba-diving in Hawaii. When I am bored, I sometimes even wish that I were at school! People don’t understand.

Last summer I asked my mom if I could just have one week completely free, no camps or activities, I wanted to have just one week of summer to chill. That was not a good idea, the whole week I just sat at home and occasionally went to a store. I was extremely bored, I didn’t know what to do. I have a million books and million games, yet I was still bored. I played a video game or two, I read a few books, and I drew a couple of crazy comics. I felt bored the whole entire time.

Why am I bored? This is a question I always ask myself, and I don’t know the answer to it. I guess everybody has been bored at least once in their life, like those times when you make a reservation at some place for dinner and you are sitting at the table waiting for what feels like forever. I can be patient, but if I get bored I feel like I just want to flop around and squirm like fish out of water. I can’t stand being bored!

Sometimes when I am bored I think about my parents when they were kids, they seem fine now, but how? Back then they didn’t have an iPad to play on or anything that cool. I guess they just learned to deal with it, also it’s not like they knew an iPad would ever be a thing in the first place! Maybe in a few decades I will be thinking: “How did I survive back then when I was a kid? I didn’t even have a jetpack!”

When I am not bored I don’t think about being bored, like if I’m doing something exciting. Think about what happens when your having fun, time goes by faster. So fast that it feels like a roller coaster! When you are not doing anything besides slowly breathing and just sitting there, you are bored, and five minutes feels like five days in the middle of the hot, sandy, dry, and boring dessert. How come my parents don’t feel like that now?

Since my parents don’t get why I’m bored, I wonder if their parents didn’t understand why they were bored! (I don’t know for sure if they were ever bored, but they had to have been bored.) Since they had even more boring things to do when they were kids, I wonder how they dealt with it. All I know is that they are like robots now. They can just lay in bed or relax, my parents can sleep in all day long, they could sit on a bench at the park and just watch me play! I can’t do any of that, I wake up and I am ready to start the day whether I am going to go to school to learn or to the hunger games to kill.

This is a problem that I want to solve, but I guess I will just wait until I am a standard adult so I can be more mature and have the patience to not get bored. Nobody really cares if I am bored or not. I wish that there is some little gadget that just keeps you entertained, I've tried Rubik's Cubes and I've tried putty, but it doesn't keep me from getting bored! Why isn't there a little game that you can put in your pocket and take anywhere that guarantees satisfaction?

I'm trying to figure out why sometimes you have to wait things out by being bored. It's very weird. I've realized that time actually goes by fast and that everything is limited, so I have to make something out of it! Maybe I shouldn't make down time a burden even though it'll be hard, but I will always be me, the guy that can't stand being bored! That is how life works, it is slow like a sloth, and at the same time fast like a ostrich.

## Zia

Sometimes change comes and you have nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. It covers everything like a layer of ash. It's not going away for a while. Change. It takes days, weeks, months or even years to get used to. Still, nothing's ever the same. Change. It stabs you in the back when you're not looking and it takes a while to heal. Change. That's what happened when my adopted aunt passed away.

My adopted aunt, Zia, passed away in 2014, and nothing has been the same since. She was always there to pick me up on the Mondays and Tuesdays and Thursdays and whatnot. Every day she would wait outside the classroom door to pick me up to take me on the bus to go to her apartment that sat in a bed of shady trees.

Zia's house was bustling with cats. They walked around the house, on the windowsill and on the air conditioner. Zia's old TV blasted old movies every time I looked. Rolling pins were left scattered on the kitchen table with a carton of buttermilk and a bottle filled halfway-up with vanilla extract. Old photos from tens of twenties of thirties of years ago hung on the walls like leeches. The green tiles on the bathroom walls started to decay and fall off.

However, as messy as it was, Zia's house was fun. Doctor Who was my favorite show and I watched day after day after day. Zia's baking smelled like heaven from the living room couch. Long summer days passed by in Zia's house and every day was different in it's own way. Some days we'd bake a cake while some days we would sit around watching a Doctor Who marathon. Every winter we would make tons upon tons of sugar cookies. Every Halloween the decorations would be put up and for Thanksgiving we'd have a big feast. Oh, and don't get me started on the birthdays...

When Zia passed away, however, I couldn't go to her house on Tuesday or Thursday or any day.

I remember a day when my parents couldn't pick me up until two hours after the end of school. The "end of school" bell rang and as many kids went home, I plopped down on a chair. I sat there motionless in the hallway, waiting for my parents to come. Echoes stretched through the hallway while I stared at the doors, the walls, or anything that could make me slightly entertained. Nothing did. Boredom filled my head like poisonous gas, something that never stops coming no matter what.

"Where are they..." my brain thought as minutes and minutes and minutes went by. "Where could they be?"

I sat there for (what seemed like) hours and hours. Every step I heard gave me hope that it was my parents, but they weren't there. Eventually, after two hours of one of the most boring moments of my life, my dad came to pick me up.

None of this would have happened if Zia was still here. If she was, she would be five minutes early to pick me up and we'd ride on the bus (she never drove) to go to her house and do something fun. More fun than poisonous gas, that's for sure.

I miss the cakes, the cats and the purple glitter-covered miniature christmas tree that Zia put on the table by the TV every year. I miss the Fridays when I would go to her house and I would sleep over. I miss the Tuesdays when I would go to her house and for dinner we'd eat her amazing chicken cutlets or the delicious turkey burgers.

But most of all, I miss Zia.



## One of Millions

Sometimes I worry that I am too small. Not in the aspect that I am short or underweight, but in the way that I don't matter. Some places and times in our life are so immense, there is no words for how big they are, and how small we are compared to that place or time. It is when I think of those places, that I start to feel tiny. The size of an electron on an atom. And it is in those times when I need someone to comfort me. To assure me that I really do matter. That is when I turn to my dad. My dad is kind of quiet. Usually he will listen to me when I want to pour my soul out. He will sit and hear me out. And then he will respond, advising me what I should do in times of crisis. And it is in the presence of this wisdom when I have found vital puzzle pieces in my life that have made me whole. Sometimes, when it seems like the whole world is against me, I turn to my father for comfort. He will always be ready to pull me not a hug, for his pleasure or mine. So when I feel small, overwhelmed by the thought of infinity and such, I turn to my father for not only does he allow me to throw at him such out of this world concepts, like a time and place can be infinite, but because when I do feel small, in the arms of his embrace, I can feel as strong and immense as the sun, and I can feel as full of life as life itself.

Me and my father are two very different people - personality wise. So what bonds us in our relationship is our passions for the same things. One, in fact, being the concept of space. When you think of space, you might think of black nothingness sprinkled with cotton ball stars going on for infinity, but we like to think of more the idea of infinity. Is space really infinite? And if its not, what is beyond that?

What I love about my father is that he is willing to follow me in my journeys to the unimaginable, our shared idea about what is beyond our knowledge - in outer space. What is beyond the bubble that all we know is contained in? I don't have a passion for the actual "looking through the telescope", but even the question "what is beyond", is enough to nag at me - to push me farther until I find out the answer. My dad is a rather quiet person, so when I had talks with him, it was usually about something important. I remember one particular exchange between him and I, where some thing about clicked in my mind ; it was a sunny march afternoon, and when I got in the car, I felt normal, like I had a place in the world. That sunny march afternoon happened to be the day when my father and brother and I were on our way to a soccer tournament. Usually, in the time when we are in the car and on the way to soccer, my father would have me think about what I can improve from the previous game, but this ride, we were drawn away from that conversation. My brother pointed up at the sky where we noticed a single line of smoke rising from behind a small mountain range. Me and my father exchanged glances, we knew it was from a factory of something, but my brother was convinced it was from a rocket, which in a sense launched us (pun intended), into the beginning of us trying to wrap our heads around the concept that something, space, can be infinite. I got out of that car feeling insignificant. Something had clicked. I was more than one in a million. I was one in trillions, even more. And that left me feeling small. Because I really was.

When we discussed that concept, we called it, "The Talks." And in those talks, my dad would have me picture this; "we know our planet Earth is one of millions in our galaxy. and our galaxy is probably one of millions in our universe. And our universe may be one in millions in - in what? What is beyond that? just thinking about it blows my mind. we are really just a fraction of a grain of sand within all the beaches in the world combined. maybe even less." And that is all of us together. I feel small because when you really think about how immense this life is, I am. The people in the world, our idols, they matter a bit more because they have made a change that

effects the world, for better or worse. I want to be that person. I want to matter. I want to rise to the top. I want to make a difference. I want the world to know my name.

One day, in the middle of one of our talks, my father asked me how I viewed the world. I later found out that he meant how I felt about our life, our house, etc, but because we were in the middle of one of our talks, I gave him my space related answer. "I like to think of this world as a bubble. Our knowledge, our home, our solar system and what we have explored fits inside that bubble, and all we can only imagine is outside of that bubble." When we have these talks, I always answer in the point of view as a scientist. I used to picture the space outside of our bubble as what we think of space. Pitch black, with cotton ball stars going on for infinity. Although when I was busy thinking as a scientist, I guess I forgot to imagine. This is probably really unrealistic, but me and my father always thought alternate universes existed...

My point is, imagination can help us delve into the farthest corners of the galaxy, imagination helped me in my seemingly unsolvable worry, that I am just another fish in the sea. Those scientific minds who can't believe, picture just pitch black nothingness going on for infinity. But maybe those who can believe... Imagination can let us explore as far as we are willing to go.

My relationship with my dad has helped me realize this all. He has brought me higher. He has helped me accept that I am small, but that is OK because I can matter. With hard work, I can matter as much as the ground beneath our feet. So I thank my father for everything he has done for me. I thank him for continuing to fly me higher, and making me whole, until I am ready to fly for myself. Maybe I will fall, or maybe I will find my balance and fly into the sunset. I don't know. The possibilities are infinite.