

Carrying Their Voices

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“Honestly, I don’t think you can make it to a university...a GED is just a good enough diploma...is English even your native language?” – Various people from my life

People are cruel. It’s a non-debatable fact of life; 99% of people will admit to being unkind at least once, and the other 1% are liars.

We often speak of the external battles we face when pursuing our dreams, yet neglect our internal distress—pain that is often caused by other people. I reached a point in my life that every time conflict came knocking on my door, I would lose some of myself and replace that piece of me with someone else’s voice. I even began writing a poem about it that started like this:

The ghosts from years past laugh at you. They nip at your heels then when you look down dissipate into nothing. They caress their fingers over your soul and whisper sweet nothings into your ear. But the ugly, blistered truth reveals itself when you reach out to touch, to grasp, to embrace and find yourself holding nothing more or less than smoke...

And right after that I wrote: I hate my writing. I can almost hear the little voice mocking my writing; it was the voice of someone who once criticized me, and then asked “Is English even your native language?”

But I told the voices to shut-up.

That summer, the water to our house was cut off. The short story is that my dad was dead, my mom and I were not quite making enough to make ends meet, and I was working part time while going to PVCC. I would fill jugs of water from the river and carry them up to the house, go to work, and then go to my evening class.

Fast forward several weeks and we got the water turned back on just in time for the power to be cut. I would now go between two jobs, stay until 10pm at PVCC to complete my ITE119

assignments, and still do homework by candlelight on the weekends. God bless the computer lab and the library.

Around then, I decided to get my GED. I studied every day, and received flying marks on my

test. When one of my friends heard this, he told me in all seriousness that it was really just a “good enough diploma”. An echo of another voice began to ring in my head.

Soon after, I was practicing driving this same friend’s truck late one night. It was an old clunker, with the seat stuffing spilling out, and we had a blast driving it down the rural roads of Nelson County. But when we discussed possible colleges to transfer to, he leaned over and told me that that he did not think I “can make it to a university”. That night another badgering voice was hoisted onto my back.

But I told the voices to be quiet.

I stayed with my two part-time jobs. Then added a third job. Then a fourth job. Finding no time to sleep, I cut it down to two jobs. I was finally finding my rhythm...

Except then mom was diagnosed with stage three cancer last year. She did not have a car, but she had radiation treatments five days a week at UVA. We lived about forty minutes from the hospital, so for months my schedule became a hectic jumble of who-is-picking-up-who and may-I-pretty-please-have-an-extension-on-my-paper? She is now in remission and is doing well, thank God.

Then our dog was diagnosed with cancer. It was surreal. The voices I’d collected over the years opened their mouths and asked why I kept trying when nothing seemed to go right.

Finally, I told the voices to surcease.

And I continued writing my poem:

Then the sun rises. It shatters the quiet night like a modern day bomb. It sweeps the cloth of stars away with a tapestry of colors - pale yellows, piercing blues, burning reds and dancing violets. The stone that has slowly sheathed your skin and encased your mind shy’s away from the light. But it can’t hide - it breaks, it is destroyed by the warmth and its leftover pebbles are taken away by the wind. Once again, you breathe.

There is an entire cosmos singing to us. If we never quell the voices we carry, we will never hear its beauty. A voice won’t drown out my name when it’s called on graduation day.