

Echoes of Life

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From time to time I go back into the memories of my childhood, standing on the edge of the world, my feet sunk into the sand, grounding me to Earth. I would run along the shores near my home in Maryland. The wind was seemingly the only force preventing my imagination from running the speed of light. I stared into the familiar and unknown landscape of boundless beauty. I feel I was wiser in that moment then I am now and may ever be.

I was born in a busy Baltimore hospital in the spring of 1993, the doctors, my mother and my father the few aware of my existence. My mother fled from her husband when she had become aware of my journey into this world. My father a traveller, spent his time between Honduras and the eastern shore of Maryland. He took custody of me as mother went on her way running from her past, never to return. The years went by, as I watched my father who was a quiet man, herding cattle, riding his horse and closing the day fishing off the coast into the night. I learned many things by watching him perform his daily rituals.

My father died in the autumn of 1998, bringing an abrupt end to the unadulterated joy of being a child. I was aware of death's existence but never aware of our own mortality. I was sent to go live in a sleepy little town in Virginia with a friend of my father's, ripped from my worry-free life of rambling the woods and shoreline that was familiar to me as home. I felt alone and marooned by those of whom I came to know in my short time. I went quiet.

Memories of life then have become dreamlike. I remember slipping out of church to go kick around in the woods and ponder my own existence, rather than that of an "all loving god," searching for any body of water where I could fantasize about what might lurk beneath its surface. Hours would go by and my patience would grow as I prospected the depths with a hook and a worm. I would sometimes stop, thinking I had heard the bell that would call me back home to my ramblings on the Maryland farm I missed so much.

Years had passed since that brisk and fateful autumn morning my father

died, and I was no closer to closure than the day it happened, still stuck in denial and the nightmarish feeling of loss. I had become angry and secluded by my own will. I wanted answers to questions I didn't know how to ask. I needed the truths to things that no one could spare. There were few memories to spark joy into my life.

However, one memory sounds in the forefront of my mind. I neglected my responsibilities when I walked out the door to wander aimlessly through the woods on that cold winter day. It had snowed a great deal the night before, transforming the choppy cornfield into a smooth blanket of white. Taken aback by the awesome display, I would squint and try to focus my eyes on where I was walking. With the bitter sting of wind on my face and the cold embrace of the snow around my feet, I marched to the woodline, drawing closer into a scene of life I would never forget.

There was a rock that stood within those woods that I would climb, to sit and stare into the rituals of the wildlife that hailed to this stream of water that ran through the ravine of those woods. I peeked up over the edge and peered down onto the stream to see ducks that had been frozen upside down in the water. I remember thinking that this was one of the first times I had experienced the brutal effects of nature. The sound of shuffling steps guided my eyes to an awesome sight. It was a family of deer that dwelled in those woods. I watched in wonderment as the fawns scurried across the frozen stream. Then, the does took turns jumping or bouncing across.

I can remember, as if time stopped, as my eyes finally landed on a majestic buck, his horns and broad chest and muscular shoulders shuddered as it let out a breath so thick it resembled smoke. Through my own careless, boyish antics of slipping and sliding on frozen ponds and many warnings, I knew that buck was going to jump the stream. I watched in anticipation as the buck prepared to take off.

But his hind legs slipped, and he fell into the frozen stream that was suddenly still no more. A mighty crack echoed throughout the woods as

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the buck let out a moan, the memory of which sends shivers down my spine to this day. I watched as the buck lifted his legs one by one to break through the ice to join his herd. My suspense melted when he crawled up the bank, then stood there poised with the successful display of perseverance in the face of failure. At that moment, my anger and sorrow evaporated and I felt renewed.

I felt that moment as a child again, with a wordless appreciation for this event, setting me free from my own seclusion. Countless obstacles still await me, and the memories of life will always follow, but echoing in the frontline of my mind will always be the sound of the ice breaking beneath that buck. His triumph will serve as a compass or symbol of strength and perseverance that helps me look past the fear that weakens my judgment. I will use it instead to sharpen my senses, setting free the locked away emotions that hinder the joyous spark of life that inevitably guides me to where I belong.