

Life's Journey

*I wonder how this is happening. When did I blink and travel through the black hole of time? I am sure as I breathe in the scene unfolding that my husband and I have not grown out of our own youthful characteristics.*

As the car slowly approaches the stall, I nonchalantly turn my head peaking in the backseat. I notice Charlie's bright blue ocean eyes, Patrick's long, lanky legs pushing on the seat before him, and Diana's long blonde locks flowing to frame her face. This sneak peak all warms the insides of my motherly pride. My thoughts begin to run awry to an early time, an easier time, a less demanding time.

I gaze forward again lost in my thoughts as my husband slowly pulls the long, black, secret agent appearing vehicle to its final resting spot. As he slowly turns the engine off he notices my temporary train of thought and without words knows to only brush my hand, providing the reassurance I am desperately in need of. *Without a doubt, he understands me.*

I slowly open the heavy door to the tall, slender, blonde boy, now a young man, in the jeep next to me. Without prompting he embraces me tight as usual. Michael in his jovial man tone greets us all with a, "Hello everyone." I still have trouble realizing he is not the toe head, nephew who can be swept up and swung around.

His sister vibrantly bounces out of the passenger door of the silver, off road vehicle with her long, straight, dark brown hair, pale blue accents of eyes, and athletic build. She moves gracefully around the Jeep with an enthusiastic, "It's great to be here, all of us, ready to make grandma and grandpa's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary surprise!"

I feel the breeze of the late afternoon waning sun flow through my hair, as I watch my offspring roll out of the SUV. They file out to greet their cousins. I am once again overwhelmed with thoughts of the simpler time; the time when we spent hours running, playing, and picnicking at parks, together as one large extended family.

"Hello Elizabeth," Diana greets her with a hearty hug and I notice they are eye to eye. Elizabeth steps back in shock as she realizes the youngest member of this team is almost her height and showing the tell tale signs of life's blossoming changes.

"Greetings cousins," Patrick smugly speaks as he unrolls his long extensions out from behind the seat he was in. Once again all eyes turn to the tall fifteen old who has now outgrown all of the cousins and looms tall like the trees we are surrounded by in the luscious park.

Finally, Charlie reaches out from the back of the extended SUV and shakes the strong hand of Shane and hugs the softball queen, Elizabeth. I feel a swell of emotions surging inside as I watch them all move towards the photographer. It warms my heart to see them pick up as if no time has lapsed since they were last together.

Carrie, the photographer, is busy setting out her tools of the trade and greeting the kids. She mentions their changes since the last time we had a photo shoot, eight years ago. As she runs through the shoots details I notice the beauty of the green grass, against the wooded area, and the bubbling of the stream just beyond the logs. The light breeze holds the trees to a slow steady sway, which makes the scene perfect for the moment about to be captured.

"Would you like both individuals and group shots of all the kids?" Carrie asks while fiddling with the long, silver lens of her visual craft.

“Please, you know how to dazzle us with your talents. Please feel free to make these anniversary shots superb for the occasion; 50 years of bliss does not come around all the time!” I respond, trying to hold back the overwhelming stream of emotions going through me.

As I silently observe the beauty of the place and subjects, I notice pieces of our puzzle have begun to change. Each piece dressed in a manor that defies childhood, each puzzle piece conversing with an air of the English vernacular that no longer requires my assistance or translation.

The longer I watch and listen intently to the conversations the deeper my mind travels and spins out of control with memories. *When did Patrick’s voice turn into the deep rolling tone my ears hardly recognize? When did Elizabeth begin to look towards a future career without softball at its focal point? When did Charlie heal himself of the sizzling burn of rejection from West Point and spring back to life on the promise of a new chapter in the fall at Pacific? When did Michael begin to see his future rising and growing with the sweet delicacy of chefs, servers, and restaurant managers? When did our little curly haired girl who called it a “seat car” turn into the confident, eloquent, linguistic master?*

He must sense the awe and shocked expression straining my face, as he puts his strong arm slowly around me. He squeezes my shoulder ever so lightly with the depth of understanding only he could provide. Once again knowing to keep silent as I work this metamorphic realization out in my fragile mind. I know now, at this moment that I am blessed by my soul mate and our newly budding young adults.