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My Storm Clouds

By: Steven Hadley

When we least expect it, people inspire us in the weirdest of ways. That's what I thought anyways after being inspired by watching a man walk the Cutten school track in the pouring rain. Back then I'm sure I thought differently.

I yelled up and the air and slammed my foot on the old wooden floor. This always happens, I end up saying things that I'm never proud of, and it makes me thoroughly disappointed in myself. Often I'll apologize immediately, and they always understand, but I still feel worthless, ashamed at how immature and weak I am.

Nothing helps. I'll open my computer filled with games I love to play, but that doesn't help. I try to draw, but ideas never come to me. Even when I jot down my feelings, the ink never leaves the pen. Frustrated even more by my inability to accept what I've done, I flop onto my bed and close my eyes, praying for sleep to come, hoping that I could just enter a quick, eternal sleep, but unfortunately, I'm still here.

The sky was dark, filling with clouds like water filling a sinking ship. I banged my fist against the wall, leaving a small mark in its wake. People started yelling. My brother tried to calm me down, but I shook him off telling him that only I am to blame.

"That isn't true!" he cried! "Steven, you didn't hurt anyone!," but I know I did. I know that I hurt everyone, and that it certainly is all my fault, and that there wasn't anything that I could do, only sulk, and wait for these horrible feelings to go away. I

awkwardly excused myself from the room, and decided to take a walk. Maybe I wanted to clear my head, or maybe I just couldn't stand living there at that moment, surrounded by problems that I created.

I kicked a soda can. The clouds appeared now to cast an ever present shadow, projecting its gradient across the landscape. Cars zoomed by in an instant, with people in warm, passenger seats that couldn't take their eyes off me. I walked down an alleyway, just hoping to disappear like a vampire in sunlight. A light mist began to appear and then soon a fog, a fog so thick, that it was strenuous to see the block ahead of you. Shaded in darkness and feeling a sense of privacy, I finally felt at rest. Finding a nice quiet mailbox, I propped myself up and drifted off to sleep.

I awoke fairly shortly after that to the rain, which fell in large sheets, each one filling the ground like a shot of poison being injected in someone's arm. My body was soaked to the bone at this point, my skin partially visible through my soggy shirt. I thought about going back home, where it was warm and I would surely have a kind reception waiting for me, but I didn't want to go back, I still felt ashamed for what I had done. So, I kept walking. Many, many blocks went by. The numerous seedy convenience stores and gas stations all seemed like a blur. Around the block, past the stores, and even to the place where the streets become cul de sacs.

The sharp chill in the air rattled every part of my being. The wind picked up and buffeted me this way and that. The rain remained merciless with its downpour, and it flowed like the mouth of a great river in every drainage system. The large trees in the distance gave me an idea. The forest appeared extremely

comforting to me right now, it would be dry inside, and it would help me sleep. For no real reason at all, I started to run, looking around everywhere frantically, almost as if I wanted to not exist. I ran down a slope, which was completely wet at this point because of the rain, and entered the forest.

However, this time it was different. Instead of kids playing and laughing on the playground, there was nothing but what looked like a vacant lot. There were no animals. Even the screech of the howler monkeys, which usually could be heard every few minutes, was gone. I felt as if I became the only person in the entire world. I shouted, and only received echoes in return. Sleep wasn't what I wanted anymore. I needed to run again, run far away, so far, that I would arrive at the ends of the earth.

The forest looked menacing almost as I left its brush in my wake. I needed help, I needed to go home. Without a phone or money to access a phone, my situation was hopeless. My home, which I would have welcomed in open arms at this point, was several miles away and so, I decided to just keep on walking. The rain felt like it had slowed, but that was just how soaked I was. I kicked some trash and at that same moment, the clouds looking like they were about to burst, sagged, and began to pour out massive amounts of water. Then, I ran again, always running farther and farther away from my problems. My old elementary school was nearby, and I knew it had protected areas, so I kept on running. My lungs ached. My heart hurt, but I wasn't going to stop, not when I was so close to peace. I ran past the sign with faded letters, around the dumpsters that smelled of old vegetables, and around the corner next to the bathrooms. I was exhausted. There was so much sweat, that you couldn't tell the difference between it

and the rain water. I just needed to sleep. So, just as before, I propped myself up against a classroom door and fell asleep.

About an hour passed, though I couldn't tell you for sure. All I knew was that it was still daytime and that it was still raining just as hard as before. Sitting up, I noticed someone out of the corner of my eye. A man, mid-twenties probably, with a tank top and greasy black hair, was casually walking the track. He was completely soaked. I wanted to call out to him, ask him what he was doing and why, but I just sat up and watched. An hour passed. He was still walking. Two hours past, and he was still walking, with the same rhythm and vigor he had two long hours ago. Then, another hour passed, and he was still walking. I felt as if I was synchronized with his rhythm, as if I had been put under a spell. Completely hypnotized, I began to tap my foot every time he took a step. Tap, tap, tap.... He let out a large sneeze. Tap, tap, tap SNEEZE. I started tapping the wall to contribute to this new rhythm we had created and I even made my own sneezing noises. Tap, tap, tap SNEEZE, rap, rap. Tap, tap, tap, SNEEZE, rap, rap.

Then, just as I was getting into the beat, and just after I calmed down, the rain abruptly stopped, the sun came out and the man stopped dead in his tracks. He looked up at the sky, then over to me, nodded, and rubbed his greasy black hair. He was also completely soaked at this point, both of us looking like we had just been submerged in water for several hours straight. He finished his last lap, and began to walk away. I waited for him to leave, and started walking home myself, with a smile firmly planted on my face.

At the time, I didn't understand why I smiled that day, when the man ran round and round the track, but in the year since

that day, I have come to understand that it was because of his dedication to his task. Even though it was pouring rain, and even though he was soaking wet, he still walked, and that gave me a new perspective on how I should treat my issues, just like him. Never stopping, always pushing and moving forward with a blunt force. This lesson not only made me more successful in school, it also helped me learn about how people and interpersonal relationships work, which has had a huge overall impact on my life. With a more positive attitude going forward after that point, I was able to earn amazing grades, and make some wonderful friends at the same time for the remainder of my eighth grade year, and hopefully for a long time going forward.