

### Side-Effects and Forever's

No one knows when or how she came into our lives. Mary was just always the girl 30 seconds walking-distance away whom, at some point or another, I latched onto. I was three, or four, no one can remember, and she was a year advanced. For some reason, our parents allowed us to have unplanned and barely supervised play dates in one of our yards and 17 some odd years later here we are. That's not to say it hasn't been difficult; it's taken firm dedication to a friendship to overcome life's nature of impermanence. Somehow, we maintained our tether with a fervor and our lives remained intertwined, red and brown hair braided together in spite of life.

### Neighborhood Kids

We were the first generation of "neighborhood kids" to grow up on our street. Cinnamon Creek was in its infancy when our parents built our houses there in 1998. It was the budding suburban area perfect for the Ding Ding Man to deliver ice creams on a hot summer day and for soccer moms named Terri to drive the young Mia Hamms to practice in their minivans. Ironically, I loved getting ice cream and Mary played soccer. It was only fitting that we were the quintessential, poster children for Cinnamon Creek. Over the years, more families built their houses and moved in, invading our territory like the mosquitoes that plagued our water balloon fights in the summer. Mary and I ultimately included others in our unspoken club.

First, it was Angela and Sarah Gifford. They're sisters, previously a package deal. The four of us spent countless days playing pretend horses in the backyards, except Sarah wanted to play as the puppy. She insisted that her character be special, much to our aggravation. Angela was really the one Mary and I wanted to play the Wii with in their unfinished basement. Sarah had a habit of manipulating everyone to fit her wishes. I'd like to blame it on the Youngest Child Syndrome, but Mary and I are both the youngest so that argument would backfire. Nevertheless,

**Commented [HB1]:** I started this piece with this sentence in an effort to hook the reader. Start with a mystery and all that.

**Commented [HB2]:** I remember specifically wording this in an uncertain way because as a memoir-styled piece, I wanted to be trusted by a reader. And no one can remember details when they're that young.

**Commented [HB3]:** I tried to insert a metaphor here for imagery purposes. I still think it's cheesy, but I suppose it does its job.

**Commented [HB4]:** Throughout this piece, I used headings to separate section from section. I tried to use headings that indicated what the section was going to be about for clarity purposes.

**Commented [HB5]:** This simile was very important for me. I wanted to communicate to the readers that Mary and I were there first and we didn't accept others lightly.

we were made to include Sarah after many scenarios of getting yelled at by Mr. Gifford in their kitchen. I suppose it worked out for a while, but eventually the Giffords moved to Minnesota for Mr. Gifford's new job, leaving it, once again, just Mary and me.

Then came Kenna and Caden Frank. We attract siblings, Mary and I, and it wasn't always the best thing. I had a crush on Caden. He was the boy who lived directly behind me; we shared a fence and spent nights standing on either side having quite the existential conversations for third graders. When I introduced Mary to him, it was decided that Kenna also got to play with us. Kenna is two years younger than I and three years younger than Mary and, since we were so young, the age gap made a difference. During the two years of our friendship, I wrote endless rants in my diary about Kenna's infuriating attitude. One day, Mary sided with Kenna in some argument that was probably inconsequential, but I found it to be the biggest betrayal. In my diary entry that day, I left a teardrop space on the page and pointed it out, ensuring that I would never forget the pain. I was 10 and now I can't remember why I was so upset in the first place. Soon enough, we grew tired of the Franks and would only sneak into their backyard in the safety of the dark to use their trampoline.

Megan Bartholomew was in the picture during the eras of the Giffords and the Franks. She didn't live on 177<sup>th</sup> Street like us, but on 176<sup>th</sup> Street. It was pushing our boundaries, but we allowed her into our circle of two. When we were all in elementary school, our friendship with Megan was stronger than cement. Her house was all the rage at the time; we played Just Dance in her basement and used her outdoor swing set as our castle for games of Narnia. Her patio was perfect for the inflatable pool filled with ice cold hose water. On the hottest of summer days, we would fill up the pool and sip lukewarm lemonades, thinking we were the coolest gals on the block. She even had a computer in her room! And a landline! Prior to Apple's worldwide

**Commented [HB6]:** I included this little bit because I love to comment on how dramatic I am. I think it's hilarious.

**Commented [HB7]:** I felt like this detail adds a dimension to the story. As a creative nonfiction piece, little details are what make it stand out. They also paint the picture more fully, which is critical for a memoir.

**Commented [HB8]:** I used exclamatory sentences rather than indicative because I want the readers to feel how excited I was about these things. I truly thought they were the best of the best and ending with a period simply didn't communicate that.

takeover, the dinosaur monitor and pink fuzzy phone were the most impressive gadgets we could imagine.

I would like to say that we've stayed friends over all the years because it's what I dreamt of at the time. However, middle school changed all of us. Megan became one of the girls who was the center of the "in-crowd." Mary and I began to see her as a completely different person. We broke the friendship off at the same time, sitting in at our computers in our respective houses. Through a Facebook chat, Mary and I confronted Megan about how much she'd changed and how little we wanted to do with her and that was the end of it. I realize now we demonized Megan unfairly and how we went about the issue was borderline cyber-bullying. I'm not proud of it and I'm sure Mary isn't either. In an attempt to rectify the past, I texted Megan a year or so later after the Night of the Gang-Up Against Megan. It seemed as if all was forgiven.

We haven't spoken since.

### Transience

Life is fleeting. The phrase is a cliché for a reason. I've always tried to fight the transience that comes with life; I hold onto movie stubs, old child-sized t-shirts, and stuffed animals that sit in my bedroom hamper, collecting dust. I used to think I was a small-scale hoarder. As of late, I'm beginning to understand that it's an attempt to maintain some concept of permanence. I had a variety of friends throughout my childhood. We shared birthday parties at the Village Pointe movie theater and caught fireflies in mason jars. I'm sure they affected my life in some way. Otherwise, what's the point of making friends if they don't leave some residue of a lasting impact? Regardless, the sad fact remains that I can't recall some of their names. Is that a side-effect of growing up? Or is it a side-effect of life's ephemerality?

### Marlboros in the Green Park

**Commented [HB9]:** I write like this a lot, including in this piece. I love to give names to things and make them proper nouns; I feel it gives me a unique voice and that helps me stand out among other very talented writers.

**Commented [HB10]:** I finished each anecdotal section with a line such as this one – short and separate from the rest. I did that for impact. In Memoir and Personal Writing, we looked at many examples of impactful nonfiction, and many of them had one-liners such as this.

**Commented [HB11]:** I have several sections like this inserted throughout the piece on Mary and I's friendship. I did so in imitation of a piece titled Abracadabra that we read in our Creating Nonfiction book. It was intended to be a meta-reflection of a sort, tipped off by events in Mary and I's friendship, that commented on the bigger pictures about life.

Living in Omaha, Nebraska wasn't the most exciting of experiences. Our days consisted of school, homework, and playing in the streets in the neighborhood. There weren't any mountains to climb, oceans to swim in, or ancient ruins to investigate. Still, we made do with the world we were given. Once Mary and I were allowed to roam off 177<sup>th</sup> Street, we began to ride our bikes off the beaten path. Literally, we turned down a winding bike path off the main neighborhood street one day and found ourselves exploring places we'd never encountered. The end of the bike path terminated at a crossroads. To the left was a bridge that led into the half of Cinnamon Creek we'd never seen. Our target was to the right: The Green Park. The Green Park was dubbed as such due to its green roof and our lack of creativity. It wasn't precisely a park; it was merely a ladder, pole, and slide apparatus organically built into the surrounding hillside. It was awesome. On the day of its discovery, Mary and I threw our bikes aside and ran. Mary, ever the cautious one, took the back entrance, a plank bridge with two railings on either side that sprouted spontaneously from the rocks behind it. I went for the rope ladder, swinging around as I climbed my way to the elevated floor of the apparatus. On that elevated floor, under the green roof, we stood over our newest acquisition, faces flushed and smiles wide.

The Green Park became a frequent destination of ours for years, a haven to which we would ride our bikes when we needed to have an ocean-deep conversation or to just get away from the rest of the world. This was before the time of cellphones, so we were yet to be slaves to technology and societal norms of texting lingo. Instead, we would ride to the Green Park, pouring rain or suffocating humid-heat, and shout to the Heavens all of our buried fears and our darkest thoughts.

When we were in fifth and sixth grade, Mary and I took one of these cathartic trips. Once we got situated under the center of the roof, sitting cross-legged with our knees touching, we

**Commented [HB12]:** This was a subtle move. At the end of the piece, I mention how Mary and I have diverged from the paths that we grew up on. I wanted to put that crossroads in earlier in the piece to get the image in the reader's mind of us taking different paths, growing, and returning to each other.

realized something was different. There was a pack of Marlboro cigarettes wedged into each of the four corners of our square sanctuary. There were expletives Sharpie'd all around the entrance to the tube slide and obscene images drawn on the inside. Someone had desecrated the park. This didn't sit well with us, so we climbed down from the apparatus and rode our bikes back to Mary's house. With a sponge, soap, and trash bags in hand, we returned to the Green Park and set to restoring it to its former glory. The naughty words we dared not to speak were washed away and the Marlboros were thrown in the trash; I hope nobody returned for their smokes only to find them gone forever. Later, we left the Green Park, satisfied with doing our charity work for the day. We went to Mary's and washed ourselves off in her laundry room sink.

The Green Park was never our destination again.

### **Life Lessons in Forever**

In the years since we've been friends, Mary and I have seen our "forever's" fade into oblivion.

We thought we'd go to the Green Park forever.

We thought we'd sit in her basement and have Twilight marathons forever.

We thought we'd live across the street from each other forever.

Those traditions didn't continue for eternity and that's been a hard truth to digest. Of course, it's only natural that circumstance has caused us to abandon those forever's. While it's bittersweet for a sentimental being such as myself to acknowledge my childhood ended years ago, there are two prominent lessons ingrained in the memories that I *know* will always be with me.

Mary and I's friendship trained me in the art of pure acceptance. When we're together, we're weird. We've always been weird, and we'll always be weird on some level. Mary recently

**Commented [HB13]:** I worded this in a specific way. We were children when this all happened, and I wanted to tell the story in such a way that it maintained that sense of innocence. "The naughty words we dared not speak," washing ourselves in the laundry room sink, etc.

**Commented [HB14]:** Again, I kept these simple sentences to one-liners for impact. I also used parallelism in their structures because repetition builds intensity and this passage was very important to me, personally.

asked me if I thought we'd have been friends had we met later in life. I answered confidently with an "I don't know." If we hadn't grown up together, there is a chance that I wouldn't be as accepting of others' quirks as I am now. My default disposition is cynical and short-tempered. It was Mary who inadvertently instilled in me the value of not judging someone based on looks or first impressions. I can't imagine what my personality would be had we not gone through all the stages of life together. It's an impossible question answered with another impossible question: how can I remotely conjure up an image of my life without this person when I haven't an inkling of what it's like to not know her?

Individuality played a key role in our relationship. While we may have been mere toddlers when we met, it was evident early on that a cookie-cutter friendship wasn't going to cut it. I didn't always live up to the standard. As I became a teenager and overrun with angst, my mind was taken over by this person who *needed* to fit in and *needed* to be exactly like everyone else. After so many years of standing out because of my fiery hair and quirky persona, I couldn't handle being the target of criticism. This was during the early years of high school. During this dark period of my life, Mary and I drifted from who we had been as children. My friends made fun of her friends and we were caught in this limbo of cliques. Neither of us wanted to stop being friends, nor do I think it would have actually happened. Still, I needed to learn that being my own person was more important than squeezing into a mold that was a laughably horrid fit. The lesson eventually took hold and I knew it saved me from making a cascade of wrong choices. This was largely in part to Mary. It was only natural; her aura exuded individuality and she demanded nothing less of those around her. I'm lucky she decided to keep me as her Best Friend Forever.

### Chalking

**Commented [HB15]:** This is literally what happened in real life. I thought it was important to put it in this piece exactly as it occurred because it speaks a truth that has haunted me for almost my entire life.

**Commented [HB16]:** I chose to include this as a question for two reasons: 1) It resonates deeper as a question rather than an explicative statement, and 2) I feel like I want the readers to reflectively apply this to their own life.

**Commented [HB17]:** This section was the original exercise that formed the basis for this bigger piece. I took it exactly as it was, maybe tweaked a few things, and pasted it into this revision. I did that because I felt it was strong, and it exemplifies everything Mary and I's friendship has resulted in.

As we got older, Mary and I lost the childhood blind innocence, but our hearts remained true to our youth. Late at night, weekends or occasionally school nights, I would be sitting on my bed, reading or watching mindless television like Jersey Shore or Family Guy. From my window, we quickly realized I could see into Mary's right across the street. On those nights when neither of us had anything to do, Mary would flicker her bedroom lights, a sort of Morse code signal we developed to meet in the middle of the street between us. Cell phones weren't necessary. We would meet, Mary with a case of chalk in her hands and me with two, cold Dr. Peppers. She loved Dr. Pepper, which rubbed off on me, for better or for worse. With the moon and the stars guiding our motions, we sat on my driveway and drew masterpieces for hours, way past the time when the 177<sup>th</sup> St. streetlights turned off. The chalk dust would blow through my fingertips, into Mary's hair, as I sketched her outline. A crime scene of rainbows and clown shoes. My friend always drew significantly cooler sketches than I. Her artistic talent exceeded writing stories and she always liked to prove it on nights like these. But, no matter the creations we deemed influential to the curious eyes of our neighbors, they were soon washed away with the rain. One night, we had our last late-night chalking, as Mary coined it, and our childhood artistic dreams melted down the pavement for the last time. I don't know for sure when this occurred, but it had to have happened at some point.

All childhood games have a "last."

### **Lasts and Firsts**

It's a battle to not buy a ticket for the Train of Depressing Thoughts About Life, especially when thinking nostalgically. I often get caught up in the notion that there are no true "forever's" and that nothing lasts and then we die. It's not an overwhelmingly positive process, I assure you. But I'm reminded every day that relationships can be the one constant in a person's

**Commented [HB18]:** I tried to use lots of strong imagery in this section because I remember very clearly these nights. I wanted the readers to be present with us in that moment, understanding what it meant to us and what it was like to truly be there.

**Commented [HB19]:** I included this for two reasons: 1) It's exactly how I talk, and 2) it's relatable. Everyone has these moments and I wanted to engage/involve the reader for one last section before the piece was done.

life. If a relationship can stand the test of time and not become just another side-effect of a life lived, then it's proved itself worthy. It's shown that ephemerality has no power over it. That's a truth I'm able to accept. Everything may have a "last" at some point, but if the right people stick around, then many more "first's" can weigh stronger in both the mind and the heart.

Mary moved away in 2015 after her graduation. A year later I moved away to the opposite side of the city. We were neighbors no longer. It's bittersweet, but the imprints of our experiences remain as strong, permanent chalk outlines stored in countless imaginary Green Parks. They formed a foundation for our diverging paths, so we can always return to the people we were as the people we have become.

**Commented [HB20]:** This was the ending to the original exercise. I split it from the rest of the original and placed it at the very end. I felt it was important to end on a physical note, so the readers could picture something, rather than the abstract concept I'd discussed directly before.