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September 5, 2013

AP Humanities

Stepping Up and Out of the Shadow

Prompt: *Indicate a person who has a significant influence on you, and explain that influence.*

“Mel. Think. What does x equal when y equals six times fifteen?” Chris says, pointing to the equation on the page.

I groan in frustration. “I have no idea. It doesn’t make sense. I can’t do this!”

Chris fixes his eyes on me. “You can do this, Mel. If you decide that you can’t and just give up, then you’re right, you can’t do it. But if you keep at it, you’ll get there. Just persevere. Don’t give up.”

I pick up my pencil again.

Chris is my brother. He motivates me when I need it. He also relaxes me when I need it.

Working quietly on my homework, my mind is drained and my body is stiff from sitting at the desk all morning. Suddenly, I find a finger poking my shoulder. I look up, and Chris stands beside me with a large grin on his face and a soccer ball in his hands.

“No.” I say, turning back to my homework.

“But it’s Saturday!!!” Chris moans, his smile immediately dropping into a frown. “And I’m bored! I need my sister!”

I tried to ignore him, pushing the book up in front of his face that is pressed up against mine. I am not going to fall for his tricks again.

“Weekends aren’t meant for homework!” Chris exclaims, proceeding to poke me so that I cannot concentrate. “And you’ve been working ALL morning- That means that you need a break!”

“No Chris.” I say, longing for a rest. “I need to finish.”

“But…” Chris gets to his knees and puts on his sad face. “Who knows how much longer I’ll be here?”

I whimper.

“You know, Mel? College is coming up pretty soon, and I won’t be here… Who knows if you’ll ever see me again… What if this is your last chance to play soccer with your brother? What if-“

“Fine!” I say, standing up and shutting my book. “You win. Let’s go.”

“YES!” Chris celebrates by skipping out the door, while singing an awful tune.

I smile and shake my head. He knew how to relax me - even if he had to do it in the most annoying way possible. I love him for that.

Chris is gone now. His leaving for the Whitworth University in Spokane has been a difficult transition for me. It literally feels as if he has taken a large chunk of me with him. Part of me feels empty. There is no brother at home to go outside to play soccer or toss the football around. There is no brother to tickle me when I am stressed or to tease me about the boys at the school. There is no brother to laugh at my silly mistakes and to comfort me when I am feeling melancholy. There is no brother to motivate me to go beyond all expectations. Chris is not there, and I miss him.

However, instead of constantly dwelling on the losses, I also have come to see the benefits. When Chris was home, he taught me quite a lot. He taught me to be confident and to not worry about what others think of me. Christopher taught me to pursue things with high expectations and to never give up. He taught me to step out of my comfort zone and to reach out to people. And even now, Chris is teaching me something while he is at college without realizing it: he is teaching me how to be my very own person.

When Chris was still living at home, I would often hide in his shadow. I did what he did, said what he said, and believed what he would believe. But I know that’s not what he wants for me. He wants me to step out, know who I am, and simply be myself. And now that Chris is at college, I don’t have somebody to hide behind. This is my opportunity to begin stepping out –to begin being myself.

I do not want to *be* Christopher, for I am my very own person. But I do aspire to be just as inspirational as he has been to me.

I have always admired Chris for the way he pursues things even when it means that he has to step out of his comfort zone. For example, every Sunday evening, my church has youth group. There, a comfortable and safe environment for the youth of this community is provided to meet, enjoy one another’s company, and learn about God. However, in the beginning it is often awkward and clique groups form quickly, leaving many of the visiting kids standing alone. My brother would be the one to take action and reach out to those visiting kids. He would be the one to invite them and to make sure that they would feel welcome at youth group. Now, as he has gone to college, I feel motivated to take his place. I am an awfully shy person, but if Chris could do it, so can I.

I watch a girl that I do not recognize step through the church doors. I look around, but nobody goes to her. Everyone has joined their own little groups in which they already feel comfortable. The girl stands there, simply looking at her hands, waiting.

I know that it is up to me whether or not she will be welcomed. Butterflies flutters around inside my stomach, my hands are clammy and sticky, and my throat feels twisted and tight as I make my way over to her.

I stand in front of the newcomer, and she looks up at me with a sense of expectation. I subtly wipe my moist palm against my jeans and then put out my hand for her to shake. “Welcome to youth group.” I say in a surprisingly clear voice. The girl smiles and takes my hand.