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ENC 1101: Mr. Kunze

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

A

"Rubber band Man"

A knock on my window in the middle of the night wakes me. I get out of bed and walk down the long hallway to the front door. Without asking who's at the door, I immediately turn the lock and the door opens with a creak. As routinely done, I close the door behind him as he goes pass. By the time I am finished locking the door he is already laid out on the couch, awake, but dead to the world. The cold tile stings my bare feet as I creep closer to him. His bloodshot red eyes and dirty, worn clothes no longer disguise him. Liquor-stained breath so strong it is as if I had held the bottle to my own face, letting the bitter liquid eat away at my own esophagus and stomach. His heavy breathing, at first, alarms me. Then I notice it's just the usual. As his eyes close and his heavy breathing subsides, I tiredly walk back to my room, just thinking, typical.

My father has always been in my life. Never once did I have to wonder who he was or would he be there for me if I needed him. Never once did I have to call on someone else for the fatherly affection I longed for. I always considered myself lucky to have this luxury that many of my friends needed and wanted. But with the good comes the bad and sometimes the ugly.

I am awakened again, but this time not by a knock on my window, but by the roaring yells in the room across the hallway. I toss and I turn. I put the pillow over my head like I see on television, but it doesn't work. I turn my television on to drown out the sounds of the never ending battle between my parents, but like always, nothing works. Unfortunately, despite his

attempt to keep his late arrivals discreet, he is caught. I am stuck in the middle. On one hand I am just glad he made it home safely, but on the other hand I can't fault my mother for feeling the way she does. Often times this constant battle becomes too much to handle, all I want to do at this point is sleep. Just sleep.

I have never considered my father to be an alcoholic nor a drug addict, but the facts show otherwise. His constant need for the two took priority over our family and even his own health. Instead of living for us, he started living for these pain killers, as I call them. This lifestyle became a 24/7 thing for him. As I think back it is hard for me to remember him without a beer can in his hand. It is hard for me to remember that easy going dad who would do anything to make me laugh. As these pain killers became more present in his life, I slowly started seeing my once loving father fade away.

Instead of confronting the problem, everyone went their own separate ways. I hid behind my daily activities and so did everyone else. I think deep down I was scared. Scared that he wouldn't think he had a problem. Scared that he would disown me, but even more than anything, scared that he wouldn't change. So I kept busy. I worked hard to be the best I could be in anything I did, seeking his approval. I did whatever I thought I could do to get him to love me more than he did his habits. I thought if I could give him more happiness, than he wouldn't need the painkillers. I guess I was wrong, because the solution to his problem has yet to be found.

It is mid-afternoon. My mother has just finished washing my father's clothes, so the sweet, but nauseating smell of Gain is in the air. I am sitting on my bed trying to watch television, but I am uneasy because I can just feel that something is about to happen. Suddenly there is a hard, but brief knock on the front door. My mother tells me to go answer it. As I approach the door, I close one eye so I can look through the peephole. A man in sheriff's attire is adjusting his

cap. I glance beside him and see the clean, looks like almost unused, police car. At this time my heart is racing. Why is he here? What does he want? Almost instantly, I rush to the back room ignoring the tall man's request to be let in. I shake my father who is still asleep despite the hour of the day. "Daddy, wake up, wake up," I whisper even though my lungs yearn to yell. "Get up, the police are here". "Shit," he responds while quickly getting out of the bed. "You have to..." A harder, louder knock interrupts my mother, notification that the sheriff is now angry and annoyed, especially knowing that we are inside because of the clue our car in the driveway gave. "Shaun, go get the door." "But..." "I said, go get the door". I hate being put in this position. I hate having to be the one to take part in the adult situations when I should be painting my fingernails and talking on the phone. What do I say? What do I do? "Who is it", I ask as if I don't already know". "It's officer so and so, open the door". I turn the lock and doorknob cautiously. As I look up into this mans blue eyes and wrinkly face, I try to greet him. My mouth feels as if it is full of cotton and marshmallows. "Um, hi". "Are your parents in"? "Uh, yeah". Without another word he pushes pass and is approaching the hallway. "Uh MA"! I yell to give her a warning. Before the sheriff reaches the hallway my mother is in the living room. "Yes officer". "I'm looking for Xavier..." "Uh, he doesn't live here anymore officer". I quickly straighten my face, hoping my confused look didn't give away our secret. "I just have to do a quick search as procedure". "O.k. officer". We waited anxiously in the front room. Surprisingly, the officer returned in only five minutes, but it seemed like forever. "O.k. ladies, yall have a nice day". "You too officer". As I walked in the back room I carefully looked around. My mother was waiting by the window making sure the officer was gone. As I step to the closet I can hear heavy breathing as if coming from someone who had been holding it in for five minutes. My father leaped out of the closet, dragging hangers and clothes with him. No one said a word. Although no one would admit it we

were all embarrassed. Not for ourselves, but for him. We were all embarrassed that we had to pull off this act and most of all we were all embarrassed because we had no control over it. That night I didn't sleep very well. I remember lying in my bed and jumping every time I'd see the lights from a car going past. I hated him for scaring me. I hated him for making me think that he could leave me at any moment.

The next morning was awkward as usual. We acted as if nothing had happened and as if everything was alright. As I left for school and took the long walk to the bus stop, I felt the eyes of the other kids burning a hole in my face. I knew what they were thinking. I knew that they had seen the police car in the driveway, which added to the confusion of our already complicated lives, but even though the people were different, their stares weren't. It was not the first time a police car had been in our yard. I had felt those same stares and experienced those same uneasy conversations before. Everyone was pretending that they didn't notice, but I knew they all did. As we approached the bus, I felt like turning around and going back home. As I climbed the stairs, the bus driver glared at me. *She knows*, I thought to myself. I kept walking past the bus driver. The walk to the back of the bus was torture. Everyone was looking at me. Even though I knew they didn't, I felt like they all knew. I felt like they had all called each other up to tell the news of how I had a messed up family. I felt like they had all gotten together to discuss ways to humiliate me and even though I knew more than half the kids on that bus didn't even know my first name; I still came to that conclusion. *They all know*. The whole ride to school, I could hear my friends whispering. I knew that they were talking about me. I could do nothing but stare out the window and wish that somehow my family could be different. That somehow I would never have to go through that again, but somehow I knew in my heart that that wasn't the last time something like that would happen. My heart is always right.

Of all eighteen years I've known my father, I never knew what drove him to his habits. I never knew what would make someone destroy their life and the lives of the others who love them. Is there something so traumatic a person can go through to make them feel like they have nothing else to gain from the world, and more importantly nothing else to give to the world? Is there something so bad that would make a person feel defeated and even worse give in to that defeat? Till this day I have no clue what made my father give into those painkillers. I don't know what drove him to be something less than what he is or is capable of being. Oftentimes I think, what kind of example of a black man is he setting for me? Or does he even care if he is setting a good example? Who will I go by to tell me how a man is supposed to treat me? If only I knew what or who made him this person, then maybe I could fix it. Then maybe I could get him help.

I blamed my father for so many things. I blamed him partly because it was his fault and partly because I didn't want to take responsibility. I blamed him for my insecurities, feeling like I wasn't worthy to be loved, because he didn't show me that I was. I blamed him for my mess ups in school because I was acting out just to get the attention that he should have been giving me at home and because I couldn't focus, too exhausted from the nights before. I blamed him for the uncertainty of whether or not our family was going to stay together and make it through those trying times. I blamed him for my unhappiness with the world and who I was in the world. If I couldn't be good enough for him then how was I going to be who I needed to be for everyone else? But most of all I blame him for not being the father that I once knew. While I blame my father for all these things that has gone wrong in my life I don't believe it is his entire fault. We are only what we are made. Meaning he was molded and shaped by his experiences. The things that happened to him made him this person and he had no control over it. And I have to convince myself that he had no control over it.

Then one day, I realized that people can only give you what they have. I started to see that no matter how bad I wanted this change from my father, he can only do what he knows how. He can only be who he knows how to be. Instead of me just loving him and letting him love me back, I was expecting more than I gave. I wanted this picture perfect father that had standards no one could live up to. I wanted someone I knew he couldn't be, but I put that responsibility on him anyway. I was pretty much setting him up to fail. I thought to myself, what if this change never occurs? Have I wasted most of my life hating what I don't like about him instead of loving what I do like? Have I missed out on the good times we could have had, by focusing on the bad?

Once I started forgiving the things I didn't like about my father, surprisingly a transformation within me occurred. It gave me a new outlook on life. It taught me to love people for who they are, not who they could be. It showed me how to take only what I could get from a person, requiring nothing less and nothing more. This has overall made me a better person. I feel as if I can learn from his mistakes and grow from my own. Without my father being who he is, I wouldn't be who I am today. This obstacle has made me stronger and wiser. Knowing that I may not have overcome this obstacle and that there are many more in my path used to scare me, yet I came to see that if you have the patience to endure and the strength to stand... when you feel you can't... nothing is too hard. I compare my father to a rubber band. Sometimes he may go back and forth from this loving father to this not so loving father, but he always manages to come back. He can go long and far, but he never manages to stay that way, as with a rubber band. So although those typical days still happen I know that keeping my relationship with my father strong is well worth it and that no matter how far our relationship stretches we will always come back together.