



“All Worth It”

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HE'S IN MY ARMS, THE NEWEST addition to the family. I'm too overwhelmed. "That's why I wanted you to go to Bishop Loughlin," she says, preparing baby bottles. "But ma, I chose Tech because I wanted to be challenged." "Well, you're going to have to deal with it," she replies, adding, "Your aunt watched you when she was in high school." "But ma, there are three of them. It's hard!"

Returning home from a summer program that cemented intellectual and social independence to find a new baby was not exactly thrilling. Add him to the toddler and seven year old sister I have and there's no wonder why I sing songs from Blue's Clues and The Backyardigans instead of sane seventeen year old activities. It's never been simple; as a female and the oldest, I'm to significantly rear the children and clean up the shabby apartment before an ounce of pseudo freedom reaches my hands. If I can manage to get my toddler brother onto the city bus and take him home from day care without snot on my shoulder, and if I can manage to take off his coat and sneakers without demonic screaming for no apparent reason, then it's a good day. Only, waking up at three in the morning to work, the only free time I have, is not my cup of Starbucks.

We were already different at age fourteen. She gave birth to me and went to an alternative high school; I established closeness with new friends in a competitive high school. She and my then present father were taking care of me; I was studying the environmental effects on the onset of schizophrenia. She took her daughter to preschool, and I vowed to never let anything get in the way of my academics. Even though I'm taking courses that prepare me for a career in the medical field, a path I would not pursue even at risk of spontaneous combustion of Earth, there is no excuse for me to fail. After all, my family has a reputation for failure, and if I don't push myself, no one else will. When I think of me not choosing the effortless Bishop Loughlin High School and traditional fun with friends and preferring the intense courses, dedication to achievement, and overall feeling of self-worth, I cannot believe my mother still can't accept my choice.

One thing I've learned growing up in Brooklyn is that disappointment happens often. The bike I rode to school in the morning wasn't there



when I went to get it in the afternoon. That's Brooklyn. Instead of seeing movies with friends on weekends, I work hard and attempt to keep the little kids out of my mom's hair. That's Brooklyn. Instead of going outside to my backyard, I remember I don't have one, and settle for the 12' by 6' concrete space in front of my house. That's Brooklyn. My Brooklyn doesn't feature flowers of the freshest air or people who smile and say hi. Instead, there's what might have been Orbit gum on the floor among the other thousand wads, a pool of strangely colored vomit, and the monotonous working class boarding the subway to the job it will complain about when it returns home.

If there's anything that Brooklyn has taught me, it's "just do it." I owe it to myself to keep trying, not because I have to, but because I want to prove to myself that I can. I'll have to endure the requirements of helping to raise my siblings and other responsibilities. After the chaos and traffic and noise have settled, I know I've made the right choice, even if my mother hasn't. And it's all worth it.

ANALYSIS

This essay opens with a conversation that abounds in conflict. Though this unconventional opening poses a risk of being confusing or unclear, it contains enough hints to pique the reader's curiosity. We wonder why the narrator feels overwhelmed. We sense the author's frustration at being encouraged to go to Bishop Loughlin instead of Tech and wonder why her mother doesn't agree with her. Finally, we feel curious about the emotions and situations behind the outburst, "It's hard!"

Like Lisa's essay, "Then and Now" (Chapter 12) and Jackie's "The House on Wellington Avenue," (Chapter 15), the author does not complain about the challenging circumstances surrounding her upbringing. This essay is particularly striking because it doesn't speak explicitly about poverty or teen pregnancy in an abstract way, but the author tells us the story of the direct lived experience: taming the "demonic screaming" of a younger sibling, cleaning up a "shabby apartment," waking up at 3 a.m. to do schoolwork.

The paragraph that begins "We were already different at age fourteen" could be more explicit about who comprises "we." Eventually it does become clear that the author is comparing herself to her mother. The author uses striking visual language to render the stark contrasts between her teenage years and her mother's. While her mother spent teenage years rearing children, the author chose "intense courses" and dedicated herself to academic achievements. This essay resem-