

Woo

Tonya Joiner

Course: ENGL 101

Instructor: Dr. Joan Faust

Essay Type: Personal Narrative

The cold, steel bars of the headboard pressed painfully into my back, and I could no longer feel my legs. Yet I sat motionless, his head heavy on my collarbone, afraid the slightest movement would disturb him. I softly kissed the thin wisps of hair on top of his head as I cradled his frail, emaciated body. Every day spent with him was precious; he would soon be gone. In those silent pre-dawn hours, the harsh lighting and sterile hospital smell faded away as my mind wandered unrestrained, exploring unknown areas and probing into ideas which challenged my Southern upbringing, and returned with new knowledge which was to forever change my life.

"Woo," as everyone knew him, loved God, family and the outdoors. He was always daring, climbing to the highest branches of any tree. When he was five years old, he grabbed the manes of our untamed horses to hoist himself onto their backs for wild, frenzied rides. At the age of nine he began a love affair which was to last his entire life-he earned to hunt.

His truck roaring into the driveway invariably disrupted the entire household. The children jockeyed for position as they ran to the door laughing and screaming. They knew he would have Tootsie Rolls and Hershey Kisses in his pockets. As soon as his tall, lanky frame filled the doorway, strawberry blonde ringlets bouncing past his shoulders, they wrapped their little arms around his legs, forcing him to drag them into the room with him. He was always willing to play their favorite games, no matter how tired he was. One wanted to wrestle; his long, tapered fingers would dance across the child's ribs eliciting delighted squeals. Another wanted to play "Chin Music." Woo's beard tickled as he blew "raspberries" on their cheeks and necks.

Many mornings at daybreak he stopped by for a cup of coffee and quiet conversation. He gestured animatedly when he talked; sparkling azure eyes belied the seriousness of any situation. Hung across his shoulder was the tattered, brown hunting pouch he refused to part with, his curls escaping the orange knit cap he always wore hunting. On those mornings he smelled of crisp, cold air and wild game.

The morphine cocktails he was given on demand had stilled his work-callused hands and dulled his eyes. The witty comments were quieted by the cancer, which was robbing him of his life and stealing him away from us. We watched helplessly for six months as each day he stepped closer to Eternity. Each member of our family attempted to come to terms with the nearing end, each in our own way. As the oldest child, I had always been able to rush to the rescue of my brothers and sister. Yet, when Woo needed me the most, I was powerless to help him, and I was furious. Buddy's eyes became dark and haunted, yet he refused to give up hope. In all his thirty-five years, he had never fought against anything so hard. Every day he said, "Today they will find the cure for him." Timmy, in his late twenties, spent infinite hours on his knees beseeching God for the miracle it would take to spare the life of this one so dear to us. Mom and my younger sister, Sonya, sobbed inconsolably, or sat in numb silence. Dad, although broken-hearted himself, was the only calm in the storm into which we were all tossed. He would quietly tell us, "Everything is going to be O.K. Woo is ready to go."

That night, as I climbed gently into the bed to hold him up, for the first time in weeks I clearly understood his mangled words, "Tonya, I'm so tired." I was filled with rage. Woo was only thirty-three years old. He would never know the bliss of finding his perfect mate, of the inexplicable joys of fatherhood. There would be no cure, no miracle, and I could not let go. I was

angry with God. How could He do this? Where was He now? Where were His love, peace and mercy?

In the still night, holding him in my arms, I found my peace. It was not the just physical person I was going to miss. It was the person inside, the spirit of this wonderful man that I wanted to keep here. With warm understanding, I knew many things. In the realm into which he was about to pass, there was no pain, anger, hate, social prejudice or judgment. There was only patient acceptance of all things human. As healing tears were finally allowed to flow down my cheeks, I relinquished my hold on his life whispering, "Go to God." Just after dawn, his favorite time of day, he took the final step of his journey. I believe in my soul that my little brother knows that his spirit soaring free allowed mine to do the same.

Tonya Joiner is a Social Work major. Dr. Joan Faust was her English professor.

Dr. Faust's Comments: *Tonya Joiner uses vivid, specific details to enable the reader to experience the episode, as well as reflection, personal evaluation, and quoted dialogue. This is an excellent and effective example of the personal essay.*