

## The Levee

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“Should I stay or should I go now? / If I go there will be trouble / and if I stay it will be double.” Those are lyrics from one of The Clash’s greatest songs, “Should I Stay or Should I Go?” The lyrics were being pumped out of a beat-up, old, black stereo while David, Erich, and I sat in the grass watching the waves of Lake Pontchartrain’s dirty water hit the rocks. The bottle of Palo Viejo Gold rum rotated clockwise as we discussed the genius of Topper Headon’s laid back drumming style. I still admire his unpretentiousness to this day. When the sky would slowly start to bleed a creamy mix of purple and orange, we knew we needed a head start to get home because we couldn’t safely ride our bikes from all of the rum we drank. The conversation about Headon’s drumming style faded and turned into a heated argument about whether instrumental bands deserved any credit. Then, we’d say our “see you later, man’s” and our “later, dude’s” and get ready to leave the levee area. The levee was our “chill spot,” “hang out,” or our “getaway.” Whichever phrase you prefer to use, the levee was it. I’d respond to the song by saying, “Let’s stay,” but we had curfews.

“Dude, I dare you to go moon that lady over there,” whispered Erich. David laughed.

“You’re crazy, dude,” I replied.

“Stop being a wuss and just do it,” he said.

Between the cigarettes and rum, I wasn’t in a position to argue, so I picked myself up off the ground, rubbed the grass off my numb ass, and said, “Okay, whatever, man.”

When I got back, all I heard was “What did she say, dude?!” between hearty laughs. I told them she said, “Grow up.”

That day I brushed it off, but looking back on it now, it showed just how immature we were at that age. It’s okay, though, because aside from being another memorable event at the levee, it also shows how comfortable my friends and I were at that place. Nothing mattered to us; we were basking in our youth and loving the hell out of it, immature or not.

The levee wasn’t always a place for friends though; I’d find myself there alone often. One time I had been suspended from school and that led to a verbal war in the house. After dinner, I’d take advantage of my parents sitting down to watch Dateline for an hour and run to the levee to lie down and listen to the water. It was soothing and perfect for allowing the heat in me to cool down. Sometimes if Erich or David had things to do after school, I’d ride my bike there by myself. Without any alcohol, I was forced to look at myself and everything around me in a sober state. It allowed me to clear my mind of things that might have been bothering me or let out some frustration. For me, the levee was always that fake friend character in a perfect story exaggerated as being “always there for you” and “really caring.” The levee never judged, and it never criticized. It would always be there to listen to what I had to say. Cheesy, I know, but when you’re a teenager full of angst, there is nothing better than to have someone (or something) that just listens to you mouth off about how your parents don’t understand you.

In the early years of being our best-friend-getaway-hangout spot, the levee was mainly a place where my male friends and I went to be boys. We drank, we smoked, we cursed, we mooned, and we fought; boyish stuff, you could call it. Then I hit puberty. Suddenly, setting anthills on fire with lighter fluid while buzzing off of stolen rum didn’t seem that “awesome” to me anymore; more and more, I was starting to notice how attractive females could really be. I

endured a perilous journey, searching high and low, and fighting my way through numerous frightening creatures called “women” (don’t worry ladies, my view of women has changed since then) until I found one that suited me and could call my “girlfriend.” Her name was Jamie and she was perfect. I was new to this sort of thing, so I never knew what to do and where to do it with her. I thought of how the levee was always there for me; it would know what to do. The first time I took her there, she immediately thought it was dangerous and that I was creepy for bringing her there.

I remember her furrowing her brow and saying, “Are you kidding me?”

“Just come on,” I answered back.

The levee, being the great place that it was, knew exactly what to do that night. We sat on the cold, damp grass and watched everything around us become darker and darker. The orangey guide lights by the docks started to come on and the mosquitoes thrived. I was scared she would complain and want to leave, so I said, “Ready to leave?” She responded by looking at me for a few seconds and kissing me on the lips. At the time, I was stupid enough to ask, “Whoa, what was that for?” but she didn’t respond; she just rested her head on my shoulder. I had then found a new appreciation for the levee. Not only did it tolerate my idiotic acts of boyhood, but the levee knew how to provide the perfect place to spend time with a girl.

With time, I found myself calling Erich and David less and less. I began to understand the importance of money and found a job. Jamie had moved back to Alabama with her grandma and left me for dead. Slowly but surely, everything that once had to do with my youth was drifting away, and the levee was drifting with it. Just like the lady I mooned at the levee said to me in a disgusted manner, “Grow up,” I had. Yet, it wasn’t as simple as just “growing up.” Changes occurred. It was a change of things I valued, a change of the people I valued, a change of the

things that brought fun and happiness to my life. It wasn't a bad change, just one that was harder for me because all I had left was the levee. I believe I had reached that point in life where you realize the place you grew up in isn't really there anymore. All of a sudden, even though I knew that place where I did crazy things as a kid, and loved it, existed, the idea of what that place was to me disappeared. I felt like I could never get it back. What I didn't realize though was that it was still there with me.

Though the levee might not be there for me the way it had when my friends and I were young, it is still there for me now. It is there for me when I listen to The Clash or see a photo of Topper Headon in a magazine. The levee is there for me when I pass by a bottle of Palo Viejo Gold rum at the grocery store. It is there for me when I tell my date "Hey, let's go walk that trail by the water," instead of taking her out to a movie. The levee has permanently ingrained its very existence into my mind and will not allow me to forget the times I had there and where it's put me today. To me, the levee, for all its intents and purposes, is a souvenir of my youth. It is one that I am proud to have with me and will always look upon no matter what age I may be. It is a reminder that no matter how shitty life may get, there was a time in my life where it didn't matter, where nothing mattered. For this, I tip my hat off the levee and thank it. I thank it for being the one to calm me down when I was overwhelmed with anger and confusion, I thank it for being the constant positive in a sea of negatives, and I thank it for exposing me to some of the true beauties life can hold by giving me the will to look for more.