

father's murder, Adams is able to relate a painfully wrenching significance yet remain in full control of his material to the final sentence. Notice, in particular, how he keeps readers always close to a physical moment. Although the final four paragraphs of the essay sweep across fifteen years of experience, they do so by fully situating readers in concrete, and highly significant, specific places and events: an empty high school theater, a glance into a mirror, and, finally, an offstage wing during a performance of Hamlet. Rather than tagging on a conclusion that resolves the essay by summarizing its significance or "moral," Adams skillfully maintains a narrative present anchored in a sequence of physical moments, enabling readers to experience and understand his meaning much more deeply.

In "An Escape Journey," Abida Wali writes about her family's dramatic escape from their Afghani homeland. Like Adams, she rivets us with unfolding action in a close-up focus on an event: we read intently to find out "what happens." Also like Adams, she doesn't explain the significance she's discovered but, instead, artfully renders it within the moment—in this case, when she arrives, crying, in Pakistan, "walking backwards to get one last glimpse of my beloved country." From this final powerful image, meaning resonates back through the narrative she's constructed.

Finally, Richard Trenbeath's essay, "The Clean Zone," presents an interesting case study in form. He carefully renders a family universe with a rich circle of details that are layered with meaning so that they function as much more than simple details. It isn't until we're well into the scene that anything like an "event" even begins to transpire. And then we're deep into the event—the driving lesson with Gramps's truck—before the significance begins to subtly emerge. Notice that when the truck flips, so does the essay. The writer suddenly bursts with emotional longing to "undo the damage and start all over again." Like both Wali and Adams, Trenbeath doesn't announce his point or its significance. He simply weaves it into the fabric of the moment, showing readers how the action itself separated him from the past that he imagined. In the end, the writer re-creates the feeling of being "fixed" in a kind of eternal unworthiness, unable to escape the Clean Zone as he struggles to enter adulthood.

After reading these essays about remembered events, check yourself to see if you don't feel a yearning to turn back and read them again, not only for their rich authenticity, but also for how they "fix" you in their own Clean Zone, one that, perhaps, you'd rather not escape.

FREE FALLING

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The impact of saying good-bye and actually leaving did not hit me until the day of my departure. Its strength woke me an hour before my alarm clock would, as for the last time Missy, my golden retriever, greeted me with a big, sloppy lick. I hated it when she did that, but that day I welcomed her with open arms. I petted her with long, slow strokes, and her sad eyes gazed into mine. Her coat felt more silky than usual. Of course, I did not notice any of these qualities until that day, which made me all the more sad about leaving her.

The entire day was like that: a powerful awakening of whom and what I would truly miss. I became sentimental about saying good-bye to many people I had taken for granted—the regulars who came into the restaurant where I worked, the ones I never seemed to find time to speak with. I had to leave all of my friends and also the classmates I had always intended to "get to know someday." Most importantly, I would be forced to say farewell to the ones who raised me.

All at once, the glorious hype about becoming independent and free became my sole, scary reality. I began to feel the pressure of all my big talk about being a big shot going to a big-time school. Big deal. I had waited so impatiently for the day to arrive, and now that it finally had, I felt as if I did not want to go. I suppose that goes with the territory of enrolling in a university six hours from home.

Upon my decision to do so, in fact, all of my personal problems

had seemed to fade. I didn't care; I was leaving. I wanted to make it clear to everyone that I *wanted* to go—and by God, I was ready. Then the day came, and I wondered if I was honestly ready to go.

My dad and stepmom were taking me to school, but first I had to say good-bye to my mom. No one ever said divorce was easy. I met Mom for brunch that morning, and she immediately began talking of my future experiences. More so, she talked a little of her first year away from home—cluttered dorm, shy roommate, some art history classes—and she spoke with such detail and enthusiasm that I clearly saw what a lasting impression college makes. We talked then of my expectations—what the guys on my floor would be like, how I hoped my classes would not be on opposite sides of campus, whether I'd gain weight on cafeteria food.

She paused for a second, and then quipped, "The food won't make you gain weight; the beer will."

I smiled. I felt relieved that Mom was in a cheerful mood, rather than a maudlin one. Ironically, the sky was filled with sunshine and bright, silky clouds. Somehow, I'd expected it to be gray and overcast. As we talked, I realized I would soon begin the long, complicated road to independence. The security I had selfishly taken for granted at home would eventually diminish into memory. Home would no longer be home, but Carbondale, Illinois.

When the waitress brought our bill, Mom's mood shifted noticeably. She became quiet, even somber. I suppose for her that somehow signalled the conclusion of our last meal together, at least the last one for quite some time. She looked down at the table pensively. Looking back now, I can see the significance that day probably had for my mother. As a parent, she must have been anticipating that day ever since November 30, 1971, and it surely challenged her emotionally.

She walked me to my car, and I could feel my sadness in the pit of my stomach. The summer breeze dried my eyes, and I blinked profusely to moisten them.

"Well, I guess I have to go," I mumbled, looking into the distance. I could not believe I did not have the courage to say that directly into her eyes.

"I know," she replied with a faint smile and then quipped, "It's not too late to change your mind." She was joking, but there seemed to be some seriousness in her voice. Her smile quickly faded when I said I couldn't.

"I'm going to miss you," she added.

"You make it sound as if you're never going to see me again."

"You could call . . . collect, of course."

I laughed. The implication that all money spent from then on would be my own was scary, yet funny as well.

"Don't worry about me too much, Mom."

"I'll miss you." She drew me close and gave me a hug, and I assured her I'd be back sooner than she'd realize. She then told me that she loved me.

"I . . . love you, too." The difficulty of saying those words overwhelmed me. I had always seen myself as someone with solid, untouchable emotions. At that moment, though, I was in a fragile, quivering state; and I could not believe I had conjured such a false image of myself.

We drew apart, and I slowly climbed into my gray Maxima. She did not cry, but who knows what happened when I turned the corner. I don't think I want to know.

At that time, I felt like a rookie sky diver preparing for his first plunge. The cabin door opens to reveal the extreme distance of his fall, which leads to either sheer excitement or eventual death. The naïveté that sheltered his fear disappears at the sudden reality of the moment. By then, of course, it is much too late to turn back. The very thought that this was *his* idea seems absurd to him, and he feels like the only person on the face of the planet. And so he closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and jumps.