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Mr. Watkins

English 1A

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Grim Tides

Have you ever had that spike of fear that galloped through your mind and you had to cull between two toxic choices? You have a choice to save a drowning soul from a vulgar death, but your life is now hanging by a thread; if that thread is cut, the tide may swallow you up, or you can just walk away and think about the screams of the child being strangled by the wave's slender hands. When he was fourteen, my father, Robert Mathews, had to choose the fate of a young child who was trapped in a rip tide. He has told me many stories from his childhood, and this is only one of the tales in which he cheated death. Who could stand there and watch somebody drown? Drowning can be a cruel fate; you feel the hands reaching out to you, grabbing your legs and pulling you down, and the tides won't let you reach the water's surface. No one can hear you scream; you just suffocate and sink into death's boney grasp. My father is a strong man even in his youth, and he had a choice to make. He dove into the risky waters that could have been his grave, and he brought the child to the sandy shore. Granted, he survived a life threatening obstacle, and death never cradled them to sleep. Oh, so fragile, a human life could be.

Two figures emerged from the water; their feet scraped across the sandy shoreline and they collapsed on the ground from exhaustion. The tides roared behind them and the smell of sea salt was in the air. Their bodies were numb from the winter cold. Their lips were blue and they had ashen skin. A constant shiver ran up their spines beneath their skin covered in cold water.

The Seagulls crowded, perched on the peer from beneath the grey melancholy sky. The figures glanced around the empty beach, “I can’t believe we’re alive” (Mathews).

It was winter in 1987, my father and his friend, David, went to a Ted Nugent concert in Sana Monica. After the concert around 6:30 A.M., they went to the beach closest to Hollywood. My father hated the beach. For some unknown reason, he was supposed to be there that day, some force pulled him there. It was dark and no one else was on the beach except for him, David, and four kids standing in the dark blue, shallow water. They were around the ages of seven to nine, just kids. One of the naive kids made a rash decision and dove into the water filled with raging tides. Consequently, the young boy was trapped in a rip tide; he had no choice but to dive under the second wave. The screaming waves crashed down viciously; the ocean was angry with the child. The salt water was consuming his body, and it wasn’t much longer until the sea would swallow him for good like a beast. The third wave bit down with white foaming teeth and “no more than two minutes later, the boy was fifty yards out” (Mathews). David and my Father glanced around the empty beach; there were no parents, no life guard, no one except for three screaming children on the shore line staring and pointing at the wide-eyed boy who flailed in the water and was tossed around by the waves like a rag doll. Before long, a choice had to be made, at this very moment; there may have either been a life saved or two deaths.

The dark beach only turned lurid, and the frightening waves only turned beastly as the boy was being carried out to the dangerous sea. My father and David looked livid at that moment, paralyzed in fear. My father glanced at David. “You go,” he said. “You’re the certified life guard, you’re a better swimmer, you go,” David lashed back. My father became a recent certified lifeguard and underwent rigorous training courses that made him an excellent swimmer. The two rattled teens flipped a coin, heads or tales decided who was facing the ocean’s demons.

The lustrous coin spun through the air like some device of fate, and David caught it: tales. They stared down at the coin; the picture of an engraved eagle mocked them. David glanced at my father who walked towards the ocean and took off his jacket in the blistering cold. A shiver ran up his spine, and without another thought, he dove into the water that woke him right up. He swam towards the boy into the monstrous tides, chomping down like he was a meal. “I feel so cold,” he thought, “Almost hypothermic, but the adrenaline rush is so thick, I have to keep going and bring this kid back to shore.”

The hideous tide bulged from the water and pounded down to fill the belly of the gluttonous ocean beast. David left to find the child’s parents as my father swam faster towards the boy until he finally reached him. My father glanced back; he could barely see the pier, they were so far out. The kid was in panic, horrified by the sea’s cruel intentions. “Listen,” said my father, “You need to calm down and do what I say, or I’m leaving without you. If you try to try to pull me down I will kick you and leave you out here.” “Okay,” said the boy, “I’ll listen, please don’t leave.” My father put his arm around the boy and helped him back to the shoreline using the side stroke. “You need to kick as hard as you can,” said my father. They bobbed in the water like corpses. They were chilled to the bone and their muscles were exhausted from treading water. Three hours later, they finally found a spot to work their way back to shore for what seemed to be about two miles from the beach. One thought still raced through my father’s mind, “Will we make it?”

Two figures emerged on the shore line in the dark and collapsed into the white sand from exhaustion after treading the ferocious tide. They laid there for a second in the white sand that stuck to their skin, numb from the chill, and their bodies were covered in goose flesh. They were dazed and had an unearthly feeling of non-belief that they battled the tide and won. My father

glanced up, catching his breath and saw three tall figures. He stared until their presence became clear; there were two parents along with David standing before him. The parents were like two silent, distorted, faceless figures to him. They grabbed their child and left the beach without a single word. My father stared with utter shock and confusion as he watched the family leave the beach that seemed to go on forever. "Not a single word," he thought. "Not a single thank you for saving my son, no life guards, no ambulance, no police, nothing... nothing..." He felt disgusted at the thought of the parent's neglect, how foolish people can be. He shook his head at the thought, "I risked my life to save someone, no one died, he was safe, and that's all that mattered." He made it when he didn't think he would, staring at the reaper for three hours, this was one story in his life added to the section of cheating death. David patted him on the back, "I'm glad you went," he said, "I would not have made it." Over thirty years later, after remembering this tale, one quote stuck out in my mind as he said it, "Truth is; I've never been to the beach since."

"When you're young, you think you're Superman, but life is so...so fragile" (Mathews). When something unexpected happens, it happens for a reason, everything does. My father never knew why he was on that beach, he never goes to the beach and still doesn't. But when you're faced with such a drastic choice, you need to step up and overcome the risk. Throughout your lifetime, you are burdened with the fact that you have to make risky choices. My father chose to dive into the tide, he chose to save a life, and he chose to survive in the refusal to give up. "It doesn't matter if you're thanked, patted on the back, given an award...it's just something that you have to do, screw the rest of it, it doesn't matter... it doesn't matter" (Mathews). I often wonder who this boy is, what his name is, where he is today, and if he remembers the day he

almost lost his life and the brave man that risked his life to save him, my father. Perhaps, I'll never know.

Works Cited

Mathews, Robert. Personal Interview. September 1, 2015.