

Lawren Dame

Ms. Ochoa

Honors Composition

6 December 2010

Little Mosquito, Big Picture

I hovered over the edge of the abyss, its gaping giant's mouth poised in a silent scream. Lofty trees littered its edges like crooked green teeth, and far below, a lapping waterfall of a tongue gurgled and gushed. Shaking, I stepped back from the cliffside, groping for a nearby tree, a smooth source of comfort. "Wow." I breathed, glancing at the absorbed faces of my father, brother, and sister as they stood, transfixed by the awesome scene before us.

Vacationing with my family at Yellowstone National Park for the last few weeks had, so far, been a delightful experience. The scenery took our breath away: waterfalls rushed and swirled, and geysers spewed glistening diamond drops of sulfuric steam. Even the wildlife had been awe-inspiring, from the stately brown bear, lumbering sedately through the forest, to the shaggy buffalo babies, staring confusedly at cars as they stood blocking traffic in the street. Yellowstone was like a miracle on earth, filled to the brim with splendor.

My favorite part of the trip had been when we hiked up a steep trail to Inspiration Point, which overlooked a twisting whirling river squeezed between two hulking canyon sides. Heights were one of my greatest fears, but I had somehow mustered the courage to clamber up the thin cliff-like trail to the point. Going back down, though, was a far more treacherous endeavor. I scabbled blindly at rocky outcrops, barely breathing with fear. Slipping on the slick surface of rock, I had to bury the urge to cling to the slab nearest me and not let go. Too terrified to continue, I froze. The next thing I knew, my dad emerged at my side, grasping my hand in his

big paw and gently guiding me down to safety. Immediately I felt secure in his looming presence, knowing I could not be hurt while my dad was near.

Today, more hiking lay in store for us. We had spent the day trekking down to Yellowstone's Lower Falls, where we were surrounded by a roaring torrent of splendor. I gripped the worn railing and strained toward the falls, mist grazing my face as I took in the view. A gleaming shower rained down just below, and a full circle rainbow had formed from the surrounding spray. All was emerald and azure, a breathtaking paradise.

Once we had had our fill of the dazzling sight, my father suggested that we hike further up the falls, to its highest point, for another camera-worthy shot. He had been camera-crazy this whole trip, and we joked that he had not had an actual chance to see anything with his own eyes yet—he had been too busy watching it all through the lens. I considered hanging back, thinking of the tremendous height of the falls, but one look at my father's broad, six-foot-five-inch frame reminded me that I could count on him to keep me safe. A surge of courage enveloped me, and I determined to climb to the top with the others.

Now, here we stood, on the upper edge of Yellowstone's Lower Falls, overlooking the deep hole gouged into the earth. Managing to unlatch myself from my grip on my tree, I crept forward for another look. Far below, around five hundred feet or so, flowed the falls. They looked like barely a trickle from here; growing dizzy, I took another step back, focusing instead on my father's sturdy back. He stood before me on the edge of the precipice, camera lens, as usual, pressed to his eye for the perfect shot. Dad was here; I was safe, I reminded myself.

Suddenly a little flit caught my attention—my eyes honed in on a buzzing little mosquito, which flickered by and unceremoniously latched itself onto my father's left shoulder. Instantly, as if with a mind of its own, my hand reached out and smacked it. For a split second, time froze.

Shock blurred my vision as my father began to stumble, his body lurching forward like a felled tree. All was still as my father hovered over the cliff. The roaring waterfall and chirps of the birds stilled in my mind, as if even they watched as his foot caught, and he righted himself, grasping at a tree. He was steady.

Relief soothed my thudding heart for a split second, and it skipped a beat before resuming its thundering rhythm. What had I just done? My heart hammered out the question, five pain-wrought syllables – what had I just done. The answer was unthinkable: I had nearly pushed my own father off a five-hundred-foot cliff, because of an insignificant mosquito. Disbelief clouded my mind. How could I possibly have done that? It had not happened, I assured myself. I could not have been so stupid. Yet the looks on my family's faces told me otherwise – I had almost just killed my father.

Dread consumed me, and I numbly crumpled to the ground. Fleeting, I recalled horror stories I had heard before: a kid drowned in a swift river current, a woman backed over the Grand Canyon as her husband took her picture, a man fell from a cliff to his death while on his honeymoon. I had grown up hearing about all these possible dangers, yet the distraction of one little insect had caused me to impulsively ignore my risky surroundings. With horror, I realized our family could have just become another of those pitiable families, broken apart by tragedy, briefly mentioned on the news and then swiftly forgotten. The story of the man plunging to his death could easily have become my dad's.

Shame burned within me – I had let something so small, so silly, take control of my mind without thinking of the whole situation. Tears seared my cheeks as I thought of what might have been: my father's strong body lying broken at the foot of that gorgeous waterfall. In an instant, this vacation, with its entire enthralling splendor, would have become the worst trip of our lives –

and I would have been the reason for it. Immediately, though, I was filled with thanks; my father had caught himself. He was unharmed.

This stupid blunder on my part, although it could have ended in disaster, has served its purpose. Never again will I forget the present situation at hand, and lose myself in something that does not matter. Whenever henceforth I find myself in a potentially dangerous situation, I only have to think of that treacherous little mosquito to keep my thoughts on the big picture, a reminder of what is truly important in life.