

2015 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Essay Category

First Place (tie): “*Green Bike vs. Climate Change,*” by Amber Dimond

I am saving polar bears. Sure, a lot of people may think they are saving polar bears. There are the activists, the photographers, the videographers... One might tirelessly broadcast images of emaciated specimens pawing pathetically at bear-safe dumpsters. Another might

I had crafted a more compelling case than I actually had. Logan peaked over the top of his tablet and dully lifted an eyebrow.

“Is this about the polar bears?” asked Taylor, my littlest sister. At 14, she melded the dueling characteristics of a credulous fledgling and a jaded skeptic.

They knew this was not my first venture into the role of animal savior. By age 4, I realized that the word “chicken” which referred to the majestic bird and the word “chicken” which referred to my nuggets were not just homonyms. After this gruesome revelation, I made the difficult decision to banish all chicken from my diet. The only way my parents convinced me to reconsider was by assuring me that the chickens we ate were mean and deserved to die. As the years went by, I grew more and more doubtful that every chicken I ate was demonstrably deserving of the death penalty. By 12, I recommitted to a meat free lifestyle. Over 10 years later, I’m still buying tofu and boiling seytan.

Along the way, other injustices railed at my conscience. Why buy eggs brought into the world by abused hens barely surviving in the confines of a factory farm when I could buy them from an old lady with a chicken coop? Is it fair to ask orangutans to sacrifice their lives to the palm oil industry so I can buy cheap cookies with an everlasting shelf life? Why ship tomatoes dozens of miles when I can grow them in a bucket in the back yard? Do flies really need to be swatted? One by one, I eliminated, transitioned, and renounced, saving fuzzy lives with every step. Now it was the polar bears’ turn.

I looked at Taylor, put my laptop down, and stood.

“Yes,” I answered in a steady voice. “It’s about the polar bears.” One week later, I was the hopeful owner of a pale green Schwinn cruiser.

In my mind, I saw myself effortlessly whizzing from destination to destination. I mapped out the safest routes to work, to school, to the grocery store, and to the library. I went on amazon.com and filled my cart with reflective gear, bike locks, bells, and a basket capable of holding 15 pounds of textbooks.

My plan felt completely natural and serene, almost inevitable. I loved bike riding. I had always loved bike riding, since the moment the training wheels came off and my dad let go of the handlebars. When I was seven, my family went on vacation to Mackinac Island. Riding around the island felt like eight miles of sailing on the wind. And when the rest of my family turned in their bikes to the rental shop, I just kept sailing for another eight miles. Granted, this was because I became separated from my parents due to the opaque quality of a horse’s gaskins. But when the police finally found me, I still felt like I could ride forever.

However, I eventually fell out of the habit of riding my bike. When I did use it, I discovered that attempting to change gears caused the derailleur to catapult my bike chain towards the

would intermittently stop at a house and ask if anyone wanted to play. They never did, which was always a relief because neither did I. I just wanted a reason to ride my bike down Peck Road.

That was the feeling I was going to resurrect.

I found myself standing at the top of the first hill with my new bike underneath me. I put my foot on the left pedal and I was sailing again. The next hill approached and I sped up, building all the momentum I would need to float to the top. I waited for all of the old sensations to wash over me in a torrent. They didn't. Then my storehouse of momentum fizzled out half way up the hill. I started pedaling harder, throwing all of my weight into each downward push. Acid started gnawing away at the individual muscle fibers in my legs. As I neared the top, I felt a familiar swelling closing in around my airways. Which meant the first voyage was over. I walked my bike back home to get an inhaler.

I didn't attempt Peck again for weeks. But I also didn't abandon my mission. Everyday, the neighbors saw my bike and I crookedly schlep around the block, the jittery effects of albuterol bubbling through my veins. The old sensations never flooded back. However, they did sprinkle. They were raindrops falling here and there and almost always catching me by surprise. Slowly, my muscles didn't notice the inclines and my lungs didn't notice the cold. Then one day, a particularly potent raindrop fell on my shoulder. It was a familiar need. A need to go fast. I was ready to go down Peck again.

Perhaps I haven't single handedly blocked access to tar sands or immobilized every Volkswagen. Perhaps the videographers are getting more done than me. My green bike hasn't replaced the car in the driveway. All of the meditation, remembrance, and sentiment I can muster won't erase my carbon footprint. I still feel like I have risen through the ranks. Because if I ever want to go to the Strachans' house, that's 530.76 grams of greenhouse gasses the polar bears don't have to worry about.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS