

I Want the World

by Brenda Shaughnessy

(518 words)

You never know, when you say goodbye, if it's the last time. Last time for who? For what?

Every time is the last for that particular goodbye, wearing those clothes, at that airport. My daughter in her fuchsia track shorts and faded green t-shirt almost as soft as her luscious little arms. She was complaining, as usual. She was hungry. She was tired of traveling.

Her complaints were especially unpleasant since they only pointed up how innocent she was of how bad everything could get. The Legos are boring? Imagine no toys of any kind.

The chicken nuggets are too hot? Just wait. They'll cool and by then, I hope she can learn to like lizard blood and shoelace chewing gum, because that's what's coming.

A fierce zip of pride bites my heart. She demands more because she knows there's more in the world and she believes she should have it all. She knows what she wants: what she wants.

She believes the world is coming to her, not veering definitively away. She still thinks we can choose between ice cream flavors, bless her that she has so many possible flavors in mind.

Between stuffed animals and dolls. Which color lunch box you want for the whole school year. What school year? I think. Will first grade exist this coming fall?

She still thinks that what she thinks will affect what she gets. She still believes tantrums might get her her way. She doesn't know yet that nobody gets her way.

We're all lucky if we get anything at all, come dinnertime, come night, the next morning and the next hot morning, the next endangered living space if we get to stay there. We can't carry all that stuff. But she doesn't think of it as stuff.

She thinks of it as what she wants. Life's been consistent – me resisting her demands, cutting my hair to make her paintbrushes. If something happens to me, who will help her believe her beliefs?

She believes her desires – as erratic and irrational as a six-year-old's desires can be – nevertheless have intrinsic value. A thread of hope wound, inextricable, all around and through her very person. I believe that, too.

One of these mornings I'll say goodbye, a routine goodbye when go to the FedPlex warehouse to work or pick my rations, and in my absence she will lose that thread, come to fully understand what she wants is impossible in our world.

All of it, any of it, the tiniest thing, impossible.

I won't have known but I'll be walking away from my daughter for the last time, coming home (wherever home is) to someone new, someone broken off from my old girl, six years old.

Here, I tell her, providing a pencil with a pristine, unsharpened end, chew on this. Nobody's touched it yet. It's all yours, darling.

Somewhere I'll find a blade to sharpen it, and we'll find a scrap for drawing, a bit of napkin or a smooth, light stone. For now, you can chew on it. Soon you'll be able to draw whatever you want.

This Is My Voice

by Shane Koyczan

(556 words)

this is my voice
there are many like it
but this one is mine
and it's a fine line
when you're trying to define
the finer points of politics
 politics being a latin word
poli meaning many
tics meaning bloodsucking bastards
but too many live in countries
where it's bullets instead of ballots
where gavels fall like mallets
when held in the hands of those
whose judgments can be bought
as easily as
children can be taught to covet
and the only ones willing to speak up
are forced to live so far beneath the radar
that the underground is considered above it

this is my voice
there are many like it
but this one is mine
and this time it's for the sons and daughters
who watch mothers and fathers drown in shallow waters
while panning for the American dream
in a polluted creek called the mainstream
this is for the homeless people sleeping on steam vents

making makeshift tents out of cardboard and old trash
trying to catch 40 winks in between the crash of car wrecks
risking their necks by surviving another day
so they can starve
so that famine can carve their body into a corpse
before their heart stops beating
so that men in a board room meeting
can make it harder for them to get welfare or healthcare
it's no wonder some of them pawn off their own wheelchair
and every time I walk by I can't help but feel at fault
that maybe I didn't search myself hard enough
for the ctrl alt
so could save the world
I've got to cash in my reality cheques
so I can drop the world some spare fantasies
because the most valuable thing I've ever learned
is to believe people when they say please

so don't tell me there are no heroes
this is for them
the women and the men
for Helen Keller who against all odds found a voice
for the choice Veronica Guerin made
for Martin Luther King who stayed just long enough
to share his dream with us
it came true one day on a bus with sister Rosa Parks
this is for the Joan of Arcs who believe even in the face of sparks
becoming flame this is for the game Louis Riel refused to play
for the day the Dali Lama finally goes home
for Dr. Jeffery Wigand who alone stared down big tobacco
for Nelson Mandela who continues to go the extra mile
for the trial that finally found a man guilty for shooting Medgar Evers dead
this is for everything Malcom X said
remembered by athletes who left the olympics double-fisted

for Arthur Miller blacklisted for calling a witch hunt what it was
for Galileo locked up because he said the earth revolves around the sun
for anyone who was told to be quiet but instead had their say
and imagine if we could still hear John Lennon play
this is for the someone who stood up today and said no
for Edward R Murrow who shut down McCarthy
this is for Salman Rushdie

Mahatma Ghandi

you

me

this city

this country

we will always have a choice

So when you stand up to be counted

tell the world this is my voice

there are many like it but this one is mine.

An Open Letter to the University of Florida

by AJ Moyer

(443 words)

Dear whomever at the University of Florida
happens to open this letter:

We will remember this when they are eating our brains,
that is, if they haven't already eaten the part for remembering
how the university board thought a Zombie Survival Guide
on the university's health department web page was degrading.

Of course health threats must be taken seriously,
and knowing about vaccines and safe sex is important,
especially in college,

but to think that these lessons are cheapened
by posting a document that could literally save our brains
from reanimated corpses that want nothing more
than to eat us where we stand,

that's just hodgepodge.
That's horsefeathers,
University of Florida;
sheer and utter poppycock.

We can study viruses and safe sex,
we can develop vaccines in labs and
treatments for other sorts of infection,
the health department hands out enough condoms,
but all we had to save us from the undead
is that pamphlet you've taken down.

We'll never have a chance to study them until it is too late.

Zombie survival pop quiz, oh person at the University of Florida who happened to open my letter:
Where do you go to hide in a zombie apocalypse?
The Mall? The University? Home?
Congratulations, you're screwed.
Just like your students are since you took down that guide!

How can we be expected to stay safe and be prepared for our adult lives when you have the gall to deny us necessary health resources.

It's safety issue, really.

Zombie survival pop quiz number 2:
What is the optimum number of people to have in your survival party?

Number 3:
What are the most important skills to have in the aftermath of a zombie apocalypse?

Number 4:
How do you balance the survival of your new clan with your food and weaponry resources?

Number 5:
Where do you tell your students to go when Urban Meyer stumbles off the football field with half a cheerleader's jugular in his teeth?

If you can't answer that, oh person
at the University of Florida
who happened to read this letter,
then approximately 51,000 students
whose families have entrusted you and yours
with their lives are now going to die!

For the sake of your students,
oh person at the University of Florida,
please pass this letter to your superiors,
ask the medical department to hold hearings,
because if you think sexually transmitted infections
and drugs are all we have to worry about in college,
it's time you realized we could use some awareness
about all the mindless stumblers out there
wanting nothing more than to desecrate our brains.

Please, person at Florida,
make them reconsider
protecting our brains.