



# *The* Beginning

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# PREFACE

## In Dependence .....

I see Freedom is a reality for some, a dream for others  
I know Independence is a gift that is not always given  
for some of us this is enough to keep our dreams hidden  
and so alone I sit away from my brothers  
lost in a sea of pain, of medication and doctors  
but I hope that perhaps my fate may yet, be unwritten  
now at such a young age I am, already, twice shy and twice bitten  
myself and others like me, are we to be just the charge of our fathers and  
mothers?  
I mutter alone the words "disabled, sick", "crippled", these are my dark  
affirmations  
but still my hope knows no bounds and against my own thoughts I catch a  
glimpse of my path but I cannot walk it alone  
it is at this point that I think, I am doomed to be a burden, and a weight?  
or must my dreams be left unfulfilled? suddenly now  
a moment, a chance, a helping hand could this be it?  
could this be my ticket to new destinations?  
I reach out for my chance I extend my arm and feel how strong it has grown  
walking alone I may fall but I do not wish to be carried  
but walking hand-in-hand I know my future may not be quite as billed.

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by Kellen Curry



# THE BEGINNING



Melody is by herself, alone in her room. Dead silence fills this once warm and familiar place. Now only her bitter crying echoes in the walls of her room. She's deep in thought on whether to do it or not.

She asks herself:

"Why are they doing this to me? I did not do anything wrong. It is not fair. I do not deserve this."

Her hands start to get sweaty and shaky. She is beginning to get frustrated and she cannot understand why terrible things are happening to her. She has not wronged anyone yet she suffers. She begins talking to herself:

"Maybe it is my fault because I cannot stand up for myself. I'm weak."

Melody starts to feel more helpless and hopeless each time

she hears her own words. She worries about the bullies at school. The fear from her heart spreads out to her nerves.

She cries softly as she talks to herself, and her soft cries turn into wails.

"All those years, I enjoyed their company very much. We ate together at the school cafeteria. We shopped together at the malls.

Those were my good friends who turned against me.

They just used me and befriended me only to humiliate me!

They treated me like a toy with no soul nor a heartbeat."

A knife is located in front of her. She stares at it... and stares at it again... until the knife suggests something ... something very dark.



Mel wakes up in a dark and ominous tunnel. The tunnel seems to be made of bricks but it is too dark to tell exactly what it is. Only the cold, coarse, and uneven ground give her clues to what she is resting on. Mel searches for an exit only to find it is a long and endless path that

leads to nowhere. As Mel tries to stand up she notices the tunnel is too small for her. This claustrophobic area gives her an uneasy feeling and she knows she has a long journey ahead of her. Mel begins to crawl aimlessly into the darkness.

It is a soundless journey that Mel takes upon herself. All she can hear is the sound of her heart beating against her chest. Mel suddenly hears her friends calling to her. The voices are faint but she can tell which direction they are coming from. She turns around and starts to crawl toward the sound. The voices become louder and louder. As she crawls further the voices turn into yelling, screaming and shouting. The volume is so unbearable, Mel has to turn around and crawl away from them. Tears start rolling down from her cheeks and she finds herself unable to go on.

Mel sits down holding her head and covering her ears in the hope that this nightmare will end. After a brief moment she releases her fingers and it is silent again.



Mel hears soft footsteps in the distance but it is too dark to see who or what is coming. Mel positions herself toward the source of the footsteps and braces for the worst. At last, it is but a young child hopping past Mel. The child is no threat to Mel; she is only half of her size. The child pauses for a second and begins to transform into a firefly.

The tiny firefly captivates Mel's attention as it creates tiny sparks of lucid lights as it glides in mid-air. The tiny creature meanders through the tunnel lighting up

every dark corner of the claustrophobic area. Mel no longer feels afraid; the light in front of her keeps her safe and provides a direction for her.



As Mel continues to follow the firefly, small streaks of dim lights appear in the tunnel. With a curious mind, Mel keeps on following the firefly until suddenly, with the blink of an eye, bright light pierces through far reaching dark corners of the tunnel. The bright light also pierces Mel's eyes as she loses sight of the firefly. Climbing out of the tunnel, Mel witnesses a vibrant and vast green pasture teeming with forest life. Her eyes enlarge as she is filled with

amazement with this wondrous green pasture. The sun is shining in the blue sky and a light breeze gently presses against the grass and trees of this newfound paradise.

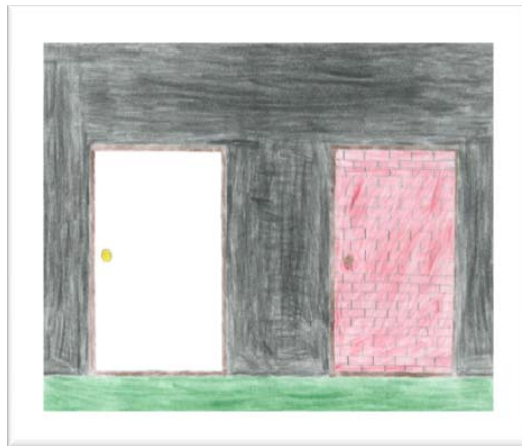
Mel turns around and the dark tunnel has vanished. She is standing in a field of grass, flowers and trees with the sun shining down on her and cherry blossom petals floating around her. Mel looks up and cannot find a single cloud in sight.



She spots the 'firefly child' from the tunnel dancing happily across the pasture into the forest. This time, however, Mel decides not to follow her. Mel is instead mesmerized by this beautiful world around her and wishes her parents were here to see this. Mel realizes that she needs an eternity to explore and learn from this world.

In the corner of her eye she spots something shiny resting in a bird's nest on a tree branch. Mel searches the bird's nest and finds a shiny glittering crown made of pure gold decorated by precious gemstones. The ray of light from above refracts colours of blue, red and yellow on the very tree trunk that holds the crown. Mel is fascinated by the crown so she decides to take it.

The crown gives Mel the feeling of authority and power, but this is a strange feeling she has never felt before. She thinks to herself that if she wears the crown, she will have the power to change the world. As soon as Mel puts the



golden crown on her head, the bright blue sky gradually fades to a gentle yellow. From yellow it grows violently to a dark and mysterious red. Eventually the sky is covered with utter darkness and the world is without sound.

Mel shifts her focus back to the 'firefly child' and notices she is barely visible in her sight. Mel runs over to her before darkness takes her away completely.

As she approaches the little girl, Mel notices she is no longer little, in fact she has grown to about the same height as her. The stranger turns around and Mel sees a brief reflection of herself just before darkness consumes her completely. Two doors now appear in front of Mel. One is milky white in colour with a golden doorknob and the other is a cold coarse brick door with a rusty doorknob.

Mel thinks for a moment and opens one of the doors. She turns the door knob and pulls the door toward herself. A bright light shines through the doorway and she steps into the light.

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I hear my mother calling for me from a distant. My head still feels a little dizzy from the bright light that pierced through the door when I stepped through it. After

the bright light has faded, I find myself resting on my warm and comfortable bed at home.

Was I dreaming? Where was I?



I slowly open my eyes. My vision is blurry, but I am relieved that I am finally waking up and finally at home. I focus my attention on a familiar figure who has been sitting beside me all this time. The blurriness of my vision has vanished and I see my mother sitting by my bed.

“How are you feeling Mel?”

This is a tough question for me in my confused state of mind. The cramped brick tunnel, the green pasture, the paradise transforming into a nightmarish abyss in front of my eyes are still very vivid in my memory. Then there is this persisting problem at school with my friends...

“Mom, I have to tell you about something.”

“Mel, we know you’ve been having difficulties at school. Your school teacher called us last week and we had a very long conversation. You obviously didn’t tell us anything, but you should have at least told your teacher or the principal. Now if your friends are a bunch of big bullies, maybe they’re not your friends after all.”

I am surprised that Mom knew about my situation all along. The most difficult part in all this is coming forward to talk about it. I wasn’t thinking straight, I came up with silly thoughts but now I know what to do. Funny how things get simpler when you are willing to take the first step...

“Mom, I’ll tell you everything.”



A year later I find myself walking towards this milky coloured doorway that leads to a room full of my classmates. My heart is full of excitement and starts to beat faster and faster. A variety of

aromas greet me as I enter the room; I can smell tangy orange, sweet strawberry, and the citrus smell of lemon rushing through my nostrils.

The heavy and electrifying beat of the music magnifies the enchanting atmosphere of this graduation party. Everyone is now listening to that loud, crazy, but delightful song, a tune that is mesmerizing to the souls of our age. I slowly notice that even I dance to the jive of the song. The loud beats, the enchanting tune, and the rock and roll atmosphere slowly give way to a softer and sweeter melody that soon fills the room. My classmates change their fast paced steps to a more gentle soothing movement. While some stay on the dance floor, others hurry back to their seats.

On the way back to my seat, I am approached by my friends who give me this beautiful silver tiara.

As they gently place the tiara on my head, I see brilliant shades of blue, yellow, and red that light up the dance floor. I suddenly recall the incident from a year ago. I remember I did foolish things during that time, but I was able to move on. I was able to make new friends who cared for me. I know that they are a genuine bunch because they were there for me when I needed them the most.

This graduation party is just the beginning of my adventure. I know that a new chapter is about to unfold as I make a fresh start. I will hold on to this tiara to remind myself that life is full of green pastures as well as dark creepy tunnels. We just need to take them on one at a time.



# The End





# AFTERWORD

## **Eliana Chia (RCD Board Member & Story Book Marketing)**

Bullying is an issue that has been steadily gaining increasing attention from the media, and rightfully so, as more stories are emerging of lives that are lost from the effects of intimidation and isolation. As we encounter these tragic stories, the question that arises is: What can be done to support those who struggle to face each day because of bullying?

The youth interns at the Richmond Centre for Disability have answered in the form of a storybook, and I have been privileged with the opportunity to join them on their project. It is a creation that represents an individual experience of being bullied through poetry, storytelling, and art. I believe that art is a powerful tool in expressing empathy and solidarity, which is crucial for the anti-bullying movement. One step that can be taken to reach out to those who are bullied is to show that there are people who care about them, who can support them, who understand them, and who are willing to act. Each art piece about bullying, such as this storybook, which emerges can build strength to this message. Anti-bullying needs to be a community project, and I hope that in the future, we can continue this work in an inter-generational form.

## **Ian Yeung (Youth Interns Supervisor)**

This project started from a casual discussion with our youth interns on the topic of bullying. Each of them experienced some sort of bullying while they were at school and as a result of their experience they are quite familiar with this topic. I was able to facilitate the group so they could share their stories with one another in a safe environment.

Their experiences were quite unique and we ended up combining their unique experiences and made them into an adventure in form of a short story. There were many issues we wanted to touch on but there were too many topics and too little time. At the end we took the approach of implementing various symbolisms in a very simple story with lots of visuals. We hope our readers would enjoy the story as much as we did writing it.

## **Ella Huang (RCD Executive Director)**

I look at the final draft of the story – The Beginning; my heart is swelled with emotions, because I am witness to the amazing journey of six wonderful young individuals having probably one of the most remarkable experiences in their lives.

When we assigned a collective project for the Richmond Centre for Disability Youth Interns as part of the training regimes, we did not plan for this outcome. They demonstrated the essence of “Independent Living” in the most basic and direct way. This group of young people taught me so much about thinking creatively, overcoming barriers and enjoying the process.

It is my delight to share with you the journey the youth interns took to complete the story book. It was a routine assignment until they started to “own” the project. The idea of anti-bullying sparked from a discussion about recent incidents of bullying leading to suicides. It brought out painful flashbacks and empathetic feelings from the group; they wanted to speak their mind. The energy, time and teamwork they put into the project was incredible; their insightfulness was heartbreaking; the determination was totally admirable. There were of course barriers along the way: one team member was too sick to continue; inadequate time to complete the assignment; perpetual proofing and re-writing; overwhelming marketing and ..... the scary limelight! Still they braced themselves and held their heads up high; they took small steps and made their way to the final destination together.

This is truly an inspiration, thank you!