

# Emerging Writers

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## Untitled

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Dani Calix

First-Place Winner

Creative Nonfiction Category

2019-2020 Emerging Writers Contest

“Untitled”

I opened my eyes. I was doing it! My hands gripped the ridged pink plastic around the handle. I felt as if I was flying; the sun was shining down on me and I felt one with the birds up above. It all occurred too fast. I failed to notice the little pebble on the ground that would wake me from my daydreams. Boom! Everything goes black.

*“Are you okay? Oh my god. Hey, look at me. It’s fine, it’s only a scratch,”* I heard a voice say.

I looked up and there he was: my older brother, Mando. He had this worried look on his face as if someone had knocked him over. I managed to get up, but one side of my face burned.

*“It hurts! Help me,”* I sobbed while grabbing the left side of my face.

He carried me over to a white wooden bench on our porch. He was the one dedicated to teaching me how to ride a bike on my own. We started with training wheels and today we took them off and attempted to ride it with only two wheels. It was a big step, but I begged and pleaded to him to let me try; I told him I was ready. I could tell he regretted it now. He swiftly went inside to grab an ice pack and I sat there looking up at the sky. It was a hot July afternoon and the sun was shining on everything it could touch. The birds were all flying freely, not caring or not knowing of the freedom they had. I was only six, but I yearned to be like them: free.

Times were different than the day I fell. It was a different month, a different vibe, and a different feeling than that from that happy, sunny July day. It was a cold, rainy mid-October day. Some could say everything was as normal as any other day but in my house, that was not the case. We lived on a cul-de-sac and there wasn't a day my older brother, who was 18 at the time, wouldn't help me learn how to ride a bike without training wheels. The houses all surrounded one another almost as if they were huddled together looking towards something where the dead-end sign meets the main road.

There were only four houses on the cul-de-sac, including ours, so everyone knew each other. Each house was unlike the next- one was dark green, another was light blue, the one next to ours was a shade of ochre and would cast a soft reflection on the stream of water near our house when it rained, but ours was the most special of all. Our house was pale yellow; it wasn't too bright to the point it was tacky but rather a yellow that would fill you with happiness or content just by looking at it. We prided ourselves on our garden on the front lawn. It was a combination of bright red roses, blush-colored azaleas, multi-colored carnations, and a variety of other flowers. We made sure to keep our grass always green and always cut. There wasn't a day I would pass by my house and not flash a smile. I always said our house was like Mickey Mouse's Clubhouse- you could never be sad while in it or by even looking at it.

I remember the day I got my first bike; I was five at the time and all of my friends in kindergarten were experiencing this rite of passage and I desperately wanted to feel what they were feeling. For weeks I begged and begged but my parents did not budge- that was until my brother began convincing my parents to get me one. We were eating dinner one night and the question of whether or not I would get a bike emerged. My mom, Rosa, began to say

*“ Even if we were to get you a bike, who would teach you? Your dad and I are too busy and your brother works.”*

I took a look at my mom. She was staring at her chicken almost as if she was looking for a way not to look in my eyes. It was common for her to say no to something I wanted, but she always ended up changing her mind. I called her name, but she only looked down. She looked as if she was having a conflict with herself in her head.

That’s when my older brother said the four words that made my dream come true. He was always doing things that I wanted. There was one time when he had just come from home and I had the worst craving for ice-cream, so I begged and begged my mom but then he got home and heard me. He instantly grabbed me and sat me in his car and took me to Bruster’s.

*“I can do it.”*

And that was it. I was getting a bike. Mando took me with him in his shiny red car and we were off to Walmart. It was a sunny day in May and there were flowers and trees everywhere; it was a perfect day. I practically ran to the bike section and fell in love at first sight with a bright pink Barbie bike with training wheels and a silver bell on its handle. My brother saw how happy I looked and we bought it- along with a helmet and protective gear. My brother and I spent all afternoon outside teaching me how to ride my bike. He had made it his mission to teach me how to properly ride a bike.

But no one was outside that dreary October day; all you could hear were the raindrops splashing on the ground and the windows of the cold house. The weather seemed to have mirrored the feeling that embodied our little house. The lights inside the house were on and the heat was blasting but sitting on the carpet of the living room staring at the saddened expressions: I had never felt colder in my life. There were a group of people sprawled across the couches in

the living room, others sitting on the table in the kitchen, and a couple of my aunts in the kitchen. I could tell from the aroma that filled the house that they were making green tea- something I can't stand the smell of to this day.

I was only six years old at the time, but I was expected to understand the tragedy that struck our family when all I wanted to do was play with Mando- who for some reason didn't come home with us that day. Mom just told me he was resting and that I would see him soon. I was happy as long as he didn't take too long because we still had to keep training me on how to ride a bike.

My mom and dad were sitting in front of me on a big green couch that we had since before I was even born. Both of their eyes were bloodshot red, their faces appeared worn, and their bodies limp. They looked sad and depressed and at the time I didn't know why. Everyone was dressed in all black. Most of us had our hair dripping wet but that seemed to bother no one. I had never seen my dad, Martin, like that. He was usually wearing his dark blue jeans with a striped polo shirt and the classic white Nike "dad" shoes he always wore, but today he looked disheveled. He was wearing a black suit with his tie undone. The buttons to the white button-up were undone at the top and he didn't have his suit jacket on. He kept staring off into space and wouldn't even dare look me in the eye. My mom looked heartbroken. She would always wear this long skirt that would flow to her ankles, a relaxed tee with her sandals on, her long black hair loose, and there never was a day I didn't see her bright smile on her face. She often reminded me of a hippie but today she was anything but that. She was wearing this lace black dress that gave me bad vibes just by being near it. It enveloped her entirely. Her hair was no longer loose but in what some would call a messy bun. Her smile was nowhere to be found but

she looked as if she were a copy of the person who I once called mom. It felt like I was staring at a set of completely different parents.

Back at what I later learned was a funeral home, all you could hear were wails and “*Why God,*” but now the rain was the only one making noise and filling the silence throughout the house. The “cold feel” of the funeral home seemed to have followed us back to the house. The funeral home was something that I can’t ever forget; that had been my first funeral. There was crying and pleading everywhere you would go. I wasn’t sure how to cope with it all; it was too much for me to handle and I was confused as to why they were like this, but I could feel their pain. I empathize with people a lot and I could feel their broken hearts so when no one was looking, I went to the bathroom and locked myself in a stall and I cried. I didn’t know why I was crying but my heart ached for them.

For some reason, they all kept glancing at me, almost wondering if I could comprehend what was going on. I didn’t really- not at that time. All I knew was that my brother was in a car accident and that he was resting now and that I was waiting on him to finish resting so he could help me ride my bike and play with me. That’s the word everyone was using “resting,” or in Spanish, “*descansando.*”

I kept shifting and looking towards the old, familiar door to see when it would open and Mando would come through arms open ready to envelop me in them, but it never did. The wooden brown door that once would open and I’d be staring at a grinning Mando now creates a gloomy atmosphere. I remember when my brother would come home from work; I could tell by the sound of his car entering the driveway; I could always tell it was his car. He’d turn the engine off and climb out of our old 1993 Toyota Corolla. I’d watch him through the window and start cultivating a plan to jump scare him but I always failed. He would always fumble with his keys

which gave me the perfect opportunity to hide behind the door. He'd walk and instead of me scaring me he would jump and scare me. That was our routine. But now looking at this door all I feel is uneasy; *when is he coming*, I would mentally ask myself. I was starting to get scared. The accident had occurred four or five days ago and I saw him at the funeral home sleeping so I knew where he was.

I stared at the rest of the living room. Pictures were sprawled on every table you could see. Family photos. There were some of us at the beach, others of us at Disneyland, but my favorite sat on the table in the middle of the room. It was a picture of my brother with his hand on my shoulder while I was on the bike. I suddenly got up from the brown carpet and rushed to the kitchen to reach for a packet of Maggi soup and asked my nearest aunt to cook it.

*"Are you hungry,"* asked my Aunt Kesly.

*"Nope, it's for Mando (my brother's nickname). He felt really cold when I touched his hand at the funeral home so I want to make this for him so he can warm up."*

She started tearing up and bent down so that we were eye-to-eye. This was the first time I got to look at her. Aunt Kesly was always full of life; she was the one who would always take care of me when my mom would go to work. She was always my favorite because she never screamed or told me off if I did something wrong; she would simply explain to me why I shouldn't do those things. Her eyes always looked bright and cheery as if she was the happiest person in the world by just looking at you. Her hair was always down and she looked carefree because she was; she never cared if something went wrong because she would always find the good in something. She'd always smile regardless of how she felt; there wasn't a day where my Aunt Kesly wouldn't smile or laugh and fill up the house with this warm energy that wraps you up and makes you feel safe and cared for. But looking at her now was like looking at a ghost. It

was like she was there but not there at the same time. Her eyes didn't shine anymore; they were glassy and gloomy. The light that was once there seemed to have gone away, vanished. She looked tired. Her eyes were swollen and she had bags under her eyes. She looked as if she hadn't slept for a week. I slowly realized everyone looked this way.

To this day I can still clearly remember the words that followed.

*"He's not coming back. He died."*

I couldn't believe the words that had just come out of her mouth. It all made sense now. He was resting but not how I thought he was. I then started to understand the pain everyone felt. I sat on my mom's lap and curled up. She was still distant but she was showing an effort to comfort me. My dad still felt like a stranger to me. I stared at my bright pink Barbie bike near the door; I could still hear the ringing of the silver bell on its handle. I closed my eyes and everything went pitch-black.

I began to hear my brother's voice and I immediately opened my eyes. That's when I saw him. He was sitting in a chair in the corner. I began to look around my surroundings since it was dark and I was still not fully awake. I was in my parents' room. I didn't feel cold in this room like I had felt in the rest of the house. It was warm; like sitting next to a fire. Mando looked just like I had remembered him except he didn't look as tired as he looked before. He was wearing his favorite pair of frayed blue jeans and an oversized graphic tee of some band he liked- Queen. His hair was cut and he looked as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. It was as if just any other day but part of me knew this couldn't be real; my aunt had just told me moments earlier he wasn't here anymore; he was in heaven, resting.

He got up from the chair and turned the lights on and sat at the edge of the bed. Whatever happened next is blurry in my mind. I remember hearing his soothing voice and being close to

him felt like being in a warm embrace. He felt like home. The bright light made everything look surreal. He talked and talked and I talked to him and it felt like he was truly there with me. I remember everything but the actual words from the conversation. I remember us laughing and saying goodbye. The only words I will forever remember are when he said

*“Adios ñeco (his nickname for me which my family still calls me), te prometo que te voy a ver pronto y nunca se te olvide que siempre estaré contigo.”*

Translated it means, “Goodbye ñeco, I promise I’ll see you again and don’t forget I’ll always be with you.” I don’t remember what way he left but as soon as he did the light went off again and it was cold once more. I fell asleep and I kept replaying his voice in my head- I still do but it’s fuzzier now. Thinking about it now, the entire experience changed me. I no longer view loss or death as something bad. The way I see loss is simply as a loss of physicality but not a loss of spirit. From that supernatural encounter with my brother, I view spirits and ghosts as souls wanting to make peace.

The next morning I walked into the dining room where my dad, mom, and uncle were sitting sipping their coffee with their eyes still pale. Suddenly my mom asked who was I talking to at night so I told her. Their faces displayed an emotion of shock, disbelief, and something I cannot describe to this day. My mom started crying and wrapped her arms around me and all I could think about was that it was okay if Mando wasn’t physically here with me because he’s always going to be in my heart. My brother was always there for me but that’s what brothers do; they take care of you until one day they are unable to. He helped me get through the first six years of my life but it was time I learn the rest for myself.

That afternoon I did something that I was afraid of doing that morning. After my interaction with Mando, I felt placed in a difficult position. I was both afraid of riding my bike

again yet finding myself becoming more and more enraptured by my bike; it was almost like a moth flying to a flame. While everyone was in their bedroom resting from the restless nights they'd had, I sneaked my way to the living room where my bike was. It looked the same but when I touched, it was as if I was a different person. It's a feeling that's hard to explain but I almost felt unconfined. I opened the door and the sun immediately shined its rays on my face. I experienced the same feeling from the night before: warm. I dragged my bike to the end of the driveway and just stared up. No clouds to be seen and no birds nearby. No brother by my side, but he was still with me. I got on, no training wheels attached, and I began to peddle. I was doing it! This time it felt different than that time in July. I felt more confident, more liberated. I glanced up at the sky and as soon as I did birds started flying overhead. Each one of them heading south. That's when I felt what they did: free.