
September 2017

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Recommended Citation

White, Allison E. (2017) "The Promise of Sunshine," *The Idea of an Essay*. Vol. 4 , Article 4.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol4/iss1/4

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The Promise of Sunshine

Allison White

New beginnings are never easy. The silent ache creeps in, past all hopeful wishes, kicking them out of sight, out of mind. My mind was crammed with thoughts, possibilities available to me as I started over in this new city. The possibility of friendship, which should have been exciting, just made my stomach churn. I craved the new relationships, yet the fear of rejection overwhelmed me, leaving behind an aching in my chest. My family had moved permanently to sunny California only sixteen hours ago, from my childhood home in Puyallup, Washington. I sat in the cramped school bus on my way to a weekend retreat with a bunch of girls I had just met from my new church in Santa Clarita, California.

I pulled at the bottom of my pink and black swim top. It was so out of style with its high neckline and busy, paisley pattern, but I had never needed a swimsuit in Washington. I hadn't had time to buy a new swimsuit for the retreat. My mom forced me to go, thinking it would be a good opportunity to make new friends.

"Don't worry Allison, most of these girls have been friends since kindergarten but I am sure they are all very nice," she said as she handed me my beach towel. "You'll become friends in no time."

I frowned. Yeah right, I thought to myself, but I tried to seem enthusiastic so my mom would not worry.

A squeal of laughter broke out behind me, jerking me back from my melancholy thoughts. The bus was loud with conversations about the Dodgers' next big game and what new trend was hot for the summer. I had been able to tune out the dull roar of conversations that I was not a part of and immersed myself in my own thoughts. I looked tentatively over at the girls in the seat across from me. One girl with flat, brown hair and large, droopy green eyes was sitting with her back up against the window, talking. Her face lit up with animation that comes from telling a really good story. Jana, I thought, I think someone said that's her name. I felt that ache in my chest again. I thought for a brief moment about scooting over and trying to introduce myself, but I was sure they wouldn't welcome the new girl into their conversation. My stomach churned at the thought. Why was it so hard to be friendly?

I turned slowly back toward the half opened window. The sun was shining down on my pale skin, but I shivered inside. I looked up at it wondering how I could feel so cold inside despite the beautiful California day. Everything looked so different. I longed for the damp chill of the Washington rain. Everything seemed constant there, familiar and comfortable. I missed the beautiful snowcapped mountain, towering behind the refreshing evergreen trees, and the dull, gray sky that seemed depressing yet somehow comforting. I took a deep breath and immediately wrinkled my nose. How different the smell of salt and sunshine was to my spinning mind. It wasn't unpleasant, just different. I closed my eyes, imagining the crisp, misty air of the mountains, now so far away from me. The giggling from the girls sent my thoughts into the past. The face of my best friend Hannah appeared in my already jumbled up mind. The thought of her crooked, goofy smile, brought a meager smile to my face. I was grasping at straws, I pleaded with my brain, Please, Please, send me anything to make me happy. Instead I was launched back into a bittersweet moment.

The last day of 6th grade was my final day in Washington before the big move to California. I wanted to savor this last day with my chummy classmates; we had all become close throughout the year. "School's out!" one of the boys yelled and the room erupted with excited shouts. In no time, every seat was empty, every seat but mine. I looked around the sage green room. My classmates' artwork hung on the walls: every picture showed an individual personality. I admired them, even the unappealing, unimaginative pieces that were just created to receive a decent grade. My heart sank. Leaving this room meant that my life was changing, things would never be the same. I heard rushed footsteps. Suddenly Hannah burst through the door and tried desperately to catch her breath.

Between gasps of air she sputtered, "I was afraid you were already gone!"

She reached into the pocket of her torn navy hoodie she always wore and pulled out a note with the name "Allie-sun" scrawled on it in sloppy handwriting.

"Don't open it until you are at your new house in Cali," she blurted out. "I'm gonna miss you more than I would miss air, or something."

I smiled and threw my arms around her. "I have something for you too," I said as I pulled a plastic bag out of my backpack. The bag crinkled as I stuck my hand in and pulled out a bracelet made out of red, orange, and green embroidery floss.

“I know these are your favorite colors,” I explained as she touched the tiny beads that were woven into the bracelet. “I made these so you never forget me. I have one too!”

I held up my wrist and showed her the bracelet of the same colors that was tied tight across my wrist.

“I’ll never forget you”, she murmured with a serious look in her usually dancing eyes.

She hugged me again and whispered, “best friends forever?”

I felt a lump in my throat. “Best friends forever,” I replied as a tear rolled down the side of my nose.

I shifted on the uncomfortable, springy bus seat, as the memory faded away. One single tear escaped my eye and raced down my cheek. I quickly wiped it away, but one after another the tears rushed from my eyes.

The girl in the seat across the aisle from me whispered to Jana, “she is so weird! She hasn’t said a word since we left the church.”

My heart stung like it was pierced with a thousand icy needles. I felt hopeless and frozen in my seat. I had never been able to become friends with girls easily. What was wrong with me? I tugged at the friendship bracelet on my arm. I turned away to face the window. The palm trees were racing by; they were blurry spots of green in my already fuzzy vision from all the tears. I pulled harder at the bracelet on my wrist as the pang of loneliness throbbed in my chest, leaving a slight red mark. I tried to concentrate on the landscape rolling by. All I wanted was to forget the ache; I wanted to be numb.

The brightly colored houses made my heart feel light for a few moments. How strange the houses looked near the California beaches: so welcoming, so snug. The passing cars whizzed by, everyone in California seemed to be in a hurry. The pain was back; I missed the quiet, private woods behind my house. I looked down and discovered that I had absentmindedly pulled the friendship bracelet into my skin. Someone please care, can’t you see I’m hurting? My mind screamed. My wrist throbbed and started to bleed slightly. I didn’t care. All I wanted was the friendship I craved. The bitterness welled up inside me like a storm and I pulled so hard on the thin bracelet that it snapped. I clutched the ruined bracelet in my shaking hand so hard my fingers turned white. I tried to control my tears, to calm my racing heart, and gather my jumbled thoughts. You are bigger than this, I thought. Bitterness won’t do you any good. It was time to let go, to move on through the icy ache in my chest. I was tired of hurting. A voice whispered in the back of my mind, friendship has to start somewhere. I gently traced my finger

along the beautiful, ruined bracelet. I realized focusing on sweet, old friendships could take my eyes away from the bright horizon of vivid, new relationships. I looked at the half open window and up at the blue sky and white, puffy clouds. A calming sensation seemed to float down through the sun's rays and fell on my face. Taking one last longing look at the ripped bracelet in my hand and tossed it out the window. I wiped the tears from my cheeks and laid my throbbing head against the window.

The bus rattled along, shaking my entire tired body. A girl bounced down on the empty seat next to me.

"Have you ever been to Oceanside?" she asked, giving me a huge brace covered smile.

"No, I just moved to Santa Clarita yesterday" I stammered, pushing my hair back from my face and quickly wiping away the trace of tears from my cheeks.

She looked at me with her wide, brown eyes.

"What? No wonder I've never seen you before, I'm Jasmine", she tossed her thick brown hair over her shoulder and stuck out her hand.

I shook her hand, hoping she didn't notice the red ring around my wrist where the bracelet had been. "My name is Allison" I said shyly.

Her blue and white striped swimsuit humorously clashed with her green and yellow plaid-patterned shorts.

"I've never met an Allison before, I already like you!" she said, my heart leaped in my chest and I smiled at her.

Why is she being so nice to me? My gaze drifted toward Jana as the group of girls in the seats around her giggled at her story. I felt my smile fade.

Jasmine put her hand on my shoulder, "Just ignore them. They don't like anyone who's not exactly like them." She rolled her eyes, "That's why they don't want to be friends with me. My friends call me Jazzy. Please! Call me Jazzy".

Jazzy pushed her bag under the seat in front of her as if to assure me that she was there to stay. My eyes went back to the window, up towards the lemon sun and didn't try to hide the smile that stole its way on to my lips. I couldn't help but hope this promise of friendship would last for more than this moment.