

JOE SUEEIVAN – “ELEPHANT DADDY”

1996

The appointed hour approaches. I crouch anxiously behind the door. He arrives. Like a cheetah pouncing on its prey, I tense every muscle in my body as I leap onto his torso and cling on desperately. Boiling with emotion, I scream, “Elephant Daddy!” My victim and I start gushing with laughter, buzzing with giggles as he carries an elated six-year-old on his back like an elephant. Though it signals the corn elusion of the favorite part of my day, I am as content as can be as I plod onto the couch and the ride draws to a close.

Soon he reemerges, taking a seat at the kitchen table. I prance over to join him, my sister, and my mom for dinner. Elephant Dad’s postdinner activities are varied. They might include a duel with a small, blond-haired Lancelot wielding a plastic sword in the employ of King Arthur, or a History Channel documentary with an impressionable little boy lying snugly across his body, soothed by the gentle rise and fall of his chest, comforted by the steady rhythm of his heart.

2008

The last in the house to go to bed, my father and I are snacking on mint-chocolate chip ice cream over the kitchen table as the clock strikes midnight. We share stories about the day that has passed and plans for the day that will be, intermittently swapping bits of advice and pieces of encouragement. At times we are serious and concerned. At times we are burning off the calories from the ice cream as we laugh the visceral, belly-based laugh common to us both. All this time, though, we are relishing our time together. Just like we did twelve years ago at that same table, just like we will for as long as life and circumstance allow.

Many of my friends say their father has influenced them by pushing them to run the proverbial extra mile en route to some generic, idealized form of success. But not my daddy. His constant and unwavering supply of tender attention has not only given me the confidence to pursue whatever dreams waltz into my mind, but to stay level-headed and to take life in jest, in stride. If Shakespeare was right when he said, “All the world is a stage /And all the men and women merely players,” my father has taught me to stay humble and collected amid tragedy and triumph alike, to smile at the end of each scene.

While his spine doesn’t enjoy all 215 pounds of my company, I don’t consider it an anachronism when I continue to refer to my father as “Elephant Dad.” For in many cultures, the elephant is a symbol of sagacity, a creature with a reservoir of wisdom between its flopping ears. And now, as I prepare to leave my home of eighteen years, I realize all the beautiful lessons Elephant Dad has taught me, lessons he somehow managed to sew into the fabric of my most cherished, emotional childhood memories.

COMMENTARY

This applicant has the distinction of having written two of the essays included in this book. The first, “untitled,” is philosophical. The second, presented here, is sweet without being cloying or egocentric. Taken together, these essays demonstrate to any admissions officer that he is a talented, multifaceted writer.

The writer takes risks in this piece, and they pay off. He writes about deeply felt but not particularly dramatic emotions, describing in reverent detail an ongoing relationship rather than a single significant moment. He plays with the essay format, presenting two related images separated by dates, without formally tying them together. The reader can tell from the articulate, clean writing that the unusual format is experimentation, rather than sloppiness. Plus, in a forum where most writers work hard to demonstrate their maturity, he admits that he still calls his

father “Daddy.”

The author establishes a tender, nostalgic tone and focuses on the domestic warmth that his father has imparted to him, rather than a more tangible skill or drive to succeed. The writer makes this work by providing many specific, artfully described examples of what makes his relationship with his father so special. Furthermore, he maintains a wide-eyed admiration of his father even in the present-day section of the essay, avoiding the temptation to shrug off a “child-ish” mood. Instead, this applicant artfully demonstrates his development with the mature phrase “plans for the day that will be” and an original treatment of an overused quote. The consistent atmosphere reinforces his thesis that a close relationship with his father has helped him develop into a sturdy young man

--- Sarah Howland