

Honorable Mention – Informal Essay

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*When the Dinosaurs Ruled
the Earth*

Dream Journal Entry #15

I am running. My feet pound against the hard decaying cobblestone road as I race through the street. *How did I get here?* I wonder. In this bizarre juxtaposition of gray-glassed skyscrapers and ancient stone, I can't quite seem to remember how I arrived in this desolate landscape—a world of no sound and no color—just motion. However, the one thing I do know is that I am being chased.

I pause. *Why am I running again?*

I glance at my six. Behind me stands a 50-foot tall Tyrannosaurus Rex. His head lowers menacingly while hot steamy saliva drips from the corners of his mouth.

Shit.

I sprint as fast as I can, turn the corner and suddenly see a hiding place. An open wooden barrel lies temptingly near me while the deafening roar of an apex predator tears at my ears. My enemy is near; this barrel is my only chance! With a gasp and a prayer, I dive headfirst into the cask and crouch deep within. There is a tiny peephole between the wooden planks level with my eye. Nervously, I peer out to catch a glimpse of the beast stalking me.

Boom. Boom.

Boom.

The T-Rex approaches slowly. With every deliberate step, a shock wave sweeps across the ground, unsettling the earth and sending stagnant dust particles into motion. He looks around, tilts his head up into the air and inhales. His ribcage expands and contracts. Beads of sweat begin to form on my brow. T-Rex has an exceptionally keen sense of smell so I've read. Great for hunting. I frown. Not so good for me.

For a second, he turns away.

Am I safe? Maybe this time I'll survive the hunt.

Abruptly, with savage intent, the T-rex turns toward the barrel and crushes my sanctuary effortlessly. I scream as his teeth sear into my flesh.

Dead.

As many as 50% of all children ages 5-10 suffer from vivid nightmares. These nightmares commonly involve themes of losing control or physical injury. Typically, the child's fear will manifest itself as disturbing images, animals, bad people, or even in my case, *dinosaurs*.

Dream Journal Entry #24

Dinosaur Dreams

Of what do dinosaurs dream I wonder?

Do they dream of strong white teeth

or warm suns that beam

To warm their feet?

Do they dream of running far?

Running far beyond where legs can go?

Far beyond the reach of death

Through which all things must eventually pass.

Or do they dream of sleeping peace,

Without carnivores to disturb their sleep?

Oh how a dinosaur's dreams could be.

If only my dinosaurs would let me sleep.

The first book I ever read in preschool was called "Al and Ben," a story of a *deep* friendship between a dinosaur and a child. If I remember it correctly, it went something like this:

"*Al met Ben.*" Picture of T-rex (Al) and a boy (Ben) staring at each other awkwardly. Drawn of course in stick-preschool-friendly-art-form.

"*Al bit Ben.*" This of course, was followed by a graphically violent illustration of Al tearing at Ben's arm, unleashing a torrent of blood that seeped through page after page. *Just kidding*—Al nipped Ben on his right hand. It was rather dull in comparison but was probably slightly more appropriate for a preschooler in retrospect.

"*Ben got mad.*" Ben throws a tantrum at being savagely bit by a bloodthirsty dinosaur. Go figure.

"*Ben left Al. Al got sad.*" What did Al expect? Ben to rejoice in celebration at the prospect of a missing appendage? I don't think so, Al. I don't think so.

"*Al ran away.*" Great, a dinosaur running away from his problems. A prime example of maturity for preschoolers. The picture depicts Al running away with tears streaking down his face. That's right! Feel some remorse you traitorous reptilian scum!

"*Al came back. Al said sorry.*" Since when do predators apologize to their prey? Talk about being scientifically inaccurate.

"*Ben hugs Al.*" Because of course hugs solve everything—*The end.*

4 *When the Dinosaurs Ruled the World*

All sarcasm and joking aside, this book was a pivotal point in my life. It marked the beginning of my literacy, albeit at a novice level, and I discovered perhaps the origins of my obsession with dinosaurs.

When I was in preschool, my teachers decided that our class would create a time machine to take us back to the land of the dinosaurs. I was so excited—words can hardly convey the innocent elation of a child being presented with such an adventure. I trembled at the very notion of seeing the magnificent prehistoric giants that once dominated the earth. My class spent hours painting a rickety box crafted from cardboard and metallic tape in our endeavors. I put my heart and soul into painting that time machine because I genuinely thought I would go back in time. When my mother realized that I *actually* believed I was going to meet the dinosaurs, she tried her best to soften the blow.

“You know that time machine isn’t going to work, right?” She asked me hesitantly on our way home from Montessori school.

“What are you talking about? Of course we’re going to see the dinos! That’s what teacher said.” I exclaimed, bouncing on the edge of my car seat.

“I know she said that, but there’s no such thing as a time machine.”

“There’s not?”

“Not yet, sweetie. Not yet.”

I was devastated.

“How could they have lied to me?” I asked. My mother didn’t have an answer to that question.

In the daytime, the dinosaurs consumed my mind with fascination and reverence. I knew everything about them from species name to habitat and diet. I did not know that later in life my obsession with them would bleed into my subconscious and stalk me in the night. I did not know that I would lose control of my life: my fears, depression, suicidal tendencies, and bullying problems. The dinosaurs would know that. They would see me at my weakest, and they would devour me.

I grabbed the blue laminated library pass and bolted straight to the library as soon as the recess bell rang from my 5th-grade class. I didn't dare play with the other kids my age for I knew too well what cruelty filled the playground. The library was my sanctuary. It was a place where no one else willingly ventured during free time—a place just for me. The library did not hurt me with cruel words and pointed whispers. Instead, it welcomed me with epic knowledge. It still does even today. There, within the sagas and legends of old and new tales, barely contained by mere sheets of parchment, I could travel with Gulliver across the oceans to strange and foreign lands, fight against injustice with the Guardians of Gal'hool, and of course, bask in the ancient world of the dinosaurs. I suppose the books were friends of a sort, but only provided temporary companionship. Even so, it couldn't erase all of the classroom bullying.

That day, I decided to read a book about T-Rex, one of my favorite carnivores in the Cretaceous period. The word *Tyrannosaurus* comes from Ancient Greek meaning “Tyrant Lizard.” It was one of the largest carnivores ever to walk the earth. *Tyrannosaurus* lived up to its name, measuring 40 feet in length with a height of 13 feet. Using advanced computational models, scientists have effectively concluded that T-rex could outrun a professional soccer player

at 18 mph and would probably eat said player as well—I would assume, despite their novel scavenger-based reputation. Within his previous environment (today’s North America), T-rex was an apex predator, feasting on an all-you-can-eat buffet. T-rex wasn’t a picky eater. He took what he could in the primitive world. If hungry, he would snack on a decaying ankylosaurus that had succumbed to old age or hunt down a baby triceratops.

That’s always how it is, *isn’t it?* The strong prey on the weak. At least evolution is consistent about that much it seems.

Sometimes I wonder what’s worse. The nightmares of sleep or the terrors of reality? Are they equal?

I don’t think so.

You can always wake up from your sleep, but the everyday cruelties of the modern world, the realities of the present we awaken to after our dreams—those never end.

Dream Journal Entry #42

I am running in circles: into the theater, out through the pterodactyl cages, and back through the evergreen forest, which loops back to the theater. This time, I am being chased by raptors—two, to be precise. Unlike real raptors, which are the size of a chicken, subconscious raptors tower over my tiny figure. I don’t need to look back at them to feel their presence. I can hear the clicking of their claws on the pavement. I can smell the putrid stench of rotting flesh embedded between their teeth from their last victim. I can feel the wind whip around my limbs as they lunge toward me, attempting to tear at me with their glistening fangs.

I dart through the circuit again and again.

Once.

Twice.

I am tired.

Trice.

So tired.

I collapse. One raptor pins my back against the floor with its giant ebony claw. Dinner is served—main course: One rare *Homo Sapien* with a side of al dente screaming.

Dead.

A few days later, I decided to read a book about velociraptors. Just for the sake of clarification, no, velociraptors are not as tall as a human. The Jurassic Park movie portrayed them inaccurately, save for their skull configuration. Velociraptors were feathered carnivores barely nearing the size of a rooster. They were equipped with a sickle-shaped claw on each hind foot, useful if you want to slash your prey, spilling out their bowels on the ground and eating while your victim is still alive. Couldn't they at least kill them before eating them? Frickin' sickled-clawed daisy cutters.

Some scientists argue that all dinosaurs are extinct. They say the only dinosaur descendants still present in the twenty-first century are birds.

They are wrong.

I see dinosaurs everywhere I go. They live within the other children here in my 5th-grade class. Their eyes are raptor eyes. They are ready to tear, ready to rip, ready to devour as soon as

the watchful gaze of the overseer disappears. They are as opportunistic and deadly as their prehistoric cousins. These aren't just dream raptors, but real ones. Ones that can kill. Strangely, they aren't the ones going extinct. The dinosaurs are thriving and I am dying.

Ashley was the leader of the small pack lurking in my class. She is a raptor: intelligent and cunning, acting behind the scenes with whispers and rumors. Small, but deadly in both size and mind. Paloma is the T-rex. She is a massive girl who uses her size for intimidation and her plague-infested mouth for foul words and unkindness. Those were the only two animals that mattered in my book. The rest of them were tooth-pick scavengers, picking at the remains that Paloma and Ashley left behind until nothing edible remained but bone, soon to be fossilized and left to the ravages of time.

One day, I couldn't get a library pass. Without my sanctuary, I succumbed to the perils of the cretaceous jungle. That was when Ashley and the Pack cornered me. Paloma made any attempt at escaping impossible while Ashley and the Pack sliced me with their verbose claws. It's hard for me even today to talk about the things they said to me. Partially because it still hurts. Even after fifteen years. Partly because I've suppressed those memories so far back in my mind, I'm not sure if I can even find the key to unlock the chamber in which their cruelty lies. Pain is pain, it comes in many forms, but it all is the same in the end. It hurts, and it sucks.

Another day. Another day. My mother and I are driving back our usual route from Holladay Middle School. She keeps looking at me with a strange look in her eyes. For a moment, I'm afraid that she can see me. I wonder if she can see the emptiness pooling behind my eyes. If she can see the scars from the raptors' claws stretching along my spine. If she can see the broken teeth wedged throughout my bleeding flesh. If she can see the broken me, trying to escape and enter the void where peace will finally be met. Just as quickly, she looks away. I want to cry. I want to *scream*. But, I guess she can't see that the dinosaurs are still here today.

Dream Journal Entry #78

The dinosaurs are coming.

The dinosaurs are coming.

The T-rexes and raptors have come to get me at last. On the farthest point of my vision, I see a looming tower in the distance protruding high into the sky.

Can I make it?

Can I escape?

By some miracle, I reach the tower. Hand after hand, I pull myself closer to the summit on the rickety ladder that spans the obelisk's length. I look down.

There is water below me and it's rising at an alarming rate. The dinosaurs are swimming in the hungry water, circling me. I can hear their angry cries pierce through the air. They are enraged. They are *hungry*.

I reach the top of the tower. For a moment, I stand there, the silent sentinel in a world of cruelty and raw animal emotion. There is nothing but the water and fear. The water is still rising and the dinosaurs are still coming.

I begin to panic. I begin to tremble. I am afraid and I don't know what to do. Every time is the same. Every time, they come to the feast of flesh on sharp teeth.

I don't want this anymore. I want this to end. I want to fight back, but what good will these little hands of mine do against the tooth and claw?

I close my eyes to the dinosaurs and whisper, "Someone, please help me."

The water finds me first. It grabs me with its slippery fingers and pulls me under. I feel my body sucked down into the depths of the dinosaur-infested sea. I wait for the pain. For the jaws that bite and the claws that slash.

It doesn't come.

I open my eyes. The tower is gone, and I am left standing on the warm, soft sands of a beach, facing outward to the calm lapping of the ocean deep.

But I am not alone. I turn behind me. There, in the pale pebbles of the white beach is a solitary albino raptor. It cocks its head at me thoughtfully, considering in turn before advancing slowly towards me.

"*No.*" I command.

The raptor halts, unsure if I am prey or predator.

I am done. Done with dinosaurs and done with pain. It is *I* who survived the extinction, and it is *they* who perished!

"You do not rule here anymore!" I declare, not just to the lone raptor standing there, but to dinosaurs everywhere.

The raptor backs up hesitantly. It knows. The age of the dinosaurs is over.

I turn away from the raptor and look up into the sky. The horizon is now crimson. Streaks of light emanate from the stratosphere as alien rocks begin to pierce through the atmosphere. The

world is changing. Changing for the better or, the worse? Who knows? Only one thing is for certain. The extinction *is* coming.

The pale light from the moon barely illuminates the outline of a glacial metal knife grasped firmly in my child fingers. I look upwards towards the kitchen window. The moon is gone and everything is gray in its absence. The world is as icy cold as the knife I'm holding. I don't want to be here anymore. To live is to be in agony. The dinosaurs knew that all too well.

Maybe that's why they went extinct.

Tears flow freely down my face, but even my tears are icy, utterly devoid of any human warmth. I hold up the knife in front of my tiny chest. One motion and it will all end. One swift descent and my extinction will arrive.

My mother runs in just before I plunge the knife.

"No!!!" She cries, grabbing the knife away from me.

There are tears everywhere. I can't tell whose. Maybe hers. Maybe mine. Maybe both. She holds me tightly and looks at me with human eyes. She has seen me. She has seen me all along.

Her hug, that embrace, says the words I've been longing to hear— *there are no dinosaurs here tonight.*

Journal Entry #78 was the last dream I had about the dinosaurs hunting me and that nightmare was over fifteen years ago.

Most scientists believe the dinosaur extinction was triggered by a massive collision of an asteroid into the earth, killing millions of dinosaurs instantly. But, while many dinosaurs died from the impact, others lived on. They were strong enough to endure and to evolve with the ever-changing world. They became the flighted birds we see today, soaring in the sun-kissed sky, with strong wings and the ability to break away from the grip of gravity's grasp.

I went to school the next day. Instead of grabbing the book-shaped library pass, I ventured into the jungle for the first time in what seemed to be 65 million years. The raptors still watched me with burning eyes, but they had no power over me. They may have dominated my past, but I will not let them control my future. I am more than their primitive behavior and I will stand tall and firm against their attacks. I will endure until they become extinct while I survive.

Their eventual extinction left behind fossils of many kinds. Sometimes I dig up old broken teeth or chipped vertebrae from times past. They are still sharp, but time has dulled their power. I still have the scars covering my body from where they devoured me, but those have healed. As I've progressed into the future, I find less and less of the fossils from when they existed. I know that time will continue to gnaw at the bones until they are less than a pile of dust to be blown away from the ever-shifting wind.

I never dream of the dinosaurs that once haunted me so. The dinosaurs that mesmerized. The dinosaurs that ripped. The dinosaurs that roared into my dreams.

They haunted me once 65 million years ago, but that was back when the dinosaurs ruled the world.