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Composition 1101

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October 27, 2015

Flashback Photography

There are many things in life that hold a high level of importance. I have not lived for the longest time, but I have been around, seen many places, and things. It is amazing how even the smallest object, a place, or just time itself can hold so much value in a person’s life, be it jewelry, a piece of fabric, a ceramic trinket or just time well spent. There are two things in my life that allow me to reminisce of a joyous time, a special time when I was young.

One of my two photos, something I like to call “Physical Therapy Session”, is of a playground. This playground is right downstairs from my apartment building. I was born in Elmhurst Hospital and I currently live in the Ravenswood Housing Projects of Astoria, Queens. I have lived here my entire life, even since before I was born, and I have come down to this playground almost every day whenever I could, just to swing on the monkey bars. As hyper as I used to be back then, I had twice the fun doing it. My mom would watch me go up, down, and around this playground for hours until I was all tuckered out. When I was a baby, my mother would put me on the slide and snap photos of my laughter. Then there were the swing sets. I would sit in that baby swing for hours. The studium of this photo is more than just one of a public housing playground. This playground signifies moments of my life where I could just escape everything else and have fun. I almost never wanted to leave that old playground. I call it “Physical Therapy” because I would get my daily exercise and relieve myself of all minor toddler problems such as having to go to bed early or eating vegetables, or just leaving my surroundings behind for just a few moments. Every day when I go home, I pass it by and it just reminds me of when I was younger. What I can see in my photo is one of the many things in my life that made me happy through the best and worst of times. It is more to me than just an old jungle gym. It is almost like when you see a certain familiar area you used to go to as a kid or when you happen to drive by your old apartment building or your old 2-bedroom house. These things hold very significant memories that are unforgettable. This is the real playground downstairs from my house. This playground, to me, was home, a place of sanction, from all the unwanted negativity. In my neighborhood, there was so much craziness all around. There was everything from gang influence, drugs, and graffiti taggers all over the subways. “I remember growing up and riding the subways a lot with my parents, and being inspired with some of this artwork. Graffiti looked and smelled like being a rock star.” [Anastasio, 133.] Even at my young age, I could barely understand the reasoning behind graffiti; all I knew was that it was cool, like being fascinated with your own drawings. It’s an art. Then I realized that graffiti tagging was legally wrong. It may have been a vice for many, but mine was the old downstairs playground. I see children running around that playground jungle gym every day, and I say to myself, “That was once me.” If I could go back to those good old days and run through that playground as a young, naïve, 4-year-old child again, it would not be the worst thing in the world. That playground will always hold a significant part of my childhood.

The second photo, one I like to call “To Infinity,” is of my childhood toy. This toy is a Buzz Lightyear action figure. I have had it since I was 5 years old. It was something I really wanted after becoming a huge fan of the Toy Story movies from Disney-Pixar, hence the popular saying by Buzz Lightyear himself, “to infinity…and beyond!” On Christmas morning of 2002, I had gotten it, even though my mom said to me prior that she might not have been able to afford it. Those action figures can be pricey. For a 5-year-old boy with the childish notion that he, too, could be a space ranger, this was everything I could ask for. I never left behind that Buzz Lightyear toy. I remember taking that toy everywhere I went. My mother never let me take it to school, of course, but anywhere I went with her, I had it right beside me. That inanimate Buzz Lightyear was like another friend to me, like a Barbie doll to a little girl, or a stuffed elephant to a baby. To this day, I still have the Buzz Lightyear figure, yet another nostalgic reminder of my childhood. One of the sad things about growing up is that you are forced to lose your childlike aspirations and adapt to the cruel jungle that is the real world. Eventually, I stopped playing with the action figure as I got older, but not once was I ever tempted to throw it away. My mother always told me to take good care of and hold onto things like that. 20 years down the line, it can become an heirloom that one day I could pass to my son. To get what I so desperately wanted on that Christmas morning, it was one of the happiest days of my life and I remember it so vividly. I often look at that little toy and smile, even as the young adult I am today. The punctum of this photo represents a much deeper meaning. It makes me feel more appreciative of what I have after getting something I couldn’t even afford. Seeing certain things from the past naturally bring forth an emotional pause, for reflecting. To some people, it may appear as just an eternally grateful material wish, but to me, I wasn’t promised anything, and as hard as it was, my mother could still afford me one. It is quite easy to forget about the important things in life when it is materialistic.

These 2 pictures share a deep connection to my childhood. They bring me back to places I wish I could revisit once again as a child. I will always have the memories, which are the most important. On any day I can just look into the reflection of the eyes of that Buzz Lightyear action figure, and sometimes I can see my younger self, smiling back. Every day when I pass by the old playground, to certain extent, I do miss my childhood. From seeing the old Buzz Lightyear figure to walking past the playground, on some occasions, I do get immersed in nostalgia just by looking. Yet, I live right upstairs from the playground so I will never forget about it. It is just one of those things that you just cannot forget. Childhood memories are the best memories someone my age will ever have until I reach true adulthood and embrace life. Then, as time will pass, I can create newer unforgettable memories. These two things in my life, that old playground and my action figure rewarded me with some great early life years where very few things fell into perspective for a young kid from the Ravenswood Projects.