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Dear Dr. Mack,

I must admit that I fought this project tooth and nail when it was first presented. I was not against the idea of a multigenre project, in fact it sounded like an interesting alternative to a research paper. My problem came with the topic. Nothing sprang to mind when we were told that we would be doing a folklore project, and I was already imagining the horrors of trying to interview my family. I love my family dearly, but we are not exactly the storytelling types. I knew very little about my own family history and I knew that it would be tough to convince my parents to open up about their lives. But the project had to get done; so I got to work.

I chose to focus on my father and his childhood, specifically his time away at boarding school. When this adventure started all I knew about my father was that he grew up in a military family, and at some point he went away to boarding school. Both of my grandparents on my father's side had passed away before I was born, and this just added to the lack of previous knowledge that I had about this topic. I have to say, however, that I learned a great deal about my father and what he has been through during this process. Through this project I received a new view of my father, and I can't explain what that means to me. This is my dad's story and not all of it is good, but because it is his story it is also part of mine. I am so thankful that I had this opportunity to hear it and that it has given me a clearer picture of the man that I thought I knew so well.

The beginning and end of my journey focused solely on my father and what I could convince him to tell me. I hoped to give him a forum where he was free to open up and tell his

story. If you ask him he would most likely tell you that it was a story that he didn't care to tell or no one would care to hear, but this is where my opinion differs from his. This is where knowing my father's character came in handy. At first he was apprehensive about talking about his youth; he gave me a couple facts but didn't see a reason to go into detail. However I knew that if I could get my father talking then it would be a while before he stopped, and when I say "a while" that is an understatement. He might be the only talker in the family, and he has an incredible talent for answering a question that you never asked, more thoroughly than you could have ever hoped. So I knew that if I could get him thinking he would eventually just start telling me stories, and with a little prodding he did just that. After a couple conversations with him I had more than enough stories to finish the project. I have to say that they are really incredible stories. By the end of the first interview I started to become a little excited about the project. My father had adolescent experiences that I thought only happened in movies, including burning down a building, hitchhiking, and stowing away a car that he was not supposed to have.

The framework for my project was quickly taking shape; now I just needed some meat to it, in the form of academic research. I was not expecting for this to be such a challenge. My father went away to boarding school when he was eleven. He was in and out of several different schools over the next several years and finally ended up at St. Francis Preparatory for high school. He told me of how badly some of the people were treated at these places, mostly by bullying and other tortures by peers. Most of these boys that my father went to school with had families that didn't want them home. My dad was very clear that the experience affected some of them for the rest of their lives, including alcoholism or other emotional problems. I

wanted to find research that supported this view. This proved to be harder than I expected, very little research has been done. I found a lot of information about sending children away and how to choose a school. I learned about troubled teens and how to pick an appropriate boarding school for them, but none of this was what I was looking for. A lot of children during the 1940's and 50's were sent away to boarding schools and I wanted to know what were the long term effects. So I searched, online mostly, and went through a list of different keywords: residential institutions, boarding schools, preparatory schools, negative effects, send away youths. Eventually I landed on a piece of writing that was exactly what I was looking for. It was a journal article on how youths that were sent away to boarding schools were negatively affected in their adult lives. The article itself even mentions the fact that there is very little research done on the topic, which made my search feel a little more victorious. This gave me the backbone that I was looking for. The project was no longer just a retelling of my dad's experiences. Now it has a depth that shows that my father's experience is not an isolated one and it is an experience that is worth learning about and researching.

As I was learning about my father and as the research began to develop there was an emergence of some ethical issues, at least ethical to me. The problem I faced, am facing, has to do with the portrayal of my grandparents. As I mentioned earlier, I have never met them, so I only know what I have been told. It is also important to note that my father never painted them in a bad light, but I know he did not have a close relationship with them. From what I gathered my grandfather was serious and distant, and my grandmother was fairly strict and had a problem with alcohol. Unfortunately I do not believe that this was an uncommon phenomenon during the 1950's, but maybe I

feel that way because my father was surrounded by many boys with the same kind of family life while he was away at school. So I feel very deeply that my father was sent away unfairly. He was a ten year old boy doing what ten year old boys do, and his life was changed because of one accident, an accident that was not even his fault. I want to be able to portray this unfairness and show my father's side, but I know that comes at the expense of my grandparents. If I showed the story exactly how I wanted to then it would certainly show them in a negative light. It's not that I have any animosity towards them, but I do feel that they sent my father away not because it was best for him but because it was easiest for them. I decided to leave them out of most of the story. I tried to portray them in an honest but neutral light, so as not to paint them as the "bad guys," but allowing people to see the situation for what it was.

Writing this project turned out to be a highly creative experience for me. As much as I was hesitant towards the project in the beginning, it became a cathartic and creative venture for me. It was cathartic in two ways, that I was able to learn more about my family and connect to my father in a new way, and because I thrive on creative outlets. It turned into more than just a school assignment as I became more involved in the outcome. I do however wish I had more time to perfect what I envision it could be; because I know that I will be unhappy with parts of the final product only because I know I rushed myself.

Having multiple options for different genres helped me out immensely. It almost allowed the project to pick out the different genres itself. For me it was easier to focus on the idea I wanted to portray in each written piece, and usually the appropriate genre would become clear. If I tried to pick the

genre first I would always get stuck. For instance, I knew that I wanted to show how nasty bullies could be at the boarding school. When I thought about it, I saw it almost as a film in my head of what I wanted to show. This made it clear that it should be written in script form. The other genres followed in the same fashion.

Throughout this letter I think that my motivation for telling this story has become evident. I want nothing more than to give my father a voice, to tell his story from his point of view. My dad is not pushing for his story to be told. In fact I think he would rather it all be left alone. For me, however, this story shows my father's choice to be different from his parents. He is not a distant parent and he has been emotionally and physically there for all of his children since day one. I have lived all of these years assuming that my father was just that way. I never knew that my father had to make such a conscious choice so that he could be a different kind of dad than his father was to him. So for this reason I want to tell his story and the story of so many other children who went through similar experiences.

Katie Ellis

Piece #1

July 21, 1951<sup>1</sup>

So a cop showed up at the door today and oooohhh if I could have taken a picture of that lumbering policeman. He filled up the whole frame of the door in that dark blue uniform, with a stick dangling from his belt that was just made for hurtin' someone, and I just knew in my heart of hearts that this was going to be terrible. Ma didn't see me crouching by the corner in the hallway spying on 'em. Good thing too, 'cause I'm sure it woulda meant a whoopin'! How in the heck did he find out!?! It must have been that little rat Johnnie; a parrot can keep his mouth shut better than him. Man, he can't keep a secret worth nothing! It hadda been him. Maybe someone saw us tear outta the building. We were like the devil out of Georgia, running all different ways. It doesn't even matter, what matters is that I got caught.

Me and the guys have been playin' in that ole' barracks for months. I heard that it was used a ton in the war to hold soldiers, but no one went near it now. The place was monstrous! Some rooms had rows and rows of bunks; I couldn't even see to the end of them, stretching out farther than the horizon. I still imagine all of those soldiers just hangin' out in there, polishing their guns and waiting to be sent out to the excitement. I bet they would have let me hang there too, not the other kids, just me. "Hey Pete," they would have told me, "did I ever tell you the story about..." and on they would go, telling me about Hitler, and the war, and how they even saw someone die. Then they would have to pause for a moment to regain their composure. Soldiers were always doin' that kind of stuff. As soon as they get to the cool stuff they don't want to

talk anymore. But I wouldn't have cared; I would have been part of their crew, Private Ellis in Training. But of course by the time me and my buddies discovered it, it was deserted.

So it became ours. We'd bust in through a broken window in the back. Jim used to say that we looked like Spiderman, climbing up that wall and through the window, perfecting the skill. We tumbled into the old mess hall which was now no more than a vacant, dust covered room, vast as it was. If I stood real still I could almost hear all of those clattering plates and the soldiers yelling things my ma would never let me repeat about the terrible food. A large metal desk with a stool left on top of it was the only thing still in huge room. That is where we would gather, and I, being the ringleader of the crew, would give out the orders for the day. "Jimbo and Tony, you're on guard duty."

"Yes sir!" they'd shout back standing at attention.

"Bobby, you're on strategy with me. We must infiltrate enemy camps, find the secret bomb locations, and bust out the P.O.W.s! No time to waste, that's how men die!"

Man, I can't believe we lost that place. It's not every day that you find an abandoned barracks of your very own.

It was just a couple of days ago that we lost the place. And I'm tellin' ya, we were just minding our own business. You gotta know that there was a bunch of crud all over the place in those barracks. Junk that was left by the soldiers, old papers and furniture, you know, just random stuff. There were heaps of old trash piles shoved into corners of some of the rooms, mostly old newspapers, or broken chairs, or letters that were never sent. During days that were too hot to do anything

else we would just sit around and poke through the piles and go through the papers, finding old articles from the war.

Tony and I were hangin' around at one end of the mess hall reading comic books that day. I was on the last page of the new *Captain America* and the sound of Bobby and Jim pounding through the hallways came up like an earthquake behind me. "Come on guys! Get up, we gotta get outta hear!" They just started yelling with a frantic look in their eyes.

Then I could smell it. It was almost like a campfire, with the calm smoke wafting into the room. Obviously the smoke was not aware of the panic it caused in its presence. "What the...? Did you guys start a fire?" Jim just stood there shaking his head, pulling at Tony's arm in urgency. I commented that it couldn't be as bad as they thought and they were just acting like wussies. I started towards the smell. As soon as I reached the end of the hall I knew it was bad; billows of smoke started pouring in from another room. Not daring a closer look, knowing that if I saw it I would be responsible for it, I took off back towards the guys. Sprinting past them I headed for the broken window. "Let's go! There's a fire!"

So the four of us took off! I hoisted the other guys outta the window with a force I didn't know I had. I boosted Jim up and he flew up and out of the window like a basketball driving towards the net. I scrambled after them and we all jumped on our bikes and bolted into the woods. I have never seen Bobby pedal that fast in my life; it was like Jesse Owens on a bike! I only looked back once and man, do I wish I hadn't. Flames poured out of the windows with the fierceness of Hitler himself behind them. I knew it wouldn't be long before the whole thing went up in smoke, but I wasn't gonna stick around for that; that's for sure.

So when that cop showed up at the door I knew I was busted. Just wish I knew how he knew it was me, someone must of saw us. The look on Ma's face when she opened the door would have sent the priest straight to the confessional; I think even the policeman felt badly for me. She didn't say one word to me over dinner; we sat there in horrible, crushing silence. She's letting me sweat it out. It would better if she just yelled. It's gonna be a long rest of the summer, I know that! If I crack the door open and stay real quiet I can catch parts of what Ma and Dad are saying. I overheard Ma talkin' 'bout sending me away. She wouldn't though, would she? She can't believe that it was my fault. Man, I didn't mean to start that fire. What am I gonna do?

Pete

Piece #2

*The curtain opens to a stale, cold dorm room. The small space is crammed with two bunk beds and dressers. With bare walls and only one window the room itself is a picture of bleakness. Quinlin, Havock, and two other boys are rummaging through the drawers and causing chaos in the room, laughing uproariously.<sup>2</sup>*

*Another group of boys are seen approaching the door, Pete, Campbell, Prescott, and Jay. Pete hears the noise and bursts inside.*

PETE: Hey! What do you guys think your doin'? Get outta our room!

HAVOCK: Calm down, Petey. We're just having some fun. These belong to you Campbell? *(Holds up a pair of underwear and laughs)*

PETE: Come on guys, let's get them outta here.

*Pete turns around to get help from his roommates but they do not move.*

CAMPBELL: Aw Pete, what are we gonna do? They'll leave when they're done.

PETE: Are you kidding? You're just gonna let them mess with your stuff? Jay, Prescott, you guys in?

PRESCOTT: Man, they beat up anyone that tries to stand up to them. There's no way I'm gonna fight 'em.

QUINLIN: Hey Hav, check this out! How many high school boys do you know with a teddy bear! *(He chucks the bear across the room)*

HAVOCK: Oooooo, is this a letter from mommy? Dear Jay Jay, I miss you sooooo much, I just can't wait for Christmas... *(erupts in a fit of laughter)*

PETE: *(to his roommates)* Forget you guys. If you don't care then fine, but I'm not gonna let them mess with all our stuff. *(Pete crosses the room and approaches Havock)* Man, gimme that letter and I thought I told you to get outta my room!

HAVOCK: *(dripping with sarcasm)* Hey guys, it looks like someone doesn't want us here. Maybe we should go.

*Havock then shoves Pete back into a dresser.*

HAVOCK: You gonna make me get out? Hey guys, I think good ole' Petey here wants to fight.

QUINLIN: I think his roomies are lookin' to be tough guys too. Maybe we'll just have to rough 'em all up.

PETE: Alright guys, ha ha, you had your fun. You thoroughly embarrassed us all. Now just get lost. Nobody wants to fight you.

JAY: *(whispering to Campbell)* Maybe we should just get outta here.

CAMPBELL: Nah man, we gotta at least make sure Pete doesn't get killed.

*Havock lunges at Pete and the fight breaks out. Havock's buddies stand back laughing while Pete's friends back into the hallway. A crowd has started to form in the hallway. Kids start yelling and cheering and Pete and Havock are practically wrestling now.*

PETE: *(shoves Havock up against the wall)* Man, back off and get outta here.

HAVOCK: Yeah I'll back off, after I beat the livin' daylight's outta ya!

*Havock shoves Pete off of him and takes a swing. Pete dodges the punch but loses his balance and falls into the group of guys standing in the doorway. The guys get Pete back on his feet and then get out of the way. The fight continues into the hallway.*

PRESCOTT: Geez, you guys better break it up before someone gets killed.

QUINLIN: Yeah Hav, maybe we should get outta here before the prof shows up.

HAVOCK: We'll get outta here, just after I teach little Petey here a lesson. *(Takes another swing at Pete, this time nailing him in the stomach)*

PETE: Dohhhh!

*Pete then rushes at Havock, and Havock flies offstage and out of the hallway. Hear the sound of Havock crashing down stairs and eventually landing in a heap.<sup>3</sup>*

CAMPBELL: Dang Pete, you pushed him down the stairs!

PETE: Awww man! Someone go and see if he's okay. I was just trying to get him off of me.

*A professor comes up into the hallway from the opposite side where Havock was pushed down the stairs and students start to go off towards their rooms.*

PROFESSOR: What's going on here? I can hear this racket all over the building! Who is responsible?

JAY: Well Professor Wellington, nothing's going on. We were just...

QUINLIN: Yeah, we weren't doin' nothin'. Just tryin' to figure out who was gonna study with who. That's all. Sometimes its gets kinda rowdy, ya know, we all want to be with the smart kids.

WELLINGTON: Hmmmm, well I don't believe that for one second, and it's "who wants to study with whom." Peter, you look awfully winded, what happened here?

PETE: Um, well sir, nothing happened. It was just like Quinlin said, study groups. Everything's good.

WELLINGTON: Alright gentlemen, that is enough of all of this. Get back to your rooms, get your books open, and get to work. If I have to return you will all be sent to the dean.  
*(walks off)*

QUINLIN: Thanks man, that was cool of you.

PETE: Yeah, whatever. You should probably go check on your friend.

***END SCENE***

*A Bully and its Prey*

*It ruined their lives, the Weak ones.<sup>4</sup>  
The life was drained out of them,  
For the sheer bored pleasure of Others.  
The Others that were stronger, tougher;  
The Others that proved their power by crushing  
The souls of those who could never retaliate.  
The fragile ones tried to stay hidden,  
Hiding themselves for protection,  
Casting out the world for self preservation.  
But it didn't matter.  
The Weak were found, ridiculed, and returned  
To their hidden beaten down lives.  
Until the devilish boredom of the Others  
Would return and the Weak were needed  
To make the strong feel strong.  
That's the essence of a bully and its prey.*

Piece #4

October 17, 1958

Dear Peter,<sup>5</sup>

I hope school is going well for you, son. We received your grade card in the mail last week and it looks satisfactory. It would do you well to better your English and mathematics scores; for these will be most beneficial to you as you enter into the university.<sup>6</sup> Overall, your mother and I are quite pleased with your improvements. We are also most pleased with the lack of disciplinary reports this semester. I hope you can continue in this fashion, son, so that your mother and I can be even more assured in our decision to send you to St. Francis.

It looks as though we will be able to have you home for Thanksgiving this year. It is still a regret that you had to stay at the campus over the holidays last year, but it was for the best.<sup>7</sup> As soon as your

courses are completed in November you can bring the car down and stay for the holidays.<sup>8</sup> I would encourage you to get a head start on your studies during the break and possibly try to find yourself a job. I did enclose your allowance but it would do you well to learn the value of a dollar and the reward of hard work for yourself.

I hope that this letter finds you well and in good health. Your mother sends her best and she would like to remind you to not waste your allowance so that we will not have to send you more money for gasoline. But of course, if you are in need let us know.

Sincerely,  
Norman Ellis

Piece #5

# RADIO SHOW TRANSCRIPT<sup>9</sup>

Thursday, September 2, 1974

Arlington, Virginia

**MARIA BENSON, RADIO TALK SHOW HOST:** I would like to welcome my two guests to the panel tonight, therapist and psychological analyst, Joy Schaverien, who has just published an article entitled *Boarding School: The Trauma of the 'Privileged' Child*. (2004) We also have Brian Yoon, founder of the *Boarding School Review*. The *Review* helps parents to become aware of the benefits of boarding schools and to decide if it is the right decision for their child. Thank you both for coming.

**JOY SCHAVERIEN, GUEST:**  
Glad to be here.

**BRIAN YOON, GUEST:**  
Yes, thank you.

**BENSON:** I have asked you both here to discuss how the experience of being sent away to boarding school affects an adolescent. There are many differing opinions on the subject and unfortunately, very little research done.

That being said, let's get started with you, Schaverian. How did you come to be

involved with the boarding school system and what are your views on the matter?

**SCHAVERIEN:** Well Maria, I became interested in the subject after I started seeing several adult patients with psychological problems dating back to their boarding school days. These men and women went through experiences in their childhood and teenage years that have affected many aspects of their adult lives, especially how they handle relationships.

**BENSON:** Are you saying that your patients are struggling to have successful relationships because they went away to boarding school?

**SCHAVERIEN:** Essentially yes.

**YOON:** If I could interject here...

**BENSON:** Alright Yoon, I'm sure that you have some problems with this statement. Please share your thoughts on the matter?

**YOON:** Well, I myself went to boarding school and found the experience quite beneficial. I started the *Boarding School Review* for this very reason so that others could share in that positive experience. The reasons why a person might struggle in his or her personal relationships are innumerable, and I doubt that we can decidedly say the causes of such unsuccessful relationships are due to the boarding school experience.

**SCHAVERIEN:** On the contrary, many people did not have as

pleasant of an experience as you, being sent away to these institutions.

Many of my patients have suffered from early abandonment issues. Children are being sent away to be raised by complete strangers with no sense of safety. These children, especially males, often learn to suppress their emotions and live a masked, guarded life that does not become a problem until they are much older. A boy essentially has to create a psychological suit of armor to shield the vulnerable child inside of him, in order to fit in and survive in an all-male institution.

**YOON:** I can't say that I agree. Just because one of your patients exhibited these symptoms we can't blame the

institution as a cause for his emotional trauma. These preparatory schools provide students with great opportunities in life. The success rate of such students is overwhelming.

**BENSON:** Let's come back to that thought about a student's success. First, Schaverien, did you have a rebuttal to Yoon's comment about emotional trauma?

**SCHAVERIEN:** I did, thank you. I admit there has been very little research done on this topic, which I see as a travesty. But that does not discount the findings. I have devoted years to this research and have talked with many men and women about their experiences at boarding school and what it has done to their lives. All you have to do is look at the media to see that

these institutions cause emotional and psychological trauma to youths. There are biographical accounts, such as Tom Brown's *Schooldays*, and fictional portrayals, such as *Dead Poet's Society*, and many, many more. With so many first hand accounts we have to admit that there is a problem here.

**BENSON:** Yoon brought up a good point; many students who attend a boarding or preparatory school are very successful later in life. What else do you have to say about this, Yoon?

**YOON:** Please allow me a moment to clarify some terms first. There are two different types of boarding schools, college-preparatory and therapeutic. Preparatory schools are geared for motivated students and

it involves a rigorous academic schedule while therapeutic institutions are for troubled youths that have had problems with traditional school settings. In either case students have great opportunities for success. In preparatory schools students are able to move into Ivy League universities or high end colleges with a very successful future in front of them. Students also have immense chances for success when coming from therapeutic institutions. These schools help students deal with their behavioral problems and they can then pursue college with a vengeance.

**SCHAVERIEN:** Yes, of course many of these students will achieve monetary and career success in life. But that may cause an even greater emotional

battle for some adults. I use the term "double binding" to describe this in my research. Adults often feel guilty about admitting the negative experiences of a boarding school because they also know that it was such a privilege. The same thing that gave them success has also caused significant damage and this causes quite an inner conflict.

**BENSON:** Let's hear some final statements from our panelists before we run out of time. Yoon, I will hand it over to you first. What do you feel is beneficial about sending a child away to boarding school?

**YOON:** First, I would just like to thank you for allowing me to come on your program to share my views. Now as to the

question, the benefits to a boarding school education are countless. Doors will open for these children that would not have otherwise been available. Students become better prepared for college and troubled teens have a chance to change their lives around.

I certainly do not believe that it is the right environment for all students. This is why students and parents must work together to decide if a student is ready for such an endeavor. But for the students who chooses this life I believe that he or she will be highly rewarded.

**BENSON:** Schaverien, any last comments?

**SCHAVERIEN:** I actually agree with parts of Yoon's statement. Boarding school does need to be

a decision that involves both the parent and the child. The problem, however, is that this is rare. More often than not a parent sends a child away without the child having a say.

If children can not express their unhappiness with a safe parental outlet, then severe emotional problems can develop in the future. There are severe problems with bullying that surpass that of a normal adolescent experience, and because children have no sense of reprieve from such situations (because they live in the environment) there are higher risks for emotional damage. The monetary success that a boarding school student may have later in life does not seem to be worth the emotional trauma. These things must be considered when

parents are looking at boarding schools. We can no longer ignore the harsh reality of the situation.

**BENSON:** Well it looks like we could debate this for hours, but for now we have to pause for a commercial break. If you have a question or comment for our guests give us a call. We'll be standing by and when we return we'll hear from the callers.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The incident that the journal depicts happened when my father was ten years old. It was the following school year when he was in fifth grade that he was sent away to boarding school for the first time.

<sup>2</sup> The portrayal of this fight is actually a combination of two different fights that my father remembers from St. Francis Preparatory. The first fight involved a boy named Quinlin who would not stop rummaging through my father's dorm room, as depicted in the beginning of the script. The end of the script shows the other fight that took place with Havock, and my father ended up pushing him down a flight of stairs. Both of these stories are combined into this script.

<sup>3</sup> This was the last time that Havock tried to pick a fight with my father. My father currently attends St. Francis Prep reunions once or twice a year, and throughout these events Havock and my father have been able to forge a friendship.

<sup>4</sup> My father made a point of saying that the bullying that took place while he was away at boarding school affected some of the students for the rest of their lives. He went as far as saying that the tormenting was so bad for some of them that it ruined their lives. It was only my father's height and athletic build that protected him from the same kind of treatment.

<sup>5</sup> At times my father would receive letters at boarding school from his father. During the interview he mentioned this with a tone of irony, noting that his father never talked to him much while he was at home but he would write beautiful letters. My father also had a very clear recollection of my grandfather's exquisite penmanship.

<sup>6</sup> The university mentioned here is St. Francis University in Pennsylvania. My father attended St. Francis Preparatory during high school, and then continued on to the university.

<sup>7</sup> During this time my grandparents lived near Washington, D.C., and my father was able to go home for most holidays, seeing how the school was only about two hours away. There were occasions, however, that my father had to stay in the dorms over the holiday along with the other boys that could not go home.

<sup>8</sup> During the interview with my father he told the story of how he hid a car at a local gas station throughout high school. The school would not allow vehicles, but my father neglected to tell his parents of this rule. I was told many stories that involved this car and his buddies traveling to nearby cities. Unfortunately, these stories did not fit into the scheme of this project, but I felt that they at least deserved a mention.

<sup>9</sup> This radio transcript features information from the Boarding School Review website and from Joy Schaverien's article found in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology*.