

****Honorable Mention****
2013 Student Storyteller

I BROUGHT MY BROTHER'S BODY HOME **BY MADELIN SCHLENZ**

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“I brought my brother’s body home,” he told me, as we drove back from Misquamicut on Route 6.

“Having grown up in Colorado, I had never been to the ocean and I had certainly never been with my father.

Only four years before, my estranged father had tracked me down through a website called Reunion.com. I’d only signed up for the website on a whim. His was the only message I had ever received. I didn’t believe it was really from him until I also got the phone call. His voice echoed through the years and the 2000 miles separating us. We both cried once we put down the phone. Over the years, I’d left him a trail of Christmas cards and one wedding announcement to find me. He’d never responded to anything, until the message through the website. I often felt angry with the former, mostly, alcoholic and addict father who was never a part of my life, but no matter how angry I was, I always forgave him every year on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. When he was still a stranger to me, I cried all day at home in front of PBS watching veterans tell their story.

“I got kicked out of New Orleans during Mardi Gras,” he told me on the long drive home through New England cornfields. I laughed.

“I hadn’t had that much to drink, he told me,” which, I think, is relative.

“They told me I could spend the night in jail or take the bus out of there. I told them I didn’t have any money for the bus, so they gave me money.”

That was the year he went on a walkabout, the year he got back from Vietnam. He told me on his walkabout, he once slept under a parked car in the ghetto in the rain. He told me he slept on the beach many times. He told me about having nothing but the pack on his back. I thought of Jack Kerouac. I thought about moving back to New England. After my recent separation from my husband, it’d been on my mind. It would be on this trip that I would finally decide to move back.

“Last week,” he told me, “I went to visit Jeannie.” He and his half-sister had communed about Jimmy. I have a faded sepia photo of my uncle and dad as children, arms wrapped



around the dog. “I never knew how Jimmy died,” he said. “He threw his body over orphans to protect them from a bomb.” He told me he’d had to stay on the base for three months right when he got back to New England. “I didn’t get out of bed,” he told me. “They thought I was going to put on my uniform and stand in a line after that.”

He looked over green tufts to the horizon of blue fading into stars. That night, my father had taken me to the ocean to show me his favorite spot to stand during a hurricane, on a rocky outcrop. He told me he thought he might be dying.

“I brought my brother’s body home.”

That was the first time I ever saw the ocean.

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Madelin Schlenz, currently a sophomore at the Community College of Rhode Island, plans to transfer to Rhode Island College in the fall to pursue bachelor’s degrees in Education and English. She began her degree at the Metropolitan State University of Denver while working full-time as an administrative assistant and customer service representative at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. She recently relocated to Rhode Island to be closer to her family. She currently works part-time at the Boys and Girls Club of Cumberland and dreams of eventually pursuing a master’s degree in Expressive Arts Therapy.



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