

Dandelions
By Nyssa Wilkinson

Sirens wailed, shots reverberated through the house, people screamed. I ran out of my cozy bedroom, my feet quickly thumping along the wooden staircase. I looked fearfully around. I made it through the kitchen and into the living room, where our flat screen TV was blaring the news.

‘It's only the news, it's only the news,’ I whispered to myself. I lifted a shaking hand, grasping the remote. I slowly turned down the volume one number at a time, washing the screams of fear from my ears, but not from sight. All the scary thoughts in my head slowly began to dissipate, until only one remained. *My dad could be there.* He could be one of the millions of people screaming in despair, in agony. He could be wishing he had never chosen to join the military, wishing for his family back home, where war was just a faraway thought.

Outside, the skies were a cheery blue; birds chirped a happy ‘Good Morning Song’ to one another. They were oblivious; they only cared about the juiciest worms and the fattest looking seeds. I began to grow angry with them, though they'd done nothing wrong. I could get angry easily, faster even than my sister, who got mad over her own fingernails. I opened, then purposely slammed the door loud enough to scare the birds, but they didn't even pay a feather of attention. This just made me even more upset, so before I could begin plotting how to hurt one of them, I ran through the house to the kitchen, where I started scarfing down my cereal. Food always helped.

My first class that morning was math. The kids never paid attention, which always annoyed me, because I actually wanted to learn something. In the classroom, students had already started throwing paper airplanes like they were in elementary school again. I could feel the anger bubbling deep inside me, but I pushed it down. I had only gotten mad once so far today, and I didn't want a stupid paper airplane to piss me off. The yells and joyous screams of the other kids filled my ears, making me want to explode. But I didn't, I kept it together.

I believe I've only at the most ever said about 100 words on any given school day. I didn't get how people had that many things to share. I sat watching the teacher's lips move in silent protest, her eyes full of desperation, as gum helped itself to the mix of flying objects. I was trying so hard to block out the yells of the kids and the whizzing planes. I thought I had the anger in control, when something wet and hard hit the back of my head. I tried to pull it off, but soon realized that it was gum, and it was not easily going to be removed.

That's when I exploded. I couldn't take it any longer. My eyes were slits. I stood up fast, shoving my chair hard with the back of my legs, so that it hit the desk behind me. But the minute I stood up, I felt like a deer in headlights. Everybody was staring me down, their faces a mixture of confusion and excitement at the new turn of events. The boy who never talked had just made himself heard. Now only one pesky thought remained: ‘*Get out of here,*’ my brain was shrieking at me. So I did the inevitable- I ran. I ran for the door that led to the outside world, where there was bound to be a breeze that would blow all of these evil thoughts away. I reached the door and yanked it open. The instant I stepped outside, I felt the anger of the classroom run off of me like I was washing it down the drain. The new air circulation cooled my body, comforting me.

Then I ran just for the freedom of running. Finally when I was ready for a rest, I stopped by a patch of dandelions. I leaned against an old tree, feeling a strong sense of protection when I touched it. It was like the tree was trying to comfort me, to protect me from all the evils and dangers of the world. I sank down against the trunk. The tree gave me a sense of calm I had never felt before. I sat there not moving, my breathing finally slow and steady. The adrenalin had left my body, leaving me very tired.

As I sat there, I realized that life would be so easy if I was a kid again. I never worried when I was younger. When my dad first got deployed, I thought nothing of it because he said he was going to bring me back candy from across the world. But when he came back, he had no left arm- and no candy. That was when my little ten- year- old brain realized that he hadn't been on a vacation trip at all- he had been in war.

That word 'war' was so small, only three letters, and yet I now knew that it held so much power, enough to change the world forever. And then there's the word 'gun', three letters, but with so much hatred, dread, tears, and sorrow crammed into the twists and turns of each letter.

I thought about my dad on the other side of the world. Maybe he was holed up in a bunker. Or maybe he was lying under a tree, feeling the last rays of sunlight tickle his face. Or maybe, just maybe, he was thinking about his son on the other side of the world. I wonder if he ever got mad over little things like birds or loud noises. I picked one of the dandelions and slowly, but firmly blew on it, wishing and wondering so many things at the same time. It was then that I finally, truly, heartfully, realized how much I missed him.