

## Hold My Hand

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3<sup>rd</sup> Place, Personal Narrative 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Anxiety hit me like a freight train as I stood in line with the other five year olds, waiting like soldiers in single file for their acting commander to appear. On my back, hung a pink princess backpack, filled to the brim with colored pencils, a coloring book, and my companion, Tony the Teddy Bear. I watched as parents arrived, holding the hands of their children, who were yelling in excitement and screaming greetings to their friends.

“ELI,” an enthusiastic voice yells at a yellow blur of yellow streaks by, like an excited golden retriever as it crashes into a boy, Eli.

Eli laughs, and moves to wrap his arms around the boy in a hug. “Liam, hey,” he says, chuckling, and as the two boys exuberantly chat, hands waving about animatedly, their parents form a circle and chat on the side, not wanting to disturb the two friends.

Silently, I look away from the families and down at my hands, which were empty of the hands of my parents, and move my vision to stare at the asphalt, wondering if a hole might appear so I could step in it and disappear. Hoping nobody sees the longing in my eyes, I stare at the gates of my new school, waiting for the moment that one of my parents would step in, and I could hold their hands too.

Time trickles by, slowly, dragging its feet in the mud as it sluggishly moves forward. Suddenly, the bell rings, and the shrieks stop, turning into goodbyes and see you later as parents bid farewell to their kid. But still, as I glance at the gates, my parents don't show up, and I clutch Tony closer to my chest, clinging to the softness of his skin, a lifeline that I desperately imprison in my tiny doll-like hands, as teachers usher their students into classrooms.

And that was how the first day of school all those years ago started for me. Alone, without the comfort of my parents like the rest of my classmates. About two years later, I boarded a plane by myself to China, with an air hostess making sure I didn't get lost. She held my hand. And because I was a 7 year old, she also rolled my suitcase as we moved to our flight. I lost Tony the Teddy Bear at a hotel the following year (I cried my eyes out for a good hour or two as my grandma baked condolence cookies).

Fast forward 2 years after the plane flight, when I turned 9, instead of my mom driving me to my violin competition, my aunt dropped me off. I got off the car with the company of my violin and sheet music as the winter Berkely wind picked up and it started to drizzle. 3 years later, where instead of being the scared five year old that was waiting in line to meet her new friends without her parents near her, a twelve year old stands along with her choir, scanning the crowd's faces as she sings her solo, hoping that her eyes would be graced by the sight of her parents. But, they

never showed; not for the first minute, the second minute, or all the one hundred and eighteen minutes that followed.

To this day, eight years after that fateful day in which my parents didn't show up to the first day of school, I still scan the audience for every concert and event I attend, searching for my parents, praying that the past won't be repeated, and that this would be the time that they show up, the first time they will be there to cheer me on when I shine, and catch me when I fall. Sometimes, rarely, they show up, and those times make me feel invincible, like you can run me over but I will still pop right back up like flowers under snow. And each time, without fail, I thank whatever force there is out there that for once, just once, everything is just the way those coloring books show, where the happy family stands, and nothing in the world is wrong.