Raining Mud

 It was about six years ago in early fall. The sky rumbled constantly for days on end. The monstrous storm raged on, seemingly endless, one big, swarming mass of grey enveloping the entire sky. There was no point where one cloud ended and the next began. There was no end to the deluge, the torrential downpour. It battered every aspect of life, the shelters, the pathways, the earth; nothing was safe, nothing was dry. The wind howled like a beast, its gusts tearing at cloth like razor-sharp claws, its gale rattling the windows like unseen hands. The world flashed constantly. Sharp bolts of lightning lit the area for moments at a time. Though the brilliance of the lights varied, they all lasted but seconds. Each blaze was followed by a growling thunder, louder when the sky was brighter and softer when there was only a distant glow. Finally, after days of the unending torrent, the sun revealed itself on the horizon. It was like an old friend that you welcome home years after your last meeting, both older and wiser than when you last met, but still as recognizable as the day you parted, still someone you rejoice in seeing.

 My family and I, fed up with staying indoors after the never-ending rain, decided to spend the day outdoors. The air was perfectly warm, not so hot as to sweat and be miserable, yet not so cold as to need a jacket. It smelled of life, of flowers and leaves and rain. The world was still damp, the beads of water clinging to every surface, refracting individual rainbows and making the world appear magical. There was a cornfield on the opposite side of the uneven country road. We were playing pass with our silver sky ball in the driveway. It got passed my mom and crossed the road, landing in the mud pit that made up the cornfield at the time, seeing as the harvest had already been taken in by that time. My mom was in flip-flops, I remember because she commented on the warm, squishing sensation of the mud between her toes. My mom, in an act of pure child-like sentiment, flung one of the bigger clumps of moistened dirt in our direction. In retaliation, all of my siblings and I crossed over that little country pass and removed our shoes. Then the mud began to fly. Clusters of muck were soaring in every direction, pelting each of us in its slimy coating. There were bundles of filth falling from the sky, raining almost as much as the storm that made this entire bout possible. It lasted about an hour, one hour of being coated in grime, one hour of laughing, one hour of fun, one hour of carefree bliss with the ones that mattered the most to us.

 In the aftermath of our battle, the casualties were great. Not a soul went untouched, went away unscathed, went away spotless. Every one of us had to get doused with the water hose before we could even enter the house. The water ran in chocolate rivulets as it washed away the evidence of our afternoon. The shower ran until well after dark, when the children were in bed and the adults settled down to relax before they themselves lay down until the sunlight streamed in through the seams between the blinds, softly wakening with its pinks and reds. Though it was perhaps an ordinary event in an ordinary setting in an ordinary life, I will never forget that day after the rain stopped, the day that it was raining mud.

**Word Count 601**

**Ordinary to Extraordinary**

 The little, white flakes float down from the almost invisible clouds. It begins to gather on the ground and cover everything in sight. First I begin with my socks, and then my snow pants, my mittens are next, followed by my oversized coat and boots. As we step into the fresh, untouched snow the instant bite from the air brings shivers down my back. I see the heat from my breath escape my lips. The snow is now heavily weighing on my already cumbersome of my boots. We, my sister and I, trudge through the couple inches of powder that has formed on our way to our neighbors’ house. Kayla, Amber, and Morgan were dressing in their gear in their garage preparing for our miraculous adventure of the day.

 Eager to begin, we quickly head out even though we have plenty of time. Kayla mentions sledding as an option, Amber a snowman, my sister, Olivia, “ice skating”, and Morgan shouts for snow angels. The snow continues to fall harder and harder; a truck came roaring down the road past us. All of a sudden I felt my imagination take flight and soar to no end. I felt as though we were going to be attacked by cannons and gunfire at any moment. It was in this moment that I had the idea of creating our own fighting army.

 I was the oldest, which made me the commander of the army, and my first order was to begin the construction of a fort in order to protect ourselves against the strategic yet dangerous enemy. We spent hours building the ultimate protection, during this time though our enemy, tank after tank; truck after truck, was still ever-present. We had to find another source of defense. Many trees guarded the edge of the fence; it was our only source of concealment. The echo of the growling tanks down the street once more was like an alarm that sounded through us all and made us instinctively run for cover.

 When the task was finally complete, as a growing darkness finds its way across the sky, we knew we had little time left of our joyous day. Our war had ended and we set out to quench our thirst for one more quick adventure before it was time to go inside for supper. We set out down the driveway searching long and hard for the last bit of excitement to conclude the night, when we heard a loud crack. Statues at first we lessened our tension when we realized the cracking noise had come from the ice that had collected on the side of the road from the day before. The spirits of my company lifted as we embarked on our final journey through the treacherous river of breaking ice. The path my imagination has paved for me has brought the greatest joy and the fondest memories of the sanctity I had discovered during that cold, snowy day as will it continue to for the rest of my life.

**Word Count: 504**

Alone

 “I am moving in with Tori!” Cody said excitedly. This is the second incident I have experienced like this in my life. I responded equally excited because I was happy for him, and I knew it was time for him to start a new chapter in his life. I knew this would change everything. Life is always offering us new avenues to explore. Yet despite this excitement, once they move, nothing is the same. You have more responsibilities and normal life experiences change; you sadly are alone all summer, seeing them becomes less frequent, and only then do you realize the importance that a single someone can have on your life.

 Nothing quite readies you for coming home to the sound of silence. Every day we would come home, eat snacks together, then do homework. We would play video games in their room; now their room is empty of their objects, all it possesses now is the memories made in that room. Now I come home and do things all alone. I used to have help if I had questions on my homework, now I have to figure it out myself. I make snacks for myself instead of us all, no video games are played, and everything has changed.

 “Please sweep, fold towels, and unload the dishwasher” my mom would write us notes for what to do when we came home. Kirby would sweep, Cody would unload the dishwasher, while I unloaded the dishwasher. Now I have to do it all. Not having them there to help makes everything take longer. I have all the responsibility, if the jobs are not completed all of the blame is on me. Being alone makes you more responsible.

 Waking up and going to the pool, Tori’s or Kelsey’s, out to eat, fishing, or a baseball game was a normal thing to do every summer. We would wake up, eat breakfast, get ready, and then go do our thing. This summer was hard to get used to. I woke up the first day of summer, went to the kitchen and realized I was alone. I had no one to do anything with. Alone. This realization made me as if I had no one. I realized how important my family was to me, the fact that they moved out was finally setting in.

 “How was your day sis?” was a normal question every day. Walking into the house the three of us would talk about everything imaginable. Now it is rare that we all talk once a week. We were all so close and now we are becoming more distant, growing apart. We are all going in different paths.

 I came home one day and my mom said “Kirby and Cody are coming over this weekend for a family dinner!” I was ecstatic! We all had not been together for at least a month and that made me realize how much I missed them. My brothers leaving me as the lone child helped me see how important and helpful they were. They would help edit my essays, explain my math problems, and even quiz me for tests. I have to do all of this by myself now. Their presence at home was of great importance.

 Age difference affects the last child the most. Being seven years apart you are always at different stages. They are graduation high school when you are just moving into the junior senior high school, getting married while you are just having your first relationship, finishing their masters before you finish high school. This is a curse and a blessing. I have my brothers to help me with what they have been through, but they are not there to help with the usual everyday problems.

 As I have grown up with my brothers I realize their influence on my personality. In certain ways I am like Kirby while in other ways I am like Cody. Having older siblings grow up and move out before you is a difficult transition when that is all you are used to. I am alone at home now. If I need anything they will be there, my brothers are my role models. Acting in the same way as my brothers is what I intend to do. Alone at home but not in mind.

**Word Count: 718**

In the Long Run

 It was an early Saturday morning, the sun was already blazing down on the pavement, that dedicated people were about to be running on. I walked into the gym not really sure what I was about to be getting myself into. As I walked through the doors into the gym, that was just as hot as outside, I saw other people looking just as tired yet excited as I was. I soon figured out that everyone had the same thought I did: What are we doing here this early! It was the first day of open runs for cross country. I had never ran before in my life. I wanted to try something new, and with the encouragement from my friends I ended up there at the open runs. A few summer runs and hard practices later, I have officially made it onto Cowan’s Varsity Girls Cross Country team, and I love it! Making the decision to commit myself to being on the Cross Country team has transformed me into a different person. Running is a tough sport. There is no half time, no time out, and no break. Running cross country has taught me to be committed to what I do, never give up, to push myself, and to be encouraging to other people.

 Being fully dedicated to something is very hard to do. We all have busy lives, and things that we like to do. Cross country is a sport where you have to be fully committed. By running this year I have defiantly learned to commit myself to running, I have to be! If I did not dedicate myself to cross country I would not be able to run how I do today. Running takes practice, lots and lots of practice. Practice takes the effort of being there, which is a form of commitment. Learning to be committed to cross country has taught me to be committed to other things I do in life. The skill has carried over into my everyday life. It has changed me into a different person.

 Coaches constantly encouraging me to be better and to push myself is just one of the ways that I motivate myself in cross country. Cross country takes a good mental brain. It is 90% mental and 10% physical. As a runner I have to motivate myself to keep going and to try harder. There are always people encouraging you, but ultimately it’s really how you motivate yourself. By constantly doing this at practice and at meets I have learned to do this in my everyday life. I have become more of a motivator for not only myself but also for other people. People have noticed this trait even in this short amount of time. Being a motivator is a great personality trait to have, and cross country has given me the ability to adopt this trait.

 Cross Country is usually the sport that no one wants to come and watch, which is a shame because cross country runners put in a lot of hard work. Cross Country can transform a person’s personality, and I believe that it has changed mine and is still continuing to each and every day. I have become a harder worker, I am more of a motivator, and I now know how to push myself, all because of the dedication I had to go to the open runs in the summer, and to work hard so that I could be on the Cross Country team.

**Word Count 587**