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HU 2110

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Nonfiction Exercise 1: Memoir

Due: 11/8/13

La Jolla
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Prologue:

When I was in high school I didn't go on the crazy spring break trips like most people did. Instead, I went on mission trips with my church. We would spend a week in Mexico not Acapulco, Puerto Vallarta, or Cancun, but Mexico. Before we went to Mexicali, we would stay a few nights in La Jolla to start the trip out on a good note. After the week in Mexicali we would return to La Jolla to relax and get ready to return to the real world. The first year I went was my sophomore year of high school; I was fifteen, and like any other boy that age, I loved to explore.

La Jolla is a quaint, little town that has been placed in one of the most beautiful places on Earth. It is located on the southern coast of California. However, instead of the typical sandy beaches that most people expect, it is home to majestic cliff faces. When the tide rolls in, huge salty waves come crashing against it. The cliffs are so beautiful and serene that even the seals would gather by them to stay safe.

The Trip:

During my first year in La Jolla we had a free afternoon, some of my close friends and I decided to go for a walk to take in the local scenery. We walked through the city following the

coast; we walked until the city faded and nature began. We walked down a wide path that's sides were lined with chain as a subtle reminder to not stray too far. This path danced back and forth along the top of the cliff, at points getting so close to the edge that you could see the 200 foot drop to the water below. As we walked down the path we noticed that the tide was receding and there were a few people walking on the fresh shoreline. Of course, we had to figure out how to get down there.

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The second year I went we were even more determined to get to the beach. So on the first free night in La Jolla, again I gathered some friends and we headed for the path. We knew what we were doing this time which made our determination even more intense. I knew where we had to go.

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We had no idea how those people got to the sand below. All we knew is that about 200 feet below us seemed to be the start of the beach. If it couldn't get worse, the way the cliffs wrapped back towards us, we could see all the way down until it met back with the water. But still, we couldn't see any possible way to get down, just jagged sandstone for a mile.

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Since I knew where we were going, we only paused momentarily at the spot where we'd stood a year before to reminisce.

“There!” I said pointing at what looked like a small crack that shot up the cliff face a shot distance from where we were. “That's how we get down.”

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But as we stood at the top of the cliffs my sophomore year, none of us knew how to

continue. Nobody said anything for quite some time as we all took in the beauty. As the cool ocean air from the water below brushed across our faces, a voice whispered “We have to climb down.”

This was all the push I needed. Unlike the rest of the group I wasn't longing for the beach below, I was staring at the edge. I wanted to conquer these cliffs. I had been trying to do everything that I could to not step over the chain, but as soon as I heard those words all reason went with the wind.

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As we got to the end of the path there were steps to the left, they led to a downtrodden path, which appeared to have only slightly less of a slope than the cliffs themselves. The one difference however between this path and the cliffs was a rope. It wasn't a perfect rope, but it was thick enough to hold and appeared to grow stronger with age. So we grabbed on and one by one we started our descent to the beach below.

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I stepped over the chain without hesitation and I started to walk to the edge. Few followed and the ones that didn't were too shocked to say anything. As we got to the edge, we knelt down to insure that we wouldn't fall before having a chance to climb. The cliff we were looking down was steep; one of my followers spit so we could see how far it really was. However, it never hit the cliff but just fell straight down and disappeared from sight. Unable to wait any longer I judged the best way possible to climb down and started over the cliff.

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Now this path seemed a lot steeper than I remembered it to be. Our feet would slip occasionally on the loose sandstone but with the rope in our hands the worst that could happen

would be to hit our faces on the rocks. We made it down rather quickly with no hiccups. We had all finally made it to the beach. As we stood there wondering what to do next, I did my best to point out the route I had attempted to take the year before.

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As I started down the cliff I realized just how steep it was. It was slow going at first but I eventually got to the point where one of my friends was able to start to follow me. As we began to disappear down the cliff my friends started to get worried, the one on the cliff with and the ones at the top. I was too focused to let fear take hold. As they started to yell for me to climb back up I paused so that I could drown out their noise. There were a few small plants that somehow grasped the side of the cliff. I grabbed the roots of one with one hand and steadied my feet against the cliff. I took my headphones out of my pocket and plugged them into my phone, which automatically started playing my favorite play-list.

When I looked up the only other daring soul had changed his mind and was starting his way back up. This was fine with me because these cliffs were not as sturdy as they appeared. Half of the holds I would try to put my weight on would just break away and fall to the beach below, so as he was climbing above me his failed holds were falling on me. I was even more determined to get to the bottom now while my friends were determined to keep me alive. At points the cliff would get even steeper, forcing me to hug the wall and trust a free hand only long enough to find a new hold. This is when my friends decided to start calling my phone in order to convince me to turn. What they didn't know was that I couldn't turn back, and I couldn't answer the phone.

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After the story I had told them of my epic battle with the cliff last year the rope climb

down just didn't stand up to the thrill they were expecting. We decided to instead find a cool cliff face to climb back up. We knew we couldn't climb the one I went down before, so we went for a walk down the beach. We ducked in and out of little coves that were made by the tide smashing against the rocks. Instead of watching the water or the wildlife, we were focused on the cliffs. We scanned them for any spot that we had a hope of climbing up. After quite a ways we found a face that seemed suitable. I led the way, making sure I didn't put them in more danger than was necessary.

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The cliff was getting harder and harder to climb down. As I dropped below what seemed to be the hundred foot mark the scattered vegetation got even sparser. I would occasionally lose footing and start to slide; doing everything that I could to stop myself from continuing all the way to the ground. I grabbed the one plant that happened to be in my way; it stopped me just until its small roots would lose grip in the sand. I was getting closer to the bottom but I wasn't in the clear yet. The cliff seemed to flare out at the bottom but as I got closer I realized it wasn't as close to the bottom as I thought. About twenty feet below the cliffs edge were boulders that from the top looked like small rocks.

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We slowly worked our way up the cliff. There were many more holds than the year before and this cliff face seemed to stay together better, too. It wasn't easy though. We had made our way about 100 feet up when we paused to attempt a picture of the ground far below (upon later review the picture didn't do the feeling justice). The fear pumping through our veins drove us forward. We stopped looking back so we wouldn't see the height because we knew we couldn't turn back. After some time we got to the top only to realize where we had ended up. All

I remember thinking is, “Shit, we can't get in trouble again.”

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As I sat on the lip at the bottom of the cliff, I stared at the boulders 20 feet below hoping they would catch me safely. Not wanting to double think it, I started lowering myself down so the fall would be that much less. Hanging from my fingertips, I looked down and let go. I was in the air just long enough to think about how dumb this was but the thrill had made it worth it so far.

I landed hard on the boulders; my glasses flew off and without breaking fell between the two rocks that “caught” me. After picking them up I brushed myself off, took one last look at the cliff and ran down the beach so that my friends could see I was okay. As I ran along the cliff, I noticed a small gap with a rope hanging down it. The path wasn't too steep, and with the rope's help I was back at the top of the cliffs in no time. Excited to tell my friends about the new path and with adrenaline still pumping through my veins I raced down the chain path to my friends. As soon as I got to them the sound of sirens filled the air.

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We were in someone's front yard, or backyard depending on their view. It was hard to tell but it was somebody's yard nonetheless. It was an oddly shaped house that seemed to have rooms separated into their own buildings that were connected by uncovered paths. We couldn't stop to observe the odd architecture or wait long enough to see who was home; we just wanted to get out of there before we were caught. We attempted to follow the paths to the road but they were so confusing we went in a number of circles before getting close to the road. Then when we got to the driveway the large wooden gate was closed and set to an alarm system. We scanned around for any place to get out. One of my buddies noticed a door but it was on the other side of their

man-made river. We leapt over it and raced to the door. Thankfully it was open and as soon as we made it through the gate, we knew we were finally safe.

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The sirens grew to a loud roar and suddenly my friends and I were surrounded by a large hoard of coast guard patrol officers. Somebody had dialed 9-1-1 because they saw me on the cliffs. They immediately started yelling to us, wondering if we had seen anybody climb down the cliff.

With fear of punishment I told them it was me. I spent the next hour learning many facts about all the idiots who die on these cliffs each year because they think they can handle it. He informed me that I was lucky to survive and lucky he wasn't issuing me a ticket. After he left we all sworn to secrecy and we made a silent trip back to the hotel.

Epilog:

I never talked about either of the cliffs until years later when we had a mission trip reunion. None of us could believe how crazy we had been or how we even survived. But to me, it was worth every terrifying moment.