

2012 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Nonfiction Category

Second Place: “*Monsters Vs. Aliens,*” by Dawn Leden

Our senses assaulted by sights, sounds and smells. The lights go out and the room is black, black like the theatre right before the boom of cartoons dance across the giant screen. It was April 17th, 2009, and our two year old son Matthew was going into that dark unknown of his first movie, and not just any movie a 3D movie adventure where he would be caught up in the chaos of *Monsters versus Aliens!*

He had spent weeks, months waiting for the movie to hit the local theatre. For a boy of two this was a huge event; for our family as a whole this was just as big. How could we not be as thrilled as he was? His excitement was contagious, like the inability to keep yourself from tapping your foot at a good musical beat.

The twenty minute car ride to the theatre was filled with electricity, sending shockwaves from person to person. Each jolt enough to remind us that we were on our way to something exciting. If Matthew wasn't strapped into his car seat the excitement would have bounced him onto the floor. The car was chaotic, everyone talking at the same time growing louder and louder. All the words fighting like siblings to be the only one heard. The smells of after-shave and perfume, dancing together like the flowers along the side of the road in the wind.

The sun streamed into the car windows, brilliant yellow just like butter. Butter, yes butte

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slice of yellow heaven. A salty, sweet mouthwatering condiment you melt and pour over popcorn, right before you smother it with white cheddar. Our mouths watered in anticipation. How could we survive another second of this ride without popcorn and butter?

Finally after what seemed like hours we arrive at the gateway to adventure. That larger than life, red brick building with the flashing lights that called to us, it screamed “Please, come in! Please! I need YOU!”

Matthew released from the prison of his car seat ran to the door, gasping for air, his small body dripping with sweat. I opened the large heavy door and he raced into the vast expanse filled with pictures, lights and smells. I closed my eyes for a split second walking down memory lane, taking hands with this old friend and asking her to be gentle with my little seedling. Taking a deep breath my body bombarded with the intermingling of smells. I snapped back into the present as Matthew squealed, “Mommy, Mommy come on it's over here!” Barely breathing, Matthew ran to the counter announcing to the attendant his presence, “this is my **FIRST** movie he screamed, I need lots of snacks so I can watch my **FIRST** movie!” The young woman took his money and handed Matthew his movie stub. Prancing like a royal steed, he found his way to his sister Sarah and Daddy letting them know, “the lady gave me my ticket because I'm such a **BIG BOY**”. Matthew selected everyone's snacks with great care, making sure all four of us had exactly what we wanted. This trip had to be perfect. The final step was to find seats inside the theatre.

Our bodies tingled from head to toe in anticipation of what was to come. All across the theatre mini humans bounced around in their seats, parents trying to harness the excitement seeping from their pores. Every second they bounced a little higher and grew an octave louder

demanding for the movie to begin. Parents peppered with questions. Mommy, when will the movie start? Will it be super loud? Will it scare me? Even with the barrage of questions we were all so elated our children were excited we could not find frustration with the amount of activity and questioning. Those little voices all melding into a chorus, the song, “Monsters versus Aliens”.

Matthew ingested everything around him. That handsome mini human that belongs to me, in his blue jeans and old navy t-shirt. Hand selected by him for this special occasion. His body vibrated, his ears adjusting to the many levels of song in the room, his hands felt the softness of the brick red chair fabric, and the hard yet cold feeling of the rusty metal.

His big brown eyes as round as saucers, watching his new environment. The look of surprise, his mouth wide open, as he tries to analyze everything that’s flooding his body. All five of his senses at their capacity, and about to hit overload head on! Then finally the look of pure joy that washed across his face as he tasted that sweet yet salty container of popcorn. His tiny hand poised to invade the container again and again.....

Then the room grew silent, like a blanket had fallen over top of the crowd, so silent I could hear my heart beating with anticipation. I snapped the photograph, the lights went out and there we sat for what seemed like an eternity but was not more than seconds, the previews started. Shhhhhhhh.....

JUDGE’S COMMENTS

The frantic pace of “Monsters Vs. Aliens” mirrors the excitement a family feels about a child’s first trip to a movie theater. This essay is rich with sensory detail, which allows the reader to see a movie theater from the perspective of a child who has never been to one. The author’s use of humorous dialogue is an effective means of characterizing her son. This piece is a refreshing reminder to enjoy life’s simple pleasures, including buttered popcorn.

Elissa Cahn was the contest judge. She is an MFA Fiction student at Western Michigan University, where she teaches composition and serves as the nonfiction editor for Third Coast. Her work has appeared in: NANO Fiction, Midwestern Gothic, Harpur Palate, and Quarterly West. She is currently at work on a story collection.