

Liti Nguyen

English 1102M

Valerie Morrison

September 14, 2007



Life's Lessons at Lunch

Today was the most unforgettable day of my life; I took the five year old version of me out to lunch. I know that seems quite impossible, but I did. I'll forever be grateful I did because I learned more from her than I have from any other person.

A little before noon I went to pick up my little friend, but she hid from me.

“Come out, little Liti!” I called.

She didn't answer or appear.

“We're going out to lunch! That means free food!” I added, knowing that little kids loved free food.

I heard giggling in the background and immediately knew that she was playing a game with me, so I decided to play along. Now where would I hide if I were a little kid? Before I could do or say anything, she came up from behind me.

“Boo!” she exclaimed.

I jumped and watched as she laughed at her successful hide and my obviously failed seek.

“Fooled you!” She stuck her tongue out at me.

“Fine, Ti,” I said as I called her by the nickname given to me by my parents and close relatives. “You win. You're very sneaky; you know that?” She smiled. “Now where would you like to eat lunch?”

“Chuck E. Cheese! Chuck E. Cheese! Chuck E. Cheese!”

“Chuck E. Cheese, it is then.”

“Yay!”

I'd forgotten how much I loved that place as a kid. I didn't care too much for the food since my main focus was on the games. Hundreds of games as far as the eye could see greeted me as soon as I walked through the door, all of them wanting my attention and enticing me with their fun. I would have stayed for hours and hours if it weren't for my parents.

When Ti and I arrived, she wanted to jump into the games right away, but I wouldn't let her. She had to finish her food first, and even with her pouting, I managed to stand my ground. Now I know how my parents must have felt when I was younger, but I guess it wasn't so bad because I was their only child. I ordered pepperoni pizza for both of us and waited for it to come.

“I never see you anymore,” I said to Ti, trying to start a conversation. “How are you doing? How's school?”

“Good,” she replied.

“Did you learn anything?”

“I play with pudding!” Ti jumped up and down in her seat.

She played with pudding. *I* want to play with pudding! I'm stuck learning about anti-derivatives in calculus and complex molecule structures in chemistry, and *she* gets to play with pudding? That is so not fair!

“And,” Ti added, “I spell 'kite' all by myself.”

I smiled. What else could you do in that situation? I do remember asking the correct spelling of 'kite' in kindergarten and getting it right. I was so proud of myself; little things like that always made me happy. Now it seems as if I can't get anything right.

I was about to ask her my next question when she turned the tables on me.

“What grade are you in?” Ti asked.

“I'm in college,” I replied.

“College? Cool! I'm going next year!”

“Really?”

“Yes!”

“Wow.”

“You silly goose.”

I tried my best not to laugh, but her remark was so cute. Another thing I loved about Ti, besides the fact that she was absolutely adorable, was her innocence. All she knew was that she was in a happy, safe little world. Mom and Dad did their best to shield me from the dangers of this earth. They grew up in a war torn country and were refugees of the Vietnam War, having their best friends end up missing or killed in battle and living their lives in constant fear that someone would attack. They arrived separately in America and married in 1988. I was born a year later, becoming a first generation American in the family. Whenever I looked at Ti, I

thought about how lucky she is. Not only does she have the opportunity our parents didn't have when they grew up, but she doesn't know about the bad things that are yet to come.

When I was seven years old, I was diagnosed with Bells Palsy, a type of facial paralysis that affects half of the face. Since I was so young at the time, I didn't care that one side of my face was swollen or that I couldn't really close my eye or talk or that I looked a bit different compared to everyone else. However, Bells Palsy hit me four more times with three of those occurrences happening within a six month span in high school. High schoolers, regardless of the grade, are particularly shallow when it comes to appearances, so having such an illness is devastating. The person with the paralysis has no idea how long it will last, and even when it's over, the nerve damage and sagging on the affected side of the face will remain forever.

Another moment that altered my life greatly was when my father was diagnosed with gall bladder cancer. It's a type of cancer so rare that the doctor made a disheartening comparison. He claimed that the odds of winning the lottery were actually higher than getting gall bladder cancer. Mom tried her best to hide her fear of Dad's potential death from me and did everything humanly possible to keep our family from falling apart. Somehow the thought of my father's death never occurred to me. Maybe it was because I was too young to understand what was going on at the time. Miraculously, he survived chemotherapy and radiation but not without serious complications. After a seven year roller coaster ride, Dad is as close to normal as he possibly can get.

Just as I was about to ask about the status of our food, the waitress finally arrived with our freshly made pepperoni pizza. Ti automatically grabbed a slice and started shoving it into her mouth. I had to tell her that it was not ladylike to put large amounts of food into her mouth at one

time, and it wouldn't be good on her stomach. That was when I noticed major differences between her and me.

Ti had a carefree spirit about her and didn't have a care in the world about what anyone else said about her. She just lived for the moment and did what made her happy. I, on the other hand, am a bit more conscious of myself and pay a little more attention to what people say about me. I don't open up very easily to people, especially to people I've just met, and I'm only comfortable around people that I've known for a considerable amount of time. Ti was more willing to take risks; she wanted to go on the highest jungle gym there. I took one look at it and was scared half to death. Also, she was more willing to actually talk to people unlike me. I tend to contemplate about what I want to say beforehand to avoid offending anyone. That's when it hit me: I needed to be more like Ti.

Even if I'm scared of heights now, I can still make risks. Why not talk to someone I haven't talked to before? Why not try to cook something and not have it explode in my face? I have nothing to lose, except probably my pride and dignity if something goes wrong. That's the choice I have to make; it's not called a "risk" for nothing. Even though 5 year old Ti may still be young at heart, she's very wise.

After finishing our pepperoni pizza, Ti begged for permission to play on the highest jungle gym, and I let her. I was even willing to go with her, but she wanted to go alone. I agreed but kept a watchful eye on her. She was doing pretty well until she fell down. I rushed over to her, and she held on to her leg.

"I have a boo boo!" she cried. Tears started piling up in her eyes.

I didn't know what to do, so I picked her up into my arms and held her. Ti put her arms around my neck for support.

“It's okay,” I said softly. “Do you hurt anywhere else?”

“No.”

“Good.”

Ti's fall reminded me of something else. I, too, was a klutz. I still am one to be perfectly honest. However, I'm glad that even with the passing of time that some things haven't changed.