With Every Moment

I never knew that life could be both chaotic and peaceful until I started spending time on the pier. Quiet and bustling were antonyms that in my mind could never go together to describe anything, but they were in fact both words that perfectly summarized my experiences at this place.

The pier was a slab of ugly old concrete that extended out into the ocean located right off of a busy road where cars blared their horns and revved their engines in the middle of the small town of Rye, New York. Parents were screaming and children were crying as they were dragged out of the beach club right next to the pier while teenagers squealed with gossip as they were entering it.

The water surrounding the pier was calm and the view was simple and looked on to Manhattan’s tall skyscrapers, which served as a constant reminder of what there was waiting further out in the world. Even if you went to the very end, you were still close enough to shore to hear all the commotion going on as others continued on with their day. At the same time, the pier was also a very isolated place. There are never more then two or three other random wanders on it at a time; probably since many people opt to go to the nicer boardwalk, Playland, which was across town.

My dad first brought me here when I was about six years old, but being that young I never appreciated being pulled away from whatever I was doing and I didn’t realize all this place had to offer. It wasn’t until I found myself really needing that separation that I wandered back to the pier. You can hear yourself think and also get a moment to remove yourself from your
reality, even though the buzzing world continues on no more then three steps in front of you. And that's just what I love about the pier. It never lets you distance yourself too far from the actuality of your busy world and at the same time it still serves as a place where you can break free for a moment of reflection and clarity.

That wasn't all the pier did for me. If I ever caught a moment where I found myself completely alone, I'd walk to the very end of the pier and and sit down on the bench right in front of the metal rods that blocked me from the ocean. I could envision myself, reaching through them, dipping my hand into the water in front of me, and feeling connected again with the person who I wished I was with the most.

My friend John loved anything that involved water. Surfing, swimming, sailing and all other water activities you could think of, if there was an ocean involved, he was intrigued. I never understood his obsession with the water but also never really questioned it. Anyone that knew John knew that there was nothing better then the energy, enthusiasm, and smile that would come from him when he knew his days would be centered around the ocean. It was that energy and enthusiasm that got John to convince everyone to spend July 4th at the beach, and it was that same energy and enthusiasm that led him to swim out deeper into the water while everyone else stayed closer to shore. The ocean was John’s true love, but unlike most other eternal lovers who hold the ultimate promise of “till death do us part” death did not part them, it only bonded them closer together, forever.

On one specific night at the pier an array of orange, pinks, reds, yellows, and light purples raided the sky and swirled together leaving the view looking like an artists perfectly set paint pallet. The warm colors sunk into the water below them leaving a lasting reflection on its surface. Spilling over the sailboats that lined up in the ocean and staining the clouds above, it
was as if the sunset was trying to touch everything in its view. Colors so majestic and bold that they couldn’t even be dimmed by the cool and dark concrete that made up the pier that stood directly in its path. It was the sun’s ultimate production and showcase before it let darkness take over the world for a few hours, and the people patiently watching on the pier were its lucky audience.

My friend Maddie and I got the parking spot in front of the pier that looked straight on to the sunset. It was February and the temperature outside was in the mid 30s so we stayed trapped inside her 2001 Honda Accord enjoying the heat and getting ready to eat the sandwiches that we had brought with us.

“Do you think people would think it was weird that we came here just to be in the car and sit”, Maddie asked me. “Probably”, I responded, right before taking a bite of my food and turning up the music that had just been serving as background noise.

About two minutes later a blue SUV pulled right into the spot next to us. Inside was a woman, probably in her mid forties, with short blonde hair. There was something about her solemn facial expression that told us right away what she was there to do. She hopped out of her car, wrapped in all her winter gear and walked to the bench at the end of the pier. Maddie and I couldn’t seem to keep our eyes off of her as she continued.

All of a sudden, the woman crouched down slightly, and began to cry. Tears poured down her face. It was as if we could hear her sobbing and feel her pain. She rocked back and fourth and held her chest, crying harder and harder as time went by. We must have sat there watching her for about fifteen minutes. Then, all of a sudden she took a very big and deep breath. As she rose from the bench that had just inhaled all of her sorrow, the woman wiped her tears
and took a moment to collect herself. She quickly made her way back to the car, still working on her composure.

After she drove away Maddie and I sat in silence. Something about that moment struck both of us. We had just watched someone fall apart and lose control of themselves. Without any other words and a few tears lingering in our own eyes, Maddie turned on her car and started driving away. Both of us thinking of the woman the entire way home.

It wasn't until a couple days later that everything started to make sense. While aimlessly flipping through the local newspaper, The Rye Record, a photo of the woman I had seen at the pier seemed to jump off the page. It was her standing there, hugging a boy who looked to be in his early twenties. My eyes wandered to the top of the page, “Obituaries”, there was a sudden pang in my chest. “In loving memory of”, boom, the pang was back. My heart slowly began to shatter and I swelled with sorrow as I began to realize why this woman had broken down in front of me that day on the pier. After reading the description on the side of the picture it became clear that the woman who I saw was crying over the recent loss of her son.

After experiencing my own form of loss and tragedy when my dear friend John passed away I found myself feeling more connected to that woman I saw the day on the pier- one of the people that was furthest removed from my life- than I had ever felt before. There’s a certain beauty and courage that comes with allowing yourself to spare no feelings and lose total control of your emotions in an effort to try and process any form of grief. Now every time that I find myself sitting on that same bench at the very end of the pier, I feel both John’s soul and the emotions and bravery of that woman that are still absorbed by the dark old bench wood lending me their strength to become vulnerable and accept the sorrow that will ultimately lead me to closure. I will never understand why life feels the need to put us all through such trials and
tragedies, but I now further recognize and appreciate that life is always happening, and happening fast. The value of each and every moment that you have is unmeasurable and irreplaceable. Even the most insignificant of times can amount to hold much importance and serve as precious time that one day wish we could get back.

The pier has always been my sweet escape and the place that I’ve turned too for a moment that doesn't require a horrible withdrawal once your time is over and you are forced to turn back around and continue living. But as I’ve grown from overcoming and working through some of the things that have happened in my life, the meaning of the pier has grown with me. My time there also shown me that even when someone is physically gone, there are still so many things around us that can bring our souls closer to theirs making us feel like we are still with them. And now, the pier will forever be the place that I can go to reconnect, not just with John, but also with the woman who pulled up next to me in the blue SUV that one cold night in February.