

Standing on My Driveway

Michaela McLoughlin as a child

Standing on my driveway, I am overcome with my childhood yearning.

Long and twisted, my driveway stretches from my big, cold, tan, Mediterranean house to the smooth newly paved jet-black road. It is lined with large, tope boulders and huge fifty-foot eucalyptus trees. The gray gravel walk way winds and turns and raises and drops until it reaches a huge verdigris gate. Here my driveway stops, just short of the smooth black asphalt of the road.

At this place, my memories come alive. Almost like a mirage, a big, white Ford truck creeps slowly down the driveway beside me, and I see my father's long muscular arm stretch outside the window to wave at me. Here at this place, the blazing sorrow of my childhood is rekindled.

As a little girl, I would sit in the middle of my long, winding driveway and watch my father leave home. Sitting there naked on the rocky pathway in an almost comatose state, I was numb to everything except the sharp, cold gravel that dug into my bottom and legs. I would stare at him as he forced huge black suitcases into the small cabin of his Ford and ignore him as he sung out my name to help. I had to be strong; I had to be immune to all emotion.

Sitting on the ground, I observed the wind tug on his shirt as if it were trying to hold him back and prevent him from leaving. Internally, I cheered it on, hoping that it could keep him home with me, but it never worked. It could never hinder him from getting into his truck, and likewise I couldn't. Twice a month he left, sometimes for a week, other times for two, but it never became easier. I would always miss him.

Each time he left, he would fade away from my memory. First I would forget his strong almost heroic voice, then his wrinkled face, and finally his thick Irish body. In the end, all I would remember was a strong intense, overwhelming feeling that he invoked in me when he was around: security. This is what I missed most when he was away. I missed feeling safe.

As a child, I never understood when he would come back. He packed for what seemed like months, years, or even decades. In some part, I suppose I wondered if he would even come back at all. At that age, I couldn't comprehend why he needed to leave or whom he was leaving to see. All I understood was that he went out for money. But why did he have to leave me when other fathers were capable of earning money without ever leaving their families? Why were we separated so often?

I thought about this when he would open the heavy white driver's door, sit down on the white, sheepskin seat cover, and start the engine. Reluctantly, I would walk over and stick my head into the window. He would then lean his head out and kiss me. I remember trying desperately to absorb his face- his hazel eyes, thick black eyebrows, strong Norwegian nose, and glistening black hair with its perfect strip of white. He was the most handsome man I had ever seen, and I had to let him go.

After he kissed me, he would tell me he loved me, and then release the brake. Slowly, he would creep down the driveway, crunching the gray gravel as he went. Walking behind, I would see the iron gate open and him turn left. Then his giant muscular arm would stretch out of the window, and he would wave to me goodbye.

Overcome with emotion, I would feel my eyes begin to sting and hot streams of pain drip onto my cheeks and into my mouth. I could stand naked there hysterically crying for what seemed like forever, until I would feel my mother's soft skin brush against my cheek. She would pick me up wrapping her long delicate arms around me and whisper into my ear, "Don't worry Mickey, he'll be back. He leaves because he loves us."

