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The Growth of a Seedling

Preface

“The Growth of a Seedling” came from the idea of the Parable of a Mustard Seed. This parable appears three different times in the Bible, emphasizing its importance. In Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus talks about how the “smallest of all seeds” grows into the “largest of garden plants.” This minuscule seed eventually sprouts deep roots into the ground which make the base of the tree strong. It then begins to grow and becomes a tremendous tree, hearty enough to withstand even the harshest storms and chilliest frosts.

Our anthology mimics the parable in the sense that we are illustrating the growth of a seed in comparison to the lives of the women from Connections For Life. We too start as an embryonic seed, grow into a young sapling, and finally burgeon into a massive tree. Through the seeds’ three basic phases of life—growing against the odds, perseverance and steadfastness, and overcoming—we too can be able to withstand any type of weather. The three poems we chose represent these three necessities.

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Selected by: Hannah Pickard

The Rose that Grew from Concrete
Tupac Shakur

Did you hear about the rose that grew
from a crack in the concrete?
Proving nature's law is wrong it
learned to walk with out having feet.
Funny it seems, but by keeping it's dreams,
it learned to breathe fresh air.
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
when no one else ever cared.

This poem is themed around ambition and beating the odds. Most people would disbelieve that a rose could sprout from concrete since this hostile growing environment is atypical for a rose. Shakur uses personification in lines 6-8, giving a rose the qualities of a human. The rose is proving nature wrong by “learn[ing] to walk with out [sic] having feet” (Shakur 4). Such a feat is analogous to a young student prodigy growing up amidst abject poverty but rising above the suffocating malaise of his environs. The rose has the ability to hold fast to its dreams, another innate quality of a person.

This rose could symbolize the women at Connections For Life. Faultfinding people could glance at the women's pasts with reproach and claim that ex-offenders are incapable of reforming their illicit lifestyles. Like the rose, the ladies of CFL can again learn “to breathe fresh air”(Shakur 9) by clinging to their dreams of recovering. People who haven't taken the time to get to know the ladies may prejudge that they are degenerates or “lost causes.” The ladies have demonstrated through their gregarious qualities that they are working to better themselves — whether others care or not — they are going to be the rose that grew from concrete.

Selected by: Hannah Pickard

An Old Cracked Tune
Stanly Kunitz

My name is Solomon Levi,
the desert is my home,
my mother's breast was thorny,
and father I had none.

The sands whispered, Be separate,
the stones taught me, Be hard.
I dance, for the joy of surviving,
on the edge of the road.

“An Old Cracked Tune” has very vivid imagery, describing a breast as thorny and dancing for the joy of surviving. This poem also contains personification as the sands and stones can talk and teach. Solomon Levi has no father and doesn’t get along well with his mother. Essentially, he lacks any human companionship and is living in the desert. He could give up, just as the ladies at Connections For Life could have, but the sand and the stones commanded him to stay motivated, to persevere.

The ladies had an experience similar to that of Solomon Levi: prison was their home, an undesirable place, like the desert. The ladies also had to have some inner voice whispering to them, imploring them to turn their life around. The sand could represent their internal feelings or the positive influence of a good friend, while the stones perhaps signify a caring family member. The poem is germane to the metaphor of “growing from unexpected places” because Kunitz is shows Levi's survival despite unfavorable surroundings.

Selected by: Hannah Pickard

Unstoppable
Rascal Flatts

So, so you made a lot of mistakes
Walked down the road a little sideways
Cracked a brick when you hit the wall
Yeah, you've had a pocketfull of regrets
Pull you down faster than a sunset
Hey, it happens to us all
When the cold, hard rain just won't quit
And you can't see your way out of it

[Chorus]

You find your faith that's been lost and shaken
You take back what's been taken
Get on your knees and dig down deep
You can do what you think is impossible
Keep on believing, don't give in
It'll come and make you whole again
It always will, it always does
Love is unstoppable

Love, it can weather any storm
Bring you back to being born, again
Oh, it's the helping hand
When you needed it most
The lighthouse shining on the coast
That never goes dim
When your heart is full of doubt
As you think that there's no way out

[Chorus]

You find your faith that's been lost and shaken
You take back what's been taken
Get on your knees and dig down deep
You can do what you think is impossible
Keep on believing, don't give in
It'll come and make you whole again
It always will, it always does
Love is unstoppable

It's unstoppable

Like a river keeps on rollin'

Like a north wind blowin'
Don't it feel good knowin'
Yeah--

[Chorus]

You find your faith that's been lost and shaken
You take back what's been taken
Get on your knees and dig down deep
You can do what you think is impossible
Keep on believing, don't give in
It'll come and make you whole again
It always will, it always does
Love is unstoppable

Love is unstoppable
So, so you made a lot of mistakes
Walked down the road a little sideways
But love, love is unstoppable

This song qualifies as good poetry because it reveals something about the human condition: namely it informs us that even after one has made mistakes, if one loves oneself and accepts and learns from one's mistakes, "love is unstoppable" (Rascal Flatts 16). "Love" here could specifically refer to love from a significant other, or it could mean contentedness. The ladies at Connections For Life have admitted their mistakes and would surely admit to regretting what they have done. Through their time at CFL, I think the ladies have experienced the meanings inherent to this song. They have accepted what they used to regret and now are encouraged to believe in themselves, because they can accomplish whatever they set their mind to, and through this can achieve happiness. This song can relate to the metaphor of "growing from unexpected places" because it tells us that even after you've "hit the wall" (Flatts 3) and you "cant see your way out" (Flatts 8), you can become "whole again" (Flatts 15), meaning that one can grow and achieve happiness even in the face of formidable odds.

Selected by: Trevor Fanning

All That Is Gold Does Not Glitter
J. R. R. Tolkien

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost. 4

From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king. 8 (Tolkien)

This pithy work contains just two stanzas of ABAB rhyme scheme. For the sake of analysis, it is helpful to divide the poem into three distinct segments: the first couplet, the second couplet, and the second stanza. From this perspective, Tolkien's poem touches on deceptive appearances, durability in adverse conditions, and unexpected renewal. We believe these themes are three cornerstones for your lives in CFL. The first couplet, "All that is gold does not glitter," (Tolkien 1) translates to the old adage "don't judge a book by its cover." For example, judgmental people might be leery of someone with a criminal record; in actuality their presumptions are specious. After all, one can sieve gold among the mud. I can personally attest that Ms. Susanne and Ms. Lynette are some of the sweetest women I've met, and one would never guess at the scars of their pasts *a priori*. We do reality a crass injustice when we try to shoehorn all its alien and multifarious forms into old and threadbare stereotypes. If we search only for glitter, we might find nothing except fool's gold.

The second, "Deep roots are not reached by the frost" (Tolkien 4), hails the value of endurance and the strength to outlast one's hardships by virtue of being entrenched in life. The frost signifies harsh conditions of life, while the roots are themselves a branching system of connections for life. The opportunities at CFL are a fertile soil in which to grow. Lastly, the second stanza portends a rekindling of life from dormant places, and finally prophesizes an exiled hero's return to power (the character Aragorn in the Lord of the Rings trilogy). "From the ashes a fire shall be woken" (Tolkien 5), emphasizes the future restoration of a proud heritage. The path the women have chosen through CFL is one brimming with promise and glad tidings to come.

You will ignore fleeting temptations to return to negative behaviors of the past

The more ingrained your routine in CFL has become, the easier it has become to weather these distractions and setbacks.

Selected by: Trevor Fanning

Sweet-Apple
James Stephens

At the end of the bough, at the top of the tree
(As fragrant, as high, and as lovely as thou)
One sweet apple reddens which all men may see,
At the end of the bough.

Swinging full to the view, tho' the gatherers now
Pass, and evade, and o'erlook busily:
Overlook! nay, but pluck it! they cannot tell how.

For it swings out of reach as a cloud, and as free
As a star, or thy beauty, which seems too, I vow,
Remote as the sweet rosy apple--ah me!
At the end of the bough.

(Stephens, 199)

This short work by the Irish poet James Stephens is most easily read as a garden-variety, unctuous poem about unrequited love. Notwithstanding, some interesting features redeem it from being consigned to the recycling bin for prattles of feelings. For instance, it is curious that the gatherers overlook the sweet, reddening apple, visible to all. It seems they would rather grasp for the low-hanging fruit than stretch out to seize this lofty, attractive apple. Here, the fragrant, plump apple fixed at the end of the bough is similar to Tupac Shakur's "Rose that Grew from Concrete" in that both comely plants have somehow been ignored by all.

In CFL, perhaps the most arduous growth comes when no one is present to watch the progress, incite one to keep moving forward, or appraise the final outcome. The tree's most beautiful product remains inaccessible. The rhyme scheme is in an alternating AB format.

Selected by: Trevor Fanning

When the Ripe Fruit Falls
D.H. Lawrence

When the ripe fruit falls
its sweetness distills and trickles away
into the veins of the earth.

When fulfilled people die
the essential oil of their experience enters
the veins of living space, and adds a glisten
to the atom, to the body of immortal chaos.

For space is alive
and it stirs like a swan
whose feathers glisten
silky with the oil of distilled experience.

(Lawrence, 228)

It would seem that great people in life make great, allegorical fertilizer in death. It is certainly true that important, deceased figures are remembered and lionized by other human beings for their contributions to the world. The first stanza is a metaphor for this idea, while the second stanza is its literal expression. The third stanza elaborates on Lawrence's theory. The poem espouses a variation on the philosophical concept of the "eternal return." Somehow, the triumphs of our existence are condensed into a rich residuum at the end of our natural life, and this nectar is cycled back into the earth.

For the women in CFL, we hope to convey that leading by example is a crucial role for them as matriarchs in their families and in their community.

Selected by: Julia Glenn

Climbing
Amy Lowell

High up in the apple tree climbing I go,
With the sky above me, the earth below. 2
Each branch is the step of a wonderful stair
Which leads to the town I see shining up there. 4
Climbing, climbing, higher and higher,
The branches blow and I see a spire, 6
The gleam of a turret, the glint of a dome,
All sparkling and bright, like white sea foam. 8
On and on, from bough to bough,
The leaves are thick, but I push my way through; 10
Before, I have always had to stop,
But to-day I am sure I shall reach the top. 12
Today to the end of the marvelous stair,
Where those glittering pinnacles flash in the air! 14
Climbing, climbing, higher I go,
With the sky close above me, the earth far below 16

Amy Lowell was known to be a vivacious and outspoken woman. Always one to push boundaries, she sought to change the world of poetry and lived to create poems defined by the Imagist Movement (Academy of Amer.). Her poem “Climbing” represents this form of poetry completely. Filled with clear and descriptive language, she beautifully describes the process of fulfilling ones goals regardless of the tribulations that stand in the way. Categorized by a free verse rhyming phrase, rhyming the last words of each completed line, she metaphorically compares the branches of a tall apple tree to the stairs of life “Each branch is the step of a wonderful stair, which leads to the town I see shining up there” (Lowell 3-4). The leaves of the tree are also symbolically seen as roadblocks or detours that in the past stopped the progression to the top — “The leaves are thick, but I push my way through; Before, I have always had to stop, But to-day I am sure I shall reach the top” (Lowell 10-12).

In doing this we see the struggle of reaching our goals but also the rewarding promise that awaits us when we do finally get there. Perseverance, the theme and determining factor in succeeding, rings throughout this poem, and is shown even through the repetition of the phrase “Climbing, climbing, higher” (Lowell 15). No matter the circumstances that we each have to deal with, we all have to recognize that it is our responsibility to take ownership for our life and have the will to flourish and prosper.

Selected by: Julia Glenn

Mother to Son
Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. 2
 It's had tacks in it,
 And splinters, 4
 And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor— 6
 Bare.
 But all the time 8
 I've been a-climbin' on,
 And reachin' landin's, 10
 And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark 12
 Where there ain't been no light.
 So, boy, don't you turn back. 14
 Don't you set down on the steps.
 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard. 16
 Don't you fall now—
 For I've still goin', honey,
 I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Through the skillful use of poetic devices such as repetition, symbolism and metaphors, Langston Hughes paints an image of perseverance and strength. Through the viewpoint of the mother in the form of advice to her son, she relates that though life may have many hurdles, you can overcome them with determination and courage. This theme is represented fully by Hughes metaphorically comparing the mother's life to a staircase (Hughes 2), and using items such as tacks and splinters to represent the discomfort and pain in life's obstacles and the feeling of being helpless to overcome this adversity (Hughes 4-5). The repetition of "and" seems to highlight the unending cycle of trials that the mother must go through in order to succeed in "climbing the stairs." However, it is within stanza two that we see the mother's strong will and inability to simply quit because of life's circumstances, "But all the time, I've been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners" (Hughes 8-11). This drive to attain something better in life than what is default is a valuable lesson that we all can relate to.

Selected by: Julia Glenn

Success is counted sweetest
Emily Dickinson

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need. 4

Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory 8

As he defeated--dying--
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear! 12

In this poem, Emily Dickinson provides a view of success tinged by pessimistic hues, arguing that success is more truly experienced by those who *fail* — “Success is counted sweetest, By those who ne'er succeed” (Dickinson 1-2). It can also be said that for the true experience of life one must feel failure, because failure is inevitable. It’s what we learn from these failures that teaches us much more than success could. Dickinson also relates that success tastes sweeter to the person who has persevered very hard for it, than to a person who has found success effortlessly, “To comprehend a nectar, requires sorest need” (Dickinson 3). Those who experience adversity and hardships rather than those who experience nothing feel success truly.

Selected by: Haroon Mujahid

Hope Is the Thing With Feathers
Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,
And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

Emily Dickinson's "Hope is the Thing With Feathers," is the fourth part of a much larger poem called "Life" and assesses the abstract idea of hope in the free spirit of a bird (Essortment). The poem has an irregular ABAB rhyme scheme. From the very first stanza, Dickinson gives vivid imagery of a bird, e.g. "That perches..." (Dickinson line 2), "Sings the tune" (Dickinson 3), and sets up the metaphor that compares hope to a bird. Feathers represent freedom as they allow birds to fly. By giving hope wings she begins to create an image of hope in our minds. This poem, therefore, ties well with our extended theme of the mustard seed. To overcome odds, the seed must have hope. Also, the next stanza creates an image of a bird's song of hope whistling above the sound of gale force winds "and offering the promise that soon the storm will end" (Essortment). So, this parallels our theme of persistence and perseverance, to which a seedling or tree must constantly commit. She finally ends by expressing what a person feels like when he abandons hope ("abash the little bird" (Dickinson 8)), i.e., they are not kept "warm" and thus are venerable.

Everyone, including the ladies at Connections For Life, has had a point in their lives where they have felt dissatisfaction or have been disheartened by prevailing circumstances, and this poem speaks directly to these people. Surely, the ladies have faced episodes unfathomable by most, but without hope, their example would be that of the abashed bird in this poem. Dickinson, sends the message of keeping hope alive and striving forward.

Selected by: Haroon Mujahid

Sonnet 60
William Shakespeare

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

Like the other sonnets that define Shakespeare's work, this sonnet is also organized into the quatrain/quatrain/quatrain/couplet structure where each quatrain represents its own metaphorical theme of the passage of human life (Booth 239) and is a good example for our theme of the seed, which follows the seed through its cycle (symbolizing the human life cycle). Each quatrain follows the ABAB rhyme scheme. In the first quatrain, the cycle of the ocean waves is juxtaposed with the cycle of human life, and each "sequent toil" (Shakespeare 4) comes forward and replaces the other. This poem parallels our theme of the seed even more in the second quatrain where Shakespeare compares the life cycle with the sun and how it crawls to maturity and then crowns the sky. This signifies not just the prevailing theme of human life cycle, but also that fact that the sun has to "crawl" to its maturity just like the seed struggling to become an elegant tree. The poem has vivid imagery in each quatrain, and I especially appreciate that the eclipse overcomes the sun. Yes, this poem is mostly about how time runs its due course, and that we are sometimes helpless, but it also conveys that each thing must understand "...thy [time's] worth" (Shakespeare 14).

The poem connects with the ladies at CFL because it reflects on the brevity of life. While time does have "a cruel hand" (Shakespeare 14), in "Praising thy worth" (Shakespeare 14), the ladies would be able to reach their goals. By describing the cycle of life, the poet makes us appreciate and value time, and strive in the hopes that "[our] verse shall stand" (Shakespeare 13).

Selected by: Haroon Mujahid

The Eclipse
Richard Eberhart

I stood out in the open cold
To see the essence of the eclipse
Which was its perfect darkness.
I stood in the cold on the porch
And could not think of anything so perfect
As man's hope of light in the face of darkness.

This poem by Richard Eberhart does not follow a particular rhyme scheme, and is rather a free verse. It uses vivid imagery of an eclipse and the darkness that entails this phenomenon to describe how the speaker feels about this occurrence. Hope comes in many forms, and for the speaker, this “perfect darkness” (Eberhart 3), though unorthodox, proves to be “light in the face of darkness” (Eberhart 6). The way we all manage adversities is different, as was discussed in our presentation's epilogue, and these differences, along with the way we manage what fate beholds, is what sets one mustard seed apart from another. The brevity of the poem makes the theme of the poem even more apparent and thus emphasis on the individuality of the speaker.

This poem helps us, and the ladies at CFL, realize that the path we take at the end to tackle obstacles will be our own. People may help us, but how we see things is not necessarily the way others see them.

Selected by: Shannon Malbrough

Stand
Rascal Flatts

You feel like a candle in a hurricane
Just like a picture with a broken frame
Alone and helpless
Like you've lost your fight
But you'll be alright, you'll be alright

[Chorus:]

Cause when push comes to shove
You taste what you're made of
You might bend, till you break
Cause its all you can take
On your knees you look up
Decide you've had enough
You get mad you get strong
Wipe your hands shake it off
Then you Stand, Then you stand

Life's like a novel
With the end ripped out
The edge of a canyon
With only one way down
Take what you're given before its gone
Start holding on, keep holding on

Cause when push comes to shove
You taste what you're made of
You might bend till you break
Cause it's all you can take
On your knees you look up
Decide you've had enough
You get mad, you get strong
Wipe your hands, shake it off
Then you stand, then you stand

Everytime you get up
And get back in the race
One more small piece of you
Starts to fall into place
Oh

[Repeat Chorus]

“Stand” pertains to trudging through hard times and overcoming one's struggles. One may be “alone and helpless” (Flatts 3), at the outset, but eventually one will resolve the stress and palliate one's circumstances. Rascal Flatts also describe how one can make one's own ending to life in the lines “Life’s like a novel/With the end ripped out” (Flatts 15-16). The band is conveying that destiny falls into one's own hands. All one must do is be strong and “Stand”—stand up for yourself and for what is right. The ladies at Connections For Life have the opportunity to change the ending to their stories, and that is exactly what they are trying to accomplish. They were the ones bending and straining, and finally they broke. This song relates to our project's driving metaphor because here one is starting over and growing into what one wants to become. One is overcoming obstacles (starting over from a small seed) and choosing one's own destiny (growing into a large tree).

Selected by: Shannon Malbrough

See It Through
Edgar Guest

When you're up against a trouble,
Meet it squarely, face to face;
Lift your chin and set your shoulders,
Plant your feet and take a brace.
When it's vain to try to dodge it,
Do the best that you can do;
You may fail, but you may conquer,
See it through!

Black may be the clouds about you
And your future may seem grim,
But don't let your nerve desert you;
Keep yourself in fighting trim.
If the worst is bound to happen,
Spite of all that you can do,
Running from it will not save you,
See it through!

Even hope may seem but futile,
When with troubles you're beset,
But remember you are facing
Just what other men have met.
You may fail, but fall still fighting;
Don't give up, whate'er you do;
Eyes front, head high to the finish.
See it through!

Edgar emphasizes through the writing of poetry that one must overcome any obstacle regardless of the toll it may have previously exacted, and irrespective of how harrowing the prospects for completion now seem! The poem is prominent because it presents a clear message; this straightforward conception of perseverance is unique precisely because Edgar wished to be unequivocal and avoid readers' misinterpreting an ambiguous poem.

We believe this poem is applicable to the state of affairs the women from CFL are now faced with because it deals with maintaining resolve and one's inner cool in the midst of dire straits and frightful foes. The dark clouds may be seen to symbolize inner demons, such as the tantalizing itch of drug addiction. Acquiescing to these nefarious urges, however, is tantamount to giving in – one must instead resist stalwartly until sobriety and a healthy life have triumphed over the vices of the past. “See it through!”

Selected by: Shannon Malbrough

Tree
Laura Green

The world a blur to most
Most see a tree as a tree
The day you actually see
When the world is not the same world
A tree is no longer a tree
A tree is something that bears fruit
A tree is something beautiful
Even in the harshest winds
A tree stands its ground
A tree with leaves of majestic green
No longer just a tree
But a tree that is a work of art
That is the day you see the world
That is the day the world comes into focus
That is the day you truly see the tree

Green is expressing from a detached standpoint a mundane perception — most people think of a tree as just a tree, similar to an unremarkable human individual. That person is but an advanced hominid creature, living his or her undistinguished life among a pool of several billion others. However, Green goes on to note that eventually one realizes the tree is indeed not merely a featureless, static tree, but a living entity that has to withstand the “harshest winds” (Green 8) to remain as immense as it is. The “leaves of majestic green” (Green 10) are what give the tree character, and each tree is distinguished by its variegated shades.

This relates to our life and to the ladies at Connections For Life because, they too, may have previously viewed life as “just a tree”, but have now persisted through struggles that have consequently adduced them to realize the cosmic importance of life. The last line “that is the day you truly see the tree” (Green 15) can relate to the ladies departure from prison. That was the exalted day they decided to do adjust the azimuths and sails of their lives, to overcome the winds and the struggles, and to bloom into a towering tree from an infinitesimal mustard seed. Although they seemingly had *nothing* coming out of prison (akin to the bereft Miss Lonely of Bob Dylan's “Like a Rolling Stone”), Connections For Life has enabled them to better themselves and has catalyzed their seizure of power over the direction of their lives toward transmogrifying into stronger women.

Selected by: Tim Tryforos

Perseverance
By Anne Stortz

When all the world is looming dark
And things seem not so clear,
When shadows seem to hover 'round
Lord, may I persevere.

When it seems everything's been tried
And there's no way to go,
Just let me keep remembering
Sometimes the journey's slow.

I may just need to stop and rest
Along the path I trod,
A time to try to understand
And have my talk with God.

As I gain new strength to carry on
Without a doubt or fear,
Somehow I know things will be right,
And so, I persevere.

Perseverance requires strength, belief, and determination. When one perseveres, one becomes stronger as time goes on. If one possesses negative, self-inhibiting notions, these self-castigating ideas will only serve to debilitate, and one will not become stronger. As Stortz writes, “the journey is slow,” (Stortz, 8) — to persevere takes time. The ending of the poem states “Without a doubt or fear, somehow I know things will be right, And so, I persevere” (Stortz 14-16).

We feel it is important to impart this message to the women at CFL: that after one fortifies one's self-confidence and one's mindset becomes entrenched and stronger than before, one jettisons the doubts and fears of life. Possessing neither fear nor doubt is the vaunted destination marking the end of the rugged path of perseverance.

Selected by: Tim Tryforos

**“Scarred But Smarter”
by Drivin' N' Cryin'**

Well I'm out of work, I'm out of hope
Of what should be of thee I spoke
Good times for the undeserved
Hard times for the ones who work
The poor man, rich man, blind man, dead man
Hoped for more than they had all planned
Just then they suffered a serious blow
As the real world cut the line they hold
Nobody said it would be fair
They warned you before you went out there
There's always a chance to get restarted
To a new world, new life, Scarred but smarter

Is it right to wish the poor man rich
Is it right to wish the rich man poor
To hope all that's well is fair ends fair
To wish thy neighbor's life to despair
Being so mad that I start crying
No payoff for all my trying
To do it right - to never fail
You're wishing for some fairy tale
Nobody said it would be fair
They warned me before I went out there
There's always a chance to get restarted
To a new world, new life, Scarred but smarter

But when my life it turns all around
Jobs and things to do that I've found
I think how foolish I must have looked
To think I could be down for good
Nobody said it would be fair
But in the end I think it is
Karma, justice - whatever you call it
It's really there - just keep looking for it
Nobody said it would be fair
They warned me before I went out there
There's always a chance to get restarted
To a new world, new life, Scarred but smarter (Kinney, MetroLyrics)

Drivin' N' Cryin's contemplative song probes our conscience with disconcerting questions of social justice – is life inherently unfair? We believe this inquiry has vital consequences for any valuations about morally-upstanding people with criminal pasts.

The song's optimistic-realistic refrain serves as a a hymn to life. It wins one over by *not* ignoring the past. Instead, like the existentialist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, it insists we must honor every scrap of reality, every scar from the past, as having been necessary – *amor fati* or “love of fate” (Nietzsche). From this ethereal perspective, nothing is dispensable. Every setback, every misstep, every ruinous moment was necessary for the culmination of the individual one is today. We want the women of CFL not to abhor their pasts, or worse still to forget their pasts, but to honor their pasts as stepping stones to a gleaming present and still more resplendent future. The power of our human beings lies in our ability to learn from our gravest mistakes, to become, in the end, “Scarred but smarter” (Kinney, MetroLyrics).

Selected by: Tim Tryforos

Perseverance
Dillon Crawford

For if you run fast
You can knock down any barricade
When you think you are there
You simply must find out
Just ask to yourself
Was it worth it?
Would I die for this job?
If you so much as think no
Then keep on going
But even if you say yes
You must never stop
Strive other paths,
Try to fix what we have left in the world
For with that you can never quit
For the people destroying it don't quit
So why should you?
Instead you should work double
Always try,
Always succeed.
Light the darkness with light.

The poem “Perseverance” by Dillon Crawford reverberates with more than a common theme of perseverance. The lines that most stood out and made lucid my interpretations of Dillon’s writing were, “Was it worth it? Would I die for this job? If you so much as think no, then keep on going. But even if you say yes. You must never stop” (Crawford 6-11). Crawford embraces that if one has failed to reach a goal, the only viable option is to continue on. Paradoxically, even if one *has* reached one's primary aim, it is imperative still to continue. “Light the darkness with light” (Crawford 20) presents a potent metaphor for trailblazing in the dark and forbidden aspects of existence.

This is an important compelling idea with regard to Connections For Life. It accords with our third and final phase in the growth of a plant — that of uninhibited growth after resistance has been overcome. The women from CFL, we feel, should not falter or stall after completing the program, but be impelled by their preexisting successes to new luminous vistas, like the metaphorical tree.

Epilogue:

A mustard seed, like all of its other peers, needs a few essentials like light, water and nutrients. But what makes it unique is how it responds to the adversities inhibiting its growth. As the maxim goes, “All happy families resemble one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Each seed, therefore, must tackle these unique and multitudinous hindrances and grow against all odds, sprouting “from a crack” (Shakur) if necessary. Once it is a seedling and faces competition, as in the poem “All that is gold does not glitter,” it should persevere and stay steadfast. Lastly, when it has developed into an elegant mustard seed, it “should not “[have] to stop,” (Lowell 11) rather “reach the top” (Lowell 12) with the “sky up above [it] and the earth down below,” (Lowell 16) for the sky is the limit. The ladies at CFL have defied all odds and have survived whatever misfortunes befell them in the earlier parts of their lives. Now that they have made CFL their home and have redefined their life, they should not stop, for the sky is the limit.

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