Colter Linford

Workshop Submission #1

 Warm sun trickled through the branches of the willows lining the creek bed as two young boys in shorts walked along the edge of the water. It was a little boy’s paradise, a summer of exploring and adventuring along new and exciting places. My little brother Jackson and I traipsed along occasionally moving willows out of our way or overturning an interesting rock just to see what treasures may have been on the other side.

 We rounded a small bend in the creek and there was what we were looking for, a sizable hole made by the current of the water. Perfect for cooling off from the hot summer sun. We wasted no time in shucking off our shirts and diving right in. These were the moments that made having a little brother so perfect. After swimming and splashing we climbed on out shivering just a little, Wyoming water is never warm, and waited to dry off. Then back across the fields for the mile or so walk back to our house where we would quickly try to find some other simple summer pleasure rather than the list of chores our dad had surely compiled for us.

 How could we ever be separated, a ten year old and his eight-year-old little brother? We were ready to take on the world, or each other at the drop of a hat. Each board game we would ever play together would turn into a wrestling match before the night was through.

“Jackson, you cheated!” I could be heard to holler.

“No way, I can totally do that!” Would surely be the response, and before you knew it we were on the floor in a mess of arms and legs rolling and fighting for the better position. Our mom would undoubtedly tell us to “knock it off, before we broke something.” But our dad, who coached both wrestling and football would begin to offer some pointers.

“Colter, right there make sure you grab wrist control so he can’t roll through. Jackson, he’s to tall for you to reach up like that, stay low.” He coached from the couch.

 And our grins would increase and the intensity would rise as we each tried to show our dad what we were capable of. I think that’s what we really sought after in everything we competed in, to outdo the other. And to impress our dad with what we could do.

Growth spurts happened and soon we were too big to be rolling around on the living room floor. Our competing with each other continued and we each pushed each other to the limit in everything. As teenagers we were reluctantly dragged to a Scottish festival that our mom insisted would be good for us, so that we could learn about our ancestors. We walked around together, aloof with our superior teenage attitudes. Then we came across the sword-fighting ring. There were two old men sparing with some fancy looking metal blades. However what caught our eye was the barrel of wooden practice swords, and despite our best efforts to not be to interested soon we were both holding a wooden sword and light heartedly taking swings at each other. And then I rapped him across the knuckles.

“Ouch, you punk!” Jackson hollered.

“Ha, I’m sorry.” I chuckled back, and then it began, his jaw began to clench. Not unlike our dad when he began to get angry. Immediately I stood a little more defensively. And then he swung, much harder than our previous swings; I blocked it and swung back at him with a little more energy as well. The wooden swords clacked against each other, as we swung harder and moved quicker. He swung high and I whipped my sword into a circle. His sword slid off and smacked me painfully against the shin.

“Jeez, take it easy! That one hurt!” I said as I backed off. I managed to get my temper under control a little bit and added, “Ok we’re down now.” And returned the wooden sword to its barrel. He slid his back as well and we walked off, each of us with a soon to be bruise but the confidence that we would have held our own as Scotsman in ancient England.

The gap between our abilities widened as I grew close to six inches and gained a lot of weight. We were finally to the point we had talked about growing up, I was a senior in high school and he was a freshman. Competing for the same cause at the same time, surprisingly this was the time where we were most relaxed and didn’t feel the need to compare and to fight with who was the more dominant. I was good at the sports I had chose to compete in, finishing as an all-state wrestler, football player and track athlete. I had left the shoes to be filled by him, but did I really want him to fill them? I had spent my whole life trying to beat him in everything. Did I really want him to become what I had become or even better? When asked who the better wrestler was which one of us would our dad say?

I returned to my hometown to watch several of his football games his senior year. And every doubt about my brother disappeared. All I knew is I wanted him to succeed, to be the best and to push his limits. I felt intense joy watching him as he played his heart out as a football player and recorded more tackles than I could have ever dreamed of. He progressed and improved in every sport he played and somehow that was just perfect with me.

In some way he became an extension of me, as I knew him so intimately that I could tell what he was thinking and feeling as he wrestled. I could tell when he was fired up and ready to go, and also when after a loss to keep my distance, to allow him to work through is anger and frustration before stepping in with my advice.

People often don’t recognize Jackson and I as brothers. We don’t look very similar; I’m far more outgoing and social than he is. He loves time to himself, either reading a book or out wandering in nature. Yet somehow we can connect with each other more than any other person on this planet. He knows all of my struggle and weaknesses, just as I know his. I think that’s why we can rely so fully upon each other and how we are able to react to the others needs so well.

Now on a cold winter night and much older than eight and 10, we drive to a bowling alley with just each other; I realize how much this young man has influenced my life. Gone are the petty feuds and fights we’ve had over the years, replaced with mutual respect and love. We pass the time casually, talking about girls and sports and good places to eat. Yet at the bowling alley we are still just as competitive and driven to beat the other. And I know that to me the word brother means, my best friend.