

## On the Mountaintop

It must have been ten degrees that day. The baby-blue Pinto had bald tires that kept slipping on the snow pack. The heater never did work. There were holes in each of the floorboards about the size of a football, which let even more cold in. Of course there was no stereo in this fine vehicle, but I had a boom box. Too bad the batteries in the boom box had run out about two hundred miles ago, and my budget wouldn't allow for any more. The high altitude caused the Pinto to sputter up the mountain at a dismal forty mph. Four wheel drive trucks driving with chains were competing with the weak Pinto. It was no contest, so I pulled over. I had no destination anyway. I pulled off the highway and parked the Pinto in a deserted parking lot in some empty town on top of that Colorado mountain. The hood of the Pinto soon disappeared under the falling snow. I sat there in the Pinto with a quilt wrapped around me, trying not to freeze to death, reflecting on the past two years. How had I gotten to the remote Colorado mountain?

Where was I going? What was I doing?

She was supposed to catch her train that Valentines Day. I have not seen her since, except for the memories I get almost daily. She was special. I loved her, even though I rarely told her. Everyone knew she was not coming back. That just made it harder on me. They would try to console me, each in their own way. My buddies would sit with me over a cold beer. My family would hug me; try to help me move on. I even saw a counselor, at my mom's suggestion.

The day she missed her train and never came back was the day my life started on a two year track that led me to that Colorado Mountain. That spring semester at college turned out to be disastrous. I started skipping school. One teacher was sympathetic to my story and didn't fail me. I can't really blame the others since I had stopped doing the work.

Summer arrived and I felt a little better. I took a class and actually got an A. I immersed myself into summer activities. Went to the park almost every day to play basketball and then jump into the lake to cool off. I felt I was healing. It felt great.

That fall I registered for full time at school. I talked to the same teachers that failed me spring semester. I convinced them that I was ready to come back full time. Not even one month had passed and my mood had dropped. Being in the school mode had brought back memories of her. Times of joy that I would never experience again. My grades started slipping, as did my attendance. I dropped out of college before they could fail me. It was time to make a change, to get away for a while.

Three days after Christmas I was getting yelled at by my drill sergeant in South Carolina. It was an excellent way for me to get my mind off her. For four months straight I did push ups, climbed ropes, fired rifles, and bonded with other lost souls. I had made good friends in that short amount of time.

When I got home that May I felt like a new man. I was fit, young, energetic, and ready to take on the world. The money I had saved during basic training allowed me take a well-deserved break. Weekdays were for wakeboarding, and weekends were for rock climbing. For three months I was allowed to spend my time that way. The summer ended and I was broke and refreshed.

As the seasons changed, so did my good spirits. My parents divorced that fall. They were one year away of their 25th anniversary. My family seemed to be falling apart. I couldn't help but think about her during that time. Maybe she could have made a difference. Maybe she could have kept my family from falling apart.

All of it was too much for me. I felt I had to leave again. About three days after Christmas I was on the road. I drove the length of Tennessee without even seeing its beauty. Missouri didn't want to let me go. I continued on through the flat state of Kansas. I drove through the plains of east Colorado wondering when I would ever see any mountains. Once I hit those mountains I started to climb them. That Pinto did alright until the snow started falling. So I pulled over.

I sat in the Pinto and tried, for the first time of that trip, to figure out what I was going to do. I could have gone to see one of my Army friends that lives in Fort Collins. But that would have meant turning back. I could have gone to see an old friend that lives in L.A. But I don't see how a country boy like me could have made it in L.A. The only other person I knew this far west was another one of my Army buds that lives in Oregon. Oregon is as good a place as any to start healing. Start a new life.

I know I will never stop thinking about her though. She had been with me since day one. She had helped our mom change my diapers. We used to jump on mom and dad's bed, until I pushed her off that one day and broke her arm. We grew up playing sports together. She was the one that told me about the birds and the bees. We dated each others' friends. We went to college together. We laughed together millions of times. We did so many things together until that one Valentine's Day when she missed her train and never came home, and my life changed forever.