

SUNDAYS

Misty, August 19, 2007

Walking along Fisherman's Wharf carrying her assortment of pastels, Misty turned toward the bay. The fog was beginning to lift and Alcatraz would be in full view of the city shortly. One could almost sense the sorrow of the formerly occupied prison. The suffering of the men imprisoned there long ago was still lingering in the air.

Misty was compelled to make every Sunday special by choosing a different site in San Francisco to sit among the tourists, while creating her chalk art onto the sidewalks. She admires nature and the world that surrounds her with all its beauty. Every creature that roams the earth Misty treats with respect. She absorbs every nuance of the visions she observes, but her favorite thing to do is people watch. Misty often wondered what secrets a smile was hiding. The way a person walked would give her several clues to their inner most thoughts. She was curious about the regrets a person passing her might have. Would they live their life differently when offered a new beginning?

Although Misty was raised Catholic, she did not limit herself to believing a specific doctrine. She always followed where her heart guided her. Every Sunday she had a strong desire to spend it in the crisp morning air of the city. This had replaced the weekly ritual of going to church. Drawing connected her to a higher power and it provided her answers to

difficult questions. Creating pictures was the one way Misty felt comfortable showing praise for the remarkable life she is living.

Continuing on her journey, Misty kept searching for that perfect location with the best view to sit and begin sketching. She usually sat just out of foot traffic while remaining close to the tourists and locals that would stroll past. Then she spied it, the ideal spot. An area that would remain shaded as the sun began to peek through the hazy morning. She arranged her chalk in a neat row showing the beautiful shades of color. Misty loved brilliant bold colors and utilized them in every picture she created. Vibrant colors had a way of lifting her spirit even if it was foggy and the past week had tested her faith.

Glancing again in the direction of Alcatraz, she speculated about the lives of the men once incarcerated there. They had no choice but to call that island home, or did they? The decisions we make in life are ours alone and no matter what we define our destiny. A person's happiness is within their reach.

Misty decided the subject of her picture would be the island known as Alcatraz. She did not see just a rock that was deserted; she imagined vivid flowers with their sweet scent drifting toward the prison giving the occupants of the jail some hope. Those cold damp cells evacuated so long ago, but somehow Misty could feel the pain that their families had felt. For not only had the prisoners actions violated innocent people, they inadvertently hurt the people that had loved them unconditionally. Their parents, siblings and yes, even their children.

Starting to sketch her interpretation of Alcatraz onto the sidewalk, a crowd slowly gathered. Gradually the piece of gray pathway developed into a bounty of hues. While working, Misty meditated about the incident that happened eighteen days earlier. Okay, some people call it thinking but it is more than a thought, it is a step toward the truth. How a life could take a seemly-unexpected turn, or was it actually unforeseen?

San Francisco is packed full of adventure. As Misty began to draw, she reminisced about her childhood and growing up in this wonderful city.

Her mother took her to museums, plays, incredible parks, the beach and the zoo. Everything was right here in this one city: step in a bus, hop

on the cable car and go. Their routine, without fail, was to go to church every Sunday. Misty's earliest recollection of Sunday mass was at about the age of three. The wind that whistled through the door cracks was so eerie it sent chills down her spine. She would scrunch close to her mother while clinging to her arm. Sometimes she would take her mother's sweater and hide under it, peeking out cautiously.

The memory of seeing Jesus on the cross still disturbs her. As a child, Misty would stare at the statue with tears filling her eyes, if only she could help him. At age three, she did not comprehend that he was just a sculpture depicting sacrifice. Every Sunday she would see him hanging there with his head lowered and sadness on his face. Oh, how Misty's heart ached not knowing how to help him. She did not understand why this man hanging there week after week, did not bother her mother. Scanning the church, she noticed the other parishioners were ignoring him as well. It was as if she was having a bad dream that she feared would return when she fell back to sleep. She thought, "Maybe next week someone will save him." Nonetheless, with each Sunday that past, he was still hanging there with his crown of thorns, as the blood appeared to be dripping from his head.

When the two of them arrived home from mass, Misty would gather her chalk and run to the driveway. Sitting alone she drew huge colorful sceneries. Those images helped Misty figure out and express her view of the world. It was a resourceful way of connecting to Mother Earth and the heavens above.

Sometimes the pictures remained on the driveway for several days. However, most of the time the creations would be washed away by the evening dew. Misty did not mind waking up and seeing them gone. She believed God loved the pictures so much he delivered them to heaven and in return left her a blank canvas for the following Sunday. Continuing the routine to this day gave Misty the tranquil sense of enlightenment.

The portrayal of Alcatraz was almost complete. You could see the island jutting up from the bay. Misty continued working, as more people congregated to view her rendition of *the rock*. A small child was standing

beside her, with radiant hazel eyes. Misty turned and saw the little girl pick up a piece of chalk. The child's mother instructed her to put it back.

"No, that's okay please let her draw." Misty said smiling at the woman.

The tiny girl sat down placing her hand on Misty's leg. Positive energy surrounds children and having a child alongside you can really help the soul heal. One of Misty's favorite parts of Sunday was watching children express their innocence through art.

"I'm drawing that rock." Misty said pointing to Alcatraz. "Do you see something over there that you would like to add to the picture?" Misty asked the child.

Each Sunday Misty chose a different location to create her illustrations. Therefore, many onlookers commented on missing her creations for several months. They always sounded delighted and honored to stumble upon them. People regularly photographed the drawings to capture their beauty, as the artwork often disappeared at nightfall. The images were one-way Misty connected to her inner child, spreading joy to the community and this particular Sunday to release sorrow. Praying that today would be the day she would gain the knowledge needed to move forward with her lives journey, wherever it may lead her.

The little girl placed her chalk down in the pile of colors. Misty was speechless. The darling child drew large hearts floating above Alcatraz. Misty assumed they were the child's interpretation of clouds in the heavens. She realized immediately that the baby she had lost eighteen days earlier was sending her love through the child's heart shaped clouds. This precious little girl with hazel eyes wiped the tear resting on Misty's cheek. Then the child smiled as she turned and walked away holding her mothers hand.

The picture was perfect. Misty signed it; "Simply Misty" picked up all the chalk scattered around and headed for home. Miracles of a child's tender heart never ceased to amaze her. When Misty held her own child, she was lifeless.

Turning to view Alcatraz one last time she thought of the hundreds of lost souls, so much pain inflicted on others and too many wrong choices. People pay a high price when they choose to go down the wrong path.

The sun had broken through the fog and was now brightly shining. Misty wandered along the wharf soaking in its warmth. She desperately wanted to believe those lovely hearts in the sky had to be a symbol of her daughters own love. The innocent child she loved so much and was still deeply grieving.

On her mournful walk home, Misty reflected back on her pregnancy. At her five-month visit, she had advised the doctor about concerns regarding extra moisture. He had explained that as the baby grew it was possible to leak urine especially if the baby kicked the bladder. Just to be positive he took a piece of paper that apparently would detect amniotic fluid. He found no fluid leaking.

“You have nothing to worry about. Your baby is doing great!” He reassured Misty as they listened to the comforting rhythm of the baby’s heartbeat.

By the sixth month, Misty’s instinct took over and she had an unsettling feeling in the pit of her stomach. Something was horribly wrong. The baby’s kicks were getting weaker by the day. And some days she felt no movement at all. Misty phoned the doctor frantic; she had to save her baby. His voice did not sound concerned, it was actually very calm and soothing. However, he wanted to put Misty’s mind at ease so he told her to come straight to the office.

“I’m sorry Misty. The amniotic fluid has slowly leaked out.” He spoke to her with unwavering concern in his eyes. “I’m going to send you to a medical center which specializes in high risk pregnancy for a second opinion. Without the fluid around the baby, numerous problems may occur. It is very probable this child will have one or several abnormalities.”

Her obstetrician informed her that most babies would have spontaneously aborted, but her child’s heartbeat was strong. He explained what they were up against and felt it wise to consider terminating the pregnancy.

Misty left immediately, taking a taxi straight to the medical center where they were awaiting her arrival. The high-risk obstetrician concurred with Misty’s own doctor. He gave Misty the dismal facts

about what could happen to the baby with no amniotic fluid to protect it.

“You need to go home and evaluate everything I’ve told you. This is a very difficult decision that only you can make.”

Misty would not make this decision. She knew before leaving the medical center that this issue was in Gods hands. You take what life gives you and you do your best. There was no alternative but to continue the pregnancy and that meant bed rest for the remaining three months.

Arriving home from the medical center Misty went straight to her appointment book and canceled the jobs she had scheduled. Putting on her softest pajamas, she crawled into bed weeping. There was no magic pill and nobody to help her get through this. It was just her and the baby in this crisis together.

Misty cried herself to sleep, however it was not long before an incredibly intense cramping abruptly woke her. She could not believe it! This little person did not want to continue on this path with her. Laying there in labor she picked up the phone to call the doctor but something stopped her. Gripping the phone tightly she just could not convince herself to dial the number. Maybe the pain would subside if she could relax. Taking several slow deep breaths, the urge to push was too strong and at 2:03 a.m. August 1, 2007, Heather Mary Kanal was born. There was no life. Just an unbelievably tiny motionless baby that was still warm. Misty held Heather in her hands and rocked her. Tears streamed down Misty’s face falling onto Heather.

Misty spoke as if Heather could hear her. “I would have been a very loving mother.” She kissed Heather’s forehead and laid her on her chest covering Heather with her robe.

Several hours had passed and Misty knew there was nothing more she could say to her or do. It was time to call the doctor and let go of this beautiful baby.

Heather Mary was laid to rest next to her grandma Gladys. Her grandmother would now protect her in heaven. Misty had to believe her mother watched over Heather. Grandmas always protect their love ones.

Misty had never revealed her pregnancy to anyone. An easy secret to

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keep, as her career kept her away from home for several weeks and even months at a time. She would now keep this secret forever.

Misty put the key in the front door and entered the seclusion and shelter of her home. The place that protects her from the outside elements but now holds the sorrow and pain of a life lost.