

The Blue Armchair

Instinctively, I hold my breath. The pungent fragrance of roasted coffee beans and the shrill sound of steam whistles from the espresso machines force my senses into overload. Before me are mounds of freshly-baked goodies and colossal stacks of books piled on bookshelves as high as the ceiling. Pressing my nose against the glass cover, I don't budge until the ginormous chocolate-chip cookie is within my possession. With one hand holding my cookie, I collect as many books as my chubby arms can hold and plop into my favorite blue armchair. I would look forward to this routine: every Saturday, when the big hand hit six, my parents would take me to Timothy's, their coffee shop, and I would begin the day's quest.

To my childhood self, Timothy's was my bridge to Terabithia. In this world, I've been a resident of Dr. Seuss's topsy-turvy Thneedville; an acrobat, weaving words into webs with Charlotte; and a palace spy in Wonderland, fighting for my life in a game of flamingo croquet. Braving these adventures instilled in me a sense of invincibility that pushed me to tackle new experiences, even engaging in mischievous absurdities, both in this world and reality.

Draping myself in jewelry constructed out of straws and cup sleeves, I would unabashedly strut all around the café. Expressions of this unwavering self-confidence and sense of invincibility were not solely limited to my sense of fashion, but rather, it was ingrained in every thought and action that I had. I believed that Timothy's should've been called Anna-Banana's, that the blue armchair was my throne, and that the deliveryman's dolly was my royal carriage. Ignorant to the laws of gravity, I once jumped off the dolly after reaching peak acceleration, wholeheartedly believing that I could fly. With a bruised ego and scraped knees, I learned a valuable lesson: invincibility is a mere delusion.

I realized that Timothy's was never a world constructed solely for me, at least in the way I had imagined. There were no adoring crowds, and the blue armchair wasn't mine. While I had imagined glorious adventures, in reality, my family's livelihood depended on the success of this café. Moving to Canada without any support, my educated parents relinquished their professional aspirations to build a stable business to provide for me. Awareness of my parents' sacrifices for my success imbued my understanding of the interdependency of people, their successes, and their failures, providing me with a new lens to construct my understanding of the world.

Shifting from being front and center to an observant spectator, I began to see beyond myself, picking up the art of people-watching. As if placing an invisibility cloak on, I would quietly sink into the blue armchair, discreetly watching peoples' behavior and interactions with one another. I found myself creating whimsical backstories of circumstance for each passerby, intertwining chance encounters and meaningful exchanges. People-watching not only helped me to become more aware of those around me, was also as an opportunity to explore undiscovered parts of myself.

I learned that despite the many sports that I have experimented with, I am the MVP at bench-warming. I make a mean latte, often topping my creations with adorable foam cats. I adore Broadway musicals and am always ready to showcase my dancing at a flash mob. I passionately believe in advocating for human rights, actively engaging in Amnesty International's initiatives.

And, I discovered that I am not only an advocate for but also identify with the LGBTQ+ community.

To say that I have figured out all of who I am would be a lie. Unlike the world of fantasy, there is no single defining moment – no Excalibur, no Sorting Hat – that marks my complete evolution. My niche in the world constantly changes, but what remains steadfast is my commitment to a life of service and adventure, albeit it isn't as cozy as the blue armchair.