



Senior Runner-Up – Abby Wells, age 16, Canada  
Commonwealth Essay Competition 2013

## The Little Girl in Me

I have faint memories of my early childhood; a birthday party here, a Christmas there. I recently found a picture, which brings a flood of memories back to me. This picture was taken when I was four years old. The little girl in the picture is me.

The most carefree and joyous days of my life were spent in companionship with the little girl in the picture, the little girl inside of me. As far as I can remember, the little girl and I only strongly desired a few things. We wanted to re-read our copy of *Charlotte's Web* over and over again, we wanted to never take off our favorite green floral dress, and we wanted to drink our weight in apple juice.

The little girl and I would frolic through life without a care in the world. We would dance around the backyard and try to count the blades of grass. We would paint wild pictures on paper that seemed to only make sense to us, and when the paper became tiresome, we took our brushes to the walls. We would giggle mischievously at our mother's furious expression, when she discovered our works of art. We were very happy.

As I, now a young adult, reflect on the foundations of our utter happiness, I concur that it stems from complete lack of knowledge. It sounds foolish, but I firmly believe that it is our complete disregard for our safety and those around us, combined with our blissful ignorance on how the world worked, coalesced to create the happiest people on Earth.

As a couple of years passed during elementary school, the relationship between the little girl and I changed. The little girl continued to be my kindred spirit, but I had to attend school, and not all of my attention could be focused on her. She understood. She offered to help me with my art projects, and what a great job she did. Her creative mind helped me write stories for English. She helped me perform in the elementary school play, and together, we sang our hearts out. I even let her doodle on the side of my notebook from time to time. But at the end of the day, when I got home, I would change out of that

constricting uniform that willed me to be standardized, and put on my flowered green dress again. It was as if we never put a pause to our childish behavior. We were very happy.

I used to enjoy jumping. First, I jumped rope. Then, I jumped off of couches and chairs. Then I jumped off of tables and down staircases. Finally, my obsession reached its peak when I jumped off a jungle gym. It was the highest jump that I had ever done, nothing but air below me. I bent my knees and sprang upward into the air, spread my arms out, pretending to be a bird, and soared. Even if it was just for a few seconds, I flew. I also nearly broke my arm. Strangely enough, the predominant memory that young adult Abby recalls from this day is not the happiness that I felt soaring through the air, but the consequence of such behavior.

Elementary school flew by, and before we knew it, high school rolled around, a stage of our lives that we were both reluctant to enter. Believing that the first day of high school was the most important day of my life, I woke very early to curl my hair, thinking that the prettier I looked, the more friends I would make. The little girl rolled her eyes at me, and told me not to fret. She reminded me that we were kind and likeable, and we would make plenty of friends. Furthermore, she promised me that we would always have each other, a promise I knew she would keep. A sigh of relief escaped my mouth at her reassuring words. I turned on the radio, and we danced in our room. We were very happy.

I wish I could report that I and the little girl lived the rest of our lives in blissful harmony; however, this is not the case. One of us began to grow up.

"Little girl," I begin, "I regret to inform you that I have been somewhat busy lately, and I haven't gotten a chance to read *Charlotte's Web* in a while. There is only so much time in the day, and other things come first." She asks me what could come before happiness. "Well," I try to explain, "School does. Homework, extracurricular activities, and getting into a good university all do. These are the things that I need to focus on." Her eyebrows furrow in puzzlement, but she relents. "Also, little girl," I say, "I don't know if you are aware, but apple juice has a very high concentration of sugar, and I've been trying to cut back." Her big, blue, innocent eyes blink twice, a blank look on her face. She does not know what concentration of sugar means. I roll my eyes at her ignorance. "And before I forget, I must tell you, I haven't worn the green flowered dress in nearly ten years; I'm afraid I've outgrown it."

These are my pitiable excuses, which I deliver without repentance, to the little girl inside of me, when her quivering voice asks me why I want to push her away.

Now, the little girl inside of me sits quietly in the back of my mind, waiting to be happy once again. She asks me if I want to go dance in the backyard, or paint a picture, or make up a story. "No!" I reply harshly, "Can't you see I have a math test tomorrow?!" She curls into a ball and buries her face into her knees. We never yell at each other.

As I am inevitably growing up, I have made many sacrifices at the cost of this little girl. I love her very much, and I do not want to lose her, however, every day I feel her warm little hands slipping through my fingers. Every time I choose to do something sensible, or every time I act my age, her image gets blurrier and blurrier. Her voice inside of my head gets quieter and quieter. My greatest fear is one day picking up a paint brush, or sitting down with a pen and paper, and not having the slightest idea what to do next. I fear that one day, I will look at this picture, and simply see an old photo of "Abby Wells when she was four years-old", rather than seeing the face of the little girl inside of me.