

Bury St Edmunds, U.K.
Bury Cemetery
morning has broken/winter has spoken

17 November 1999
Gray drizzly

© I sit and watch the remains of sunlight drip sadly from the sky. Night, in all her beauty, usurps the day. I think about the commitments I have made in my life and wonder to where they have taken me. I look at all I have invested these precious years in and I am slowly unsettled: suddenness eludes me. Somehow today is connected to years long turned ashen.

'Commendation Day' at P.S. 108 resounds within me. Those hot spring days in the auditorium when I'd sit in a crisp white shirt, striped clip-on tie, and watch students go up on the stage to receive their commendations. *Perfect Attendance, Academic Performance, Honor Roll,* and on. They had an award for everything. Each time Mr. Kleinberg, our ball headed principal, announced an award, I'd hold my breath. Waiting on the name.

Why I'd ever believed they'd call my name, I don't know, except I really needed to win something. Needed to be uplifted. My name was never called in the 108 auditorium. Yet each Commendation Day, an ironed white shirt and striped clip-on, sitting in a row with Hezekiah, Hillary, Robert, Lentini, Dominic, and Arthur. We merry misfits.

Each time that day came I believed, "Today, I get one." The sharp stab I felt when another name was called. Why did I keep believing? No one from our retard class ever got one and we had to always sit in the last row – in case someone 'acted out.' Yea, guess who? Why did they make us sit in the back like circus animals?

Was it so we might see what we could get if we really tried? If we really sat-up straight and behaved: our names in black on a gold-bordered white paper and everyone would applaud? I'm not sure what difference it would have made, except that for one day I might be lifted above the grayness: the retarded class, the bullying, 103rd street, Commendation Day and all the faces I'd watched ascend the stairs to receive what I was certain I deserved.

At first, I'd steal my sister's from her drawer and tear them up. By fourth grade, as we'd walk home, she'd just hand them to me. We'd stop at the corner of Rockaway. I'd tear them to pieces, gleefully smiling. She didn't care. No matter what they did to my sister she was always an A-Honor Roll student. She could write, draw, and paint. Her dream was to be a writer and an English teacher. I never passed a single class.

By this day that gold-trimmed piece of paper would have disintegrated and I'd have probably forgotten it. But in never having had it, whenever I fail to achieve something I'd so wanted: that auditorium, that itchy starched white shirt, that applause – it all comes back.

Simply, this child in me who'd watched all those years past seeks assurance that the failures of these days, as in times gone by, have *never* been his fault. That there were times I could have won but chose to fail instead. Could have won.

The child inside me never liked losing, for the twisted comfort it brought me. He'd always wanted to win. To Win!

Retarded, while it may be a pejorative term today, in the '60s it was the universal term in education for all behavioral anomalies. It's just the way it was. Child life under a broad brush.