

## Take What You Get

by Eric Weisman, '01.5

I hated both my last day of school in Hopkinton and my first day of school in Sherborn. My mother drove me to my new school in our brand new white Volvo station wagon. The ride from our house to the school seemed much shorter than it actually was. Looking back on it, anytime I've unwillingly traveled somewhere, the car ride seemed extremely short. I remember the station wagon climbing the long, winding hill that led to Pine Hill Elementary school. As I watched the trees and fields pass, I imagined that the car hadn't gone by them. In my mind, I was still back in my new trundle bed at home.

My mom knew I was on the verge of tears, and she was constantly moving her hand back and forth between the car's stick shift and my knee.

"All the kids are going to love you," she said, patting my leg. "Mrs. Smith is so excited to have you in her class."

I couldn't even muster a response. I pictured Mrs. Smith forcing me to stand up in front of the class, asking me to tell the kids my name and what I liked to do. Then I saw the kids laughing when I broke down in tears, unable to give them an answer, or merely mumble a few words about myself. I couldn't even respond to my own mother.

"Honey, it's ok to be nervous. Remember that I'll pick you at 3:15. You don't have to take the bus this afternoon."

She parked the car and held my hand as we walked up the steps to the school's entrance. I was wearing blue shorts, a bad choice because they were too short and revealed my pale, chubby legs. The walk with the principal and my mother down the long, empty corridors was what finally did it for me. I had been trying my hardest to hold back the tears, forcing myself to think of the end of the day, when my mother would be waiting for me. But the classroom was getting too close. I could sense it by the way the principal slowed his pace and drifted to the right side of the corridor. I felt the tears under my eyes, but I didn't care enough to wipe them away with my arm.

"Welcome to Pine Hill," Mrs. Smith said.

I remember faces staring at me. I turned around and my mother was waving goodbye. I guess she figured a quick exit would be the easiest. I was left beside my new teacher, a poor substitute for the familiar figure of my mother. She was introducing me to the class, but I don't remember anything she was saying. I thought I heard a few boys in the back laughing. I couldn't blame them; I would've laughed too.

Then I heard, "It's time for morning recess. Creig, come show Eric around the classroom."

The kid named Creig wasn't paying any attention to her. Instead he was leaning over a desk, his butt sticking high in the air.

"Now the girl who can slap my butt first gets to be my girlfriend," he told a group of girls behind him. They were laughing, glancing to see if Mrs. Smith was watching Creig's latest ploy.

"Go!" Creig yelled.

As if in some sort of trance, at least six girls ran towards him, all trying to be the first to touch his perfectly round rear-end. A girl named Beth won, and Creig was obviously disappointed. He had his eyes on a blond hair girl named Jenny.

"Creig! You don't want a time out do you?" Mrs. Smith warned.

The words "time out" got his attention and he immediately faced her. As he walked towards us, I got a good look at him for the first time. He was short and had blond hair, but I noticed the muscles that bulged from his legs and arms. He reminded me of a miniature marine. His crew cut even had lightning bolts above his ears that the barber had carved in his hair.

"I want you to show Eric around the classroom," Mrs. Smith said.

"No problem Rosemary," he said.

"Creig, I warned you about that. You don't want to see Mr. Luther, do you?"

"Sorry Mrs. Smith. C'mon, let's go."

I dreaded eating lunch in the cafeteria at Pine Hill. Even though Creig introduced me to all of his friends, I still hated to open my lunch in front of everyone. Maybe this was because eating lunch was like an event at that school. The six kids at our table dumped their lunches onto the table and began comparing. It seemed like everyone else's mothers had prepared neat sandwiches for their children. I saw sandwiches with just the right amount of peanut butter and jelly so that the insides weren't spilling out the back when they bit into the bread. Mothers cut the crusts off of sandwiches and cut them into triangles and squares. But Creig's lunch was far superior in my mind.

His mother gave him a cooler filled with two ham sandwiches, chips, cookies and a Pepsi. I hid my lunch bag in my lap, concealing its contents from the rest of the table. I didn't have to unwrap my sandwich to know that the turkey would be hanging out the sides, mayonnaise gushing from the bread. My mother didn't even use white bread. Instead she used Branola, which I didn't mind, but I would've killed to have my sandwich made on Wonder bread that one time. I'm sure my mother would have packed a bruised apple or pear for me along with an apple juice box. I tried my hardest to prevent the kids from seeing me eat, but a kid named Matt saw me.

"Your mother doesn't cut the slimy edges off the turkey," he said. "That's gross."

From the corner of my eye, I saw a glob of mayonnaise slide off that slimy turkey and land in my lap. I heard laughter as I rubbed the mayonnaise into my shorts.

"I'll trade you my sandwich for yours," Creig said, ending all laughter. "It's turkey, right?"

"Yeah," I said. "Thanks."

A couple of years later I found out that Creig hates turkey. On thanksgiving, his mom cooks roast beef for him because he won't eat the turkey. But on that day, he ate my entire sandwich in front of those kids, and they didn't stop looking at him until the last bite was gone.

For the rest of the day, Creig showed me around and sat next to me in class. He showed the spot behind the moveable blackboard where he kissed the girls. At recess, he let me shoot baskets with him after he told the other kids he didn't want to play the usual game of pickle. He was the first kid to applaud when I finished my addition sheet before anyone else. And he walked me to my awaiting mother when the day was over. The day almost seemed to breeze by. And so I made it through my first day of school with Creig by my side.

It took me a while to grow accustomed to the number of rich people that lived in Sherborn. Almost every family seemed to have three cars, and people owned at least four acres of land. Creig's family was no exception. While the blue colonial house wasn't overwhelming from the outside, the inside was a different story. Mr. McBride was into electronics, and Creig loved to tell me that all the electronics in his house were worth more than a brand new Cadillac was. Considering he worked for a computer company, it was only fitting that Mr. McBride gave a computer to everyone in the family.

It wasn't long before I began spending nights at Creig's house. I remember my first breakfast at the McBride's. Mrs. McBride made French toast because Creig demanded that she make it for him. Actually he said, "Mom, Eric's never had your French toast before." She sighed and just looked at Creig. I didn't understand what the trouble with making French toast was until I had sat down at the table.

Creig's older brother Jeff and Mr. McBride were already at the table drinking orange juice. Creig's older sister Melinda was still sleeping. Mrs. McBride was standing at the kitchen counter in her nightgown, feeding slice after slice of bread into the yellow batter.

"Eric, are you ready for the first piece?" she asked. I started to get up to bring her my plate, but Mr. McBride placed his hand on my shoulder to keep me seated.

"She'll bring it over to you bud," he said.

And so the process went. After each piece of bread was finished cooking in the pan, Mrs. McBride brought it over to the table. We ate in a kind of rotation, until 48 slices of bread had been used.

"Susan, these are outstanding," Mr. McBride said.

"Mom, I like mine cooked a little more," Creig told her.

"More orange juice," Jeff demanded.

I sat at the table in silence, observing the scene. Jeff liked to wait until he had a stack of three or four pieces so that he could cut them into blocks and eat them. Mr. McBride barely looked up from the morning paper while he shoveled a piece drenched with syrup into his mouth. As for Creig, he liked butter. Mrs. McBride had left a butter knife inside the margarine container so that the syrup from our knives wouldn't get mixed in with the butter. But Creig just used his knife to scoop out a large chunk of margarine that he used on each piece of French toast. Mrs. McBride immediately caught him.

"Creig, one more time, and you're through."

"Sure Mom, whatever," he said, and while she wasn't looking he licked the buttered knife clean.

After he had finished, Creig nudged me to get up.

"Maybe he's not finished, Creig," Mrs. McBride said.

"Let's go," he said.

I brought my plate over to the sink just like my mother had taught me to do. Mrs. McBride looked surprised when she said thank-you. As we were leaving the room, I glanced back at the table. Nothing but empty seats and finished plates. Before I raced Creig up the stairs, I caught Mrs. McBride sitting down to a couple of pieces of French toast made from the ends of the bread loaves that Creig insisted he wouldn't eat.

The kind of fun I was used to wasn't Creig's type of fun. While I was into GI Joe, Creig was into girls. He told me stories of how he planned to get Jenny SanClements behind the blackboard. After all, he had held her hand on the field trip to the bird sanctuary. So I guess you could say I became involved with girls at a pretty early age. He had the looks and I had the brains. According to him, together we'd make a pretty good team.

In the third grade, Creig told me to go after Jenny SanClements. I thought she was easily the prettiest girl in the grade. She had straight blond hair and wore loafers with the shoelaces wrapped in a spiral like a beehive. She was the one all the girls huddled around on the playground while they watched the boys play pickle. But since Creig didn't like her anymore, it was ok if I wanted her to be my girlfriend. Besides, he was hooked on some new girl named Kristin. Hooked on some new girl. Creig always seemed to be hooked.

There was a running joke in my high school that if a girl hadn't been with Creig McBride yet, she was soon to be victimized. I remember he had a girlfriend named Amy in tenth grade. She was the real possessive type. Creig used to pick her up, take her shopping and buy her jewelry just so she wouldn't say something like, "You don't love me anymore." Once he bought her this hideous heart shaped, gold pendant with a mound of pearls in the middle. When he finally decided it was time to buy her a ring, I told him I'd help him pick it out. For a kid who couldn't keep his eyes off other girls, he sure seemed like he was devoted to Amy.

They had been going together for nearly two years before she decided he was flirting with too many other girls. We were on a class trip in Italy when he broke down. I came back from dinner with a bunch of my friends one night while we were in Rome. I remember Creig and Amy had decided to order pizza and eat it at the hotel. Whenever she ate pizza, Amy would pull the cheese off with the tips of her fingers, careful not to get any grease or sauce on them. Then she'd pile the cheese in a corner of her plate. I used to ask her what was wrong with the cheese. "The texture of it makes me want to throw up," she'd say.

I came back to find a group of my friends standing outside the door to my room. As I walked down the hallway, I heard moaning and deep sobs from inside the room. Then there was silence for a few seconds before the sobbing started again.

"Eric, you better hurry up and get in there," one girl said. "They had a fight and Amy's telling everyone he hit her."

"She told him it was over," someone else said.

I opened the door and saw Creig on the bed, his head buried in his pillow. I went and sat on the edge of the bed, not really knowing what to do. I thought to myself that it was the first time I had ever seen him like this. I started rubbing his back, once in a while patting his head.

"Creig, it's okay. Tell me what happened bud," I said. Since I didn't really know what else to say, I must have sat there with him for a half an hour with my hand on his back, just listening to his muffled sobbing. Finally he rolled over and I saw how the tears made his eyes puffy and red.

"All I ever wanted was her," he said. "I didn't mean to push her, but she wouldn't listen to me. I was just trying to tell her I loved her."

"Did she end it?"

"I think so. I'm not sure."

I called my friend Payman in to the room and told him to sit with Creig. I spent the next hour talking with Amy in her room, telling her how upset Creig was and that he was bawling in the next room. Finally I convinced her to go talk to him. Later that night I told Payman I'd be sleeping on the floor in his room because Creig and Amy wanted to sleep together in our room.

Three weeks later it was over. I found out for sure when the rumor turned into fact, according to the seven girls he had fooled around with while he had been with Amy. But a few days before she broke up with him, I spent the night at Creig's house.

"You know, Katie Eggert has been looking good lately," Creig said, leaning over from his bed so I could see him from where I was on the floor. I knew his motive for the conversation.

"What's your point? I thought you loved Amy."

"I do, but I can look at other girls, can't I?"

"Is that all you do, just look?" I saw him smile at me. He had one hand resting behind his head while the other was inside his boxers. I hated this subject because I hadn't ever had a serious girlfriend. Now I was almost sure he had cheated on Amy.

"What's your fucking problem. Can't you be happy with just one?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Don't pull this shit with me. You told me Amy was everything to you."

"I didn't cheat on her," he said.

"Whatever. You want to tell me, tell me. I could care less."

"I love her."

"I'm going to sleep."

"What's your problem? You're in a bad mood."

I pretended I was asleep until I heard his soft breathing. As I lay on his floor in the dark, looking up at the ceiling, I thought about how I was obsessed with a girl named Susie in the eighth grade. She had straight black hair that ran part way down her back. Her eyes were small and oval shaped, and she had a nose that reminded me of a miniature ski jump. We were best friends for over a year until I found out that Creig had messed around with her while I had liked her. "How could you have done this to me?" I said to her. "It's not like we were ever together," she said. After that, I wouldn't speak to her. I settled for an "I'm sorry" from Creig.

I was in Israel with my family during Christmas break of my senior year when my girlfriend Brianne chose to cheat on me. She had been my first serious girlfriend; we'd been dating for almost a year and a half. When I came home, I had a message on my answering machine from Creig, telling me to come over as soon as I got home. I decided I'd go to his house after I had stopped in to see my girlfriend. I remember how she came running down the stairs when she heard me talking to her mother. We had been fighting more often than not before I had left for Israel, but she immediately threw herself into my arms when she saw me. Her long red hair dangled in my face and her curls smelled of a mixture of shampoo and hairspray. I wasn't sure if I wanted things to work out for us, but I was glad to see her after being away.

When I got to his house, Creig came outside with a football. We started to throw the ball back and forth in his backyard. He was wearing his blue and white basketball warm-ups with his Detroit Lions football jersey.

"Guy, there's something I got to tell you," he said.

"Don't tell me you hooked up with someone else," I said, laughing as I tossed the ball to him.

"No, but your bitch did."

"What?"

"She spent like the entire week with Payman. They hooked up last night, just a couple of hours before you would've been getting on the plane to come home."

"Are you kidding me?" I asked. The tight spirals he threw to me pierced the palm of my hands and the laces ripped pieces of skin from them as I tried to catch the ball.

"No joke dude. I told her she better tell you as soon as you got home or I'd go house on her."

"This is a joke," I said, my voice starting to crack. I threw the ball back to Creig, but it barely made it back to him as it wobbled all the way. He jogged over to me and put his arm around my shoulder.

"Let's get some food," he said. "Taco Bell is calling me. I'll drive." As he started to run inside to get his keys he turned towards me.

"Hey, watch this," he said.

He faced his house and acted like he was a punter getting ready to receive the snap. He called out "down, set, hut" and held the ball out in front of him. He let go of the ball and I saw he was trying to punt it straight up into the air. But his leg came too far forward and the ball shot off his foot and headed straight for the house. It smashed into the kitchen window, easily shattering it. I saw Creig scrunch his shoulders and duck down as the glass fell to the ground.

"Holy shit," he said and I saw his mouth drop and his eyebrows raise when he looked at me.

"Creig Robert!" I heard Mrs. McBride yell from inside.

"Oh shit," he said as he headed inside.

As I followed close behind, I couldn't help but laugh.

When it came to sports, Creig was a natural athlete. He could always just play. Maybe that's why I became the sports fan I did, but moving to Sherborn meant getting involved in some type of sport. It was the kind of town where parents sat in lawn chairs to watch their sons play baseball. Some dads got so involved that they insisted year after year that they coach their sons' team. Creig was the type of athlete that dads wished their sons could be. He had the strength to tackle in football, the speed to run the base-paths, and the touch to shoot the basketball. He was the complete package, and I overheard on more than one occasion different dads talking to each other, wishing they had McBride on their team.

Since I would've done anything Creig wanted to do when I first moved there, we were always practicing sports. Creig had a basketball court in his driveway with a glass backboard and breakaway rim for dunking when we lowered the hoop. We would pretend we were in the NBA, two teams playing against each other. I would introduce the starting lineups and Creig would come running out from the garage, as if he were each player. Once the game started, Creig took all the shots. Even though we were supposed to be teammates, the game was really shooting practice for him. Once in a while he'd make a behind-the-back pass to me and I'd make the lay-up. But then from behind me I'd hear, "What a pass on that play. Jordan really made Pippen look good there."

Childhood games soon turned into high school sports. I like to think I remember our Thanksgiving Day football game because it was our last together. We were both wide receivers during our senior season. For four years I had wanted to catch the ball, but I just didn't have the speed for wide receiver. "You belong on the line," one of my coaches told me. But I shed 20 pounds for my senior season and improved my speed by running windsprints and five miles each day.

The other teams were geared towards stopping Creig. Our coach always said to us before the game, "Fellas, they'll be double-covering McBride, so one of you has to step it up and make some plays."

That Thanksgiving Day game was my time. I had already caught a touchdown earlier in the game, but with 10 seconds left, we were down by a score. We had 30 yards to go. I lined up tight to the tackle while Creig was split out to my left. The play was simple. Wait until Creig crossed in front of me and run towards the corner of the end zone. I waited, faking out my man completely, and headed towards the back corner. As I glanced over my left shoulder I saw the ball spiraling in my direction. I caught it in stride and scrambled into the endzone.

It was like no other scene. The fans stormed the field and the photographers were snapping pictures as I tossed the ball to the referee. I looked back towards the field and saw Creig sprinting towards me. He leaped in the air and jumped into my arms, knocking me onto my back. After that, they kept piling on top of me until I could smell the dirt and grass of the field I'd played on for four years. My helmet was pinned against the ground and I felt my chin strap digging into my skin. I could barely breathe but didn't really care. Creig kept yelling to me, "You did it man! You won this shit for us!"

We were the last two in the locker room after the game. The locker room was littered with unraveled adhesive tape and mud from cleats. A couple of kids had forgotten to put their shoulder pads in their locker,

and there was a jock strap draped across one of the benches. The celebration had stopped and we were left alone.

"Man I really fooled those guys on your touchdown," Creig said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

I mean if I hadn't been the decoy, you wouldn't have been so wide open."

"Oh," I said, not wanting to push the issue further.

Outside, our parents greeted us with congratulations. My mom was still bundled up in her winter coat and pink mittens. She was holding up the sign that said, "Go Eric and Creig." She had drawn mini football players below the words and little turkeys above them.

My dad started the praise as he grabbed our shoulders and said, "My boys!"

"That was quite a game," Mrs. McBride said.

"Yeah, you guys were great," My mom added, barely able to talk it was so cold.

"Hell of a catch big guy," Mr. McBride said. "I couldn't have done it better myself."

I didn't even have to look at Creig to know what he was thinking.

I wasn't with Creig the day he packed the back of a U-Haul full of his belongings and headed off to Ohio for college. That summer I had been playing for an American Legion baseball team and I had a game the day he was supposed to leave. Creig was six months older than me and was too old to play in the league. Instead, I talked to him briefly on the phone before he drove out with his new girlfriend, who was soon to be a senior in high school. Ohio Wesleyan had offered him a football scholarship so he had to leave for triple sessions in mid August.

"You psyched to be going to school?" I asked.

"Not really," he said. "Football is going to crush me."

"Don't sweat it. I'll call you in a couple of days to make sure you're still alive."

"Okay, don't let Emily cheat on me."

"Shut up, guy. Have fun out there. Take care of yourself."

"I'll try. See ya."

"Bye."

I waited until I heard the receiver click on the other end before I hung up the phone. As I sat down on my couch, I remember thinking it would be the first time in 12 years that we'd be separated.

I visited Creig at school almost two months later. We had a hard time agreeing on a weekend because I wanted to fly out when Emily wasn't visiting. I ended up going with his mom and dad over parents' weekend. We met Creig at his dorm and I saw that he looked even more muscular than ever. He had an Ohio Wesleyan cap on backwards and as usual, he wasn't wearing a shirt.

"Oh Creig, would you please put a shirt on?" Mrs. McBride said.

"Jeez, bud, what the hell is wrong with you?" Mr. McBride asked. "Is that a new TV. That's pretty nice bud."

"I know, you paid for it," Creig said. Then he turned to me.

"Guy, can you believe it? They have Taco Bell out here and everything. I've been waiting for nearly a month so we could go together."

"Sounds good," I said.

I looked around and surveyed the room. I noticed a picture of Emily on his nightstand. On his desk was a smaller picture of us playing baseball against each other when we were in the seventh grade. In the picture, I'm playing first base and he's the runner getting ready to steal second base. I'm holding out my glove, eager for the pitcher to throw me the ball so I can tag him out for leading too far off the base. I don't remember what happened beyond the edges of the photo.

"This place is so much like home," Creig said, putting on a T-shirt and turning my attention away from the picture.

Somehow, I didn't find that hard to believe.