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My impediment adulthood : quarterlife crisis and beyond

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

MY IMPENDING ADULTHOOD:
QUARTERLIFE CRISIS AND BEYOND

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
in
CREATIVE WRITING
by
Corey Ginsberg

2009

To: Dean Kenneth Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Corey Ginsberg, and entitled My Impending Adulthood: Quarterlife Crisis and Beyond, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Vernon Dickson

Les Standiford

Dan Wakefield, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 3, 2009

The thesis of Corey Ginsberg is approved.

Dean Kenneth Furton
College of Arts and Sciences

Dean George Walker
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2009

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my amazing family and friends. Thank you for allowing me to use your lives as fodder for my essays. Without your support and your willingness to put up with my mood swings, whining, and incessant rocking in the fetal position for the past five years, I would never have been able to complete this project.

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I also want to extend my appreciation to the entire MFA community at Florida International University, who welcomed me and has supported me for the past three years. It has been an inspiration to work with such a talented and giving group of professors and students. I feel very lucky to be a part of the MFA family, and will always look back fondly on my many wonderful memories from this program.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
MY IMPENDING ADULTHOOD:
QUARTERLIFE CRISIS AND BEYOND

by

Corey Ginsberg

Florida International University, 2009

Miami, Florida

Professor Dan Wakefield, Major Professor

My Impending Adulthood: Quarterlife Crisis and Beyond is a collection of personal essays that chronicles the time before, during and shortly after the narrator's quarterlife crisis. The further removed from childhood she grows, the more the narrator clings to aspects of her youth she fears she'll lose when she resigns to enter the adult world—a place she believes is stifling and terrifying. Each essay in this collection serves as a lens through which the adult world is examined, admired, feared, avoided and misunderstood as the narrator works to accept that she must grow up, despite nearly three decades of persistent resistance. The essays illustrate ways in which innocence is incrementally lost, while at the same time celebrating ways in which portions of this innocence is preserved and appreciated. This collection aspires to give a voice to readers in their twenties whose struggles are often ignored by the literary world.

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SECTION ONE

“In the time of chimpanzees I was a monkey.”
~Beck

SWIMMING BECOMES YOU

“We’re doing flip turns,” Coach Matt said as he pointed toward the shallow end of the pool. “Why don’t you hop in and give it a try?”

You’d never swum a full length with your head in the water, let alone heard of a flip turn. But everyone was staring as you stood there, goggles in hand, navy suit three sizes too big hanging from the shoulders of your bony nine-year-old frame. Mom nodded from her seat in the grass, eyes saying, *go ahead*.

“It’s easy,” Coach Matt said when he sensed your hesitation. He smiled and winked at you from behind thick glasses. “Just swim toward the wall, and when you’re about two feet away from hitting your head, turn upside down, flip over and push off on your back.” The way he gestured with his body and arms made his belly jiggle and he looked like a fish in a hula hoop.

You pushed your long blonde hair behind your ears, put your goggles on and climbed into the pool. You took your place at the back of the line of swimmers and watched them each complete the drill. Every few seconds a new person headed down the lane, approached the wall and rolled upside down in a fast, clean motion. Then they pushed off on their back, extended their arms and kicked till they floated to the end of the line. The other kids made it look simple, with their bent elbows, side breathing and quick, on-target flips.

When it was your turn you tried to mimic their movements but your body wouldn’t bend that way. You thrashed and fought for every stroke. Each time your right arm came out of the water, your left shoulder dropped and you rolled too far onto the

side. Even though your legs were kicking hard, your hips still sank. By the time you made it to the wall you were nearly vertical in the water, pushing forward, grabbing to stay afloat.

Still, you tried to flip, to make your body roll into a compact ball and propel your feet over the top of your head. But it didn't work. You dipped down, tucked your chin and blew bubbles out your nose. When you finally inverted your body, there was no air left in your lungs and you began to choke. You surfaced and coughed as water spewed from both nostrils.

When your next turn came, you managed to flip over without inhaling water but went too far and ended up standing in the pool facing the wall. The turn after that, the same thing. And again. And again. Even though Coach Matt said it didn't matter, that you'd figure it out, you ran to the bathroom to be away from the other swimmers so they wouldn't see you cry. You could hear them laughing and splashing each other as you sat in the first stall staring at the green rubber floor.

The whole way home in the car you begged Mom not to make you go to practice the next day.

"I hate swimming. I don't even know how to do it right."

"Honey, give it another try," she said. "You're just starting. You won't even know if you like it till you give it a real chance."

"But I don't want to."

"Please, one more try?"

And it began.

That first summer it was short practices, no more than forty-five minutes, four times a week. On the days before swim meets the team played Sharks and Minnows and Coach Matt let everyone out early to go off the diving board. Those were the best practices, when you left the pool laughing and excited. That summer, even competitions weren't too bad. One length of the pool freestyle, no flip turn. Sure, most of the time you were slower than everyone else—the alternate in the outside lane whose points didn't even count, flailing just to stay afloat—but at least your slowness wasn't so obvious in a short race. At the end of the meet, no matter who won, everybody got cookies and orange drink and there was a pool party with a DJ.

But that winter swimming changed. Your best friend's mother encouraged you to sign up for an indoor team, the one her daughter was on that practiced at the local high school. She told you it would be fun, and you'd get a lot faster, just like Lisa had. Plus, it would be nice to carpool.

For the first two weeks the new team was great. Each night you played games or learned how to do starts on the block, and the little swimming you did wasn't too bad. Sometimes you got to use flippers or Styrofoam pull buoys that went between your legs to make them float during arms-only sets. Everything about indoor swimming was so new and fun you didn't realize this was just the honeymoon.

At the end of the free trial period, your parents sent in the non-refundable check for nearly a thousand dollars to pay for the winter and spring seasons. When you walked onto the deck that following Monday, most of the swimmers from your lane were gone. You stood in the corner and watched the fast kids stretch their shoulders and hamstrings and tried to mimic their arm circles.