



The Wall

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The Wall

"Hasn't he died yet?" Jay spoke into the telephone.

"That's not funny," Penny said.

"Yes it is," he said, grinning. That was good shit, he thought, his feet shuffling on the floor with excess energy.

"No, he hasn't. Close to it, though."

"You're doing a great job, sis. Wish someone would look out for me."

"I do."

"Yeah...I've gotta go." This conversation was getting old, he thought.

"I wouldn't want to keep you from your occupation."

"Very funny."

"Well, I think you should come and see him soon."

"No probs, anything for you. Thanks for letting me know," he said, magnanimously. He chuckled at how normal he sounded, like a respectable middle class man.

"I thought you'd want to know, the doctors have said the tumour has returned and he could die anytime."

"Okay, I get the picture." His smile died. "I'll come over tomorrow. You know, things to do, men to see."

"Everything's a joke with you, isn't it? You really shit me, sometimes."

"I know. I'll see you tomorrow, about two, okay?"

"Sure."

Jay locked his housing commission unit and made his way down the stairwell. He stepped onto Darlinghurst Road. Sweet garlic aromas from the Indian and Vietnamese restaurants permeated the cool evening air. He walked along the uneven concrete, passing the towering terrace houses with worn green paint and wrought iron twisting along balconies only big enough for one or two people.

Some of his friend's houses had floors layered with dirt and grime soaked walls; poky fortresses with small windows and tiny backyard enclosures. Still, he loved it. This was his home;

comforting. Its filth suited him; like a pig enjoying thick rolls of mud on his skin, it made him feel less alone. He made his way up the steep hill to The Wall where all his mates were.

He hoped Tamara would be there tonight, the shy 18 year old chick that turned up with the Jesus van. She was a great distraction from all this shit, especially now. She was so naïve, in one way, and removed from his world, the very fact she existed made him feel better about his life. Her shock about his life made him wonder if things could be different, better one day, maybe.

Jay danced around the edges of the park as his friends watched from their usual wooden bench, some of them high on heroin or speed, some stoned or drunk. He couldn't stay still like them. He would take people's jumpers or bags and tease them; he enjoyed it, it passed the time. He didn't want to be passive and wait in squalor to be screwed; literally.

"Hey, has she come yet?" he called to Jimbo who was urinating on a tree.

"That Jesus girl?"

"Yep."

"Yeah, they came half an hour ago."

Jay kicked the garden wall, "shit!" he yelled, the other men ignored him as he paced backward and forwards in front of them.

Heroin accompanied him through the evening; its white streak rushing rapidly into his system and providing his necessary oblivion. His closest friend, heroin, was his rock—a constant in his life, and reliable.

Through his shaky vision and underneath a dense fur coat of euphoria and mental dullness, he could see strangers' hands and bodies and acts that, thanks to his narcotic friend, he blurred into unreality. He awoke a little to find himself passed out in front of his own blue paint-peeled door. His mind was black. Nothing new in that and anyway, he liked it this way. Letting himself inside his lifeless apartment, he didn't bother to turn on a light, his body collapsed into an unconsciousness that lasted most of the following day.

When Jay awoke his face was adhered to his brown cushion and he realised he had probably missed visiting hours at the hospital. Dad won't even give a shit anyway, he thought.

Jay eventually arrived at St Vincent De Paul Hospital and after explaining he wasn't a normal visitor but a son, he was directed to the 15th floor, bed 42a. As he walked in he saw his sister leaning over his father. Images of his mother flashed before him in her soft blue pastel blouse and white flowing skirt, her wavy light brown hair and sharp nose. He could hardly breathe.

His father's mouth fell open as he saw Jay for the first time in five years. His father's eyes darted all over Jay's face and body like a doctor inspecting a patient's decline. Red blotchy craters and sores infested Jay's face, his eyes were irritated and red and his long black hair knotted in rebellion around his face.

Yellow skin, sunken eyes and an enlarged pock-filled nose showed the effects of his father's liver cancer. You don't look so scary now; Jay smiled at the thought, as memories of his father's threatening features over his bed at night dissolved.

"Jay."

"Yep, tis me."

Jay embraced Penny; she raised her arms, briefly and limply, and patted his back.

"How are you old man?" He moved nearer to the bed.

"Not great." His father didn't smile.

"I came to give you back something."

"What?"

"This rock, you gave it to me when I was ten. You said, 'you'll have to learn to be tough like this rock', I think I did you proud." He put the rock onto his father's lap. His father was shocked and awkward as he looked down at its grey jaggedness. He looked up at Jay in bewildered fear; Jay thought he looked like a dog wincing before an owner's scorn.

"Uh."

"I just wanted to thank you for it. I think it was good advice," Jay sniggered.

His father didn't say anything. Jay's fingers rested over his father's gnarly hand and he leant forward. Jay felt his father resist and pull back in an almost frightened manner. He tightened his grip. His father looked down, no longer looking into his eyes. Jay couldn't tell if he was ashamed of himself or of his son? Fuckin' hypocrite, he thought.

"Well, I'm going," Jay said to Penny.

She nodded and said, "I'll see you out."

"Bye, Dad."

His father nodded and looked like he might say something, but didn't. Jay thought he looked relieved.

As they reached the corridor, Jay said "don't know how you do it."

"Do what?"

"Look after him, after everything..."

"That's because you're not me."

"You're right; bet you're glad about that."

She looked down.

"Jay, I'd like to have you over for dinner, you haven't seen the kids for ages now."

Jay looked at Penny; thinking she must be feeling guilty about the fact that it had been a year since he had seen them.

"That'd be good," he said, "what night?"

"Wednesday, about 6:00, okay? Do you want me to pick you up?"

"Yeah that'd be good, usual place?"

"Yep," she said, "that was weird in there, why do you stuff like that?"

"What can I say? I'm my father's son."

Jay could see she was unimpressed.

"Come and see him again though, Jay. It does mean something to him."

"Don't know 'bout that. See you Wednesday, yeah?"

"See you then, take care."

Penny disappeared back into the room. 'As usual, back at his side. Stupid alcoholic, he brought all of this onto himself,' he muttered. It would've been nice having a female to look after him beyond the age of 12, when his mother had died. He could still see her leaning over him, her scent engulfing him as she kissed him goodnight.

It was Penny's choice to be like this with Dad, but Jay couldn't pretend. Maybe she was good at forgetting or maybe she had forgiven him, he didn't know, she never talked about it to him. The lift opened at ground level and Jay walked out onto the street.

Jay got out of Penny's black Saab housed in her immaculate garage. Penny had gone into the house before him to help John with the children. He walked through the garage to the television room and could hear splashing and laughing coming from the bathroom.

Penny's house was warm and clean, with its caramel yellow walls, vibrant abstract paintings, soft white carpet and large windowed rooms overlooking the shimmering expanse of Elizabeth Bay.

He called out into the hallway and naked limbs came streaking out into the hall.

"Uncle Jay," Peter yelled and ran and embraced him. Jay picked him up.

Lucy came around the corner wrapped in a towel.

"Hello, Uncle Jay," she said, obviously pleased to see him, but not showing much emotion.

Penny followed her children, "I'm just getting him dressed." She took Peter and dressed him in his red and blue Elmo pyjamas and Lucy appeared in what Jay saw was a Saddle Club shirt and pants.

John appeared out of his office and greeted Jay. They walked into the kitchen, with its white imitation marble bench tops and stainless steel appliances. John handed Jay a juice and they sat down to dinner. Jay looked around the table smiling through the dim candlelight (Penny's daughter loved candlelight). He loved Penny's family, especially his niece and nephew.

This dinner was so different from their childhood, he marvelled at how Penny had managed to create all of this. He looked over at her as she asked Lucy how her reading was going and he smiled feeling elated for her and a little envious. He chewed slowly and looked around the table. Peter was enjoying scooping his butter chicken into his pappadum and Lucy was talking about how she had been doing times tables at school. Jay surrendered to the children's stream of consciousness talking, and occasionally glanced over at his sister, who seemed happy to ignore him. The adults said nothing, until Jay asked;

"How's work, Penny?" He smiled at her and looked like he had just entered the world of grown ups.

"Fine, busy," Penny said, looking over at him briefly before receiving a mouthful of food.

"How bout yours, John?" He smiled feeling pleased with himself to be participating in this normal dinner conversation.

"Good, thanks."

There was nothing more to be said and the children continued on, as if he always sat at their dinner table. Lucy did ask him however if he ever washed his hair, if he did wash it, why was it so knotty? When her hair got dirty or knotted her Mum washes it, she told him. He laughed and told her that was good advice.

Fear, silence and nausea was Penny and Jay's experience when they sat down to the family dinner table. Jay thought it seemed as if Penny was avoiding looking at him, maybe his face contained too many memories. Since their father had deteriorated their childhood had been returning to him in colours, smells and scenes he wanted to forget.

Peter and Lucy sat on Jay's lap after dinner and said goodnight to him with delicate kisses on his cheek. Penny disappeared upstairs with them and John took an important call in his study, so Jay found himself on his own.

He walked down into the sunken lounge room and allowed his body to relax into the red cushioning of the couch. Leaning his head backwards and closing his eyes, Jay experienced the familiar jarring of his past. Sounds pounded his skull like it was about to explode. He was glad he had taken that valium before he came, it would hold him over until he could score again. Right now, his body was anchored to the couch.

The red light behind his eyelids became the dull light of his home many years ago, one of those evenings he wanted to forget.

Jay, Penny and their Mum were enjoying a rare night of their father being away for dinner. They had been able to eat everything without indigestion and had started their homework in peaceful silence, when they heard him banging through the front door, knocking into walls, falling over and swearing at the top of his voice.

Adrenalin moved through his body, he felt nervous even at the sound of his Dad's deep booming voice. Jay remembered bracing himself for his father's anger. His Dad was throwing plates around in the sink, the clatter of porcelain and cutlery was shrill and ominous in the air. He was yelling at their mother about where his dinner was and Jay could hear her answering him quietly. He knew she was trying to calm him down. Then he started to yell Jay's name and Jay's pulse quickened as he heard his father walking up the stairs.

Finally, he reached Jay in the bedroom and threw his jumper at him, yelling about putting things away. Jay got up quickly from lying on his bed, his 12 year old frame dwarfed by his father's dark shadow. And then he felt it an adult fist slamming his face like a plank of heavy ply wood. Jay felt stinging pressure on his shoulder blades and raised his hand to his nose, seeing his own thick blood on his fingers. Penny stood in the hallway, and he heard their mother's anxious steps approaching and then she appeared in the bedroom door. She darted in between the swaying figure of the man and the limp boy on the bed. His mother cradled him in one arm and stood up close to their father;

"Stop, Malcolm. Get out."

Her voice was strong and deep and her back, straight and hard. She pointed her finger to the door. He stood looking at her with anger and confusion. No one had seen her with this strength

before. Jay had always felt afraid for his Mum, he hated that she had to stick up for him. He looked forward to when he could defend all of them. One day he'd be bigger than him.

Many times his Mum had been pushed violently into doors, walls, bookshelves, but this night, his father looked down at her and surrendered. This was the one moment where she, Anne Beaumont, won. He left and didn't return for the rest of the night. He was so drunk and physically weak he could barely get out the front door without injuring himself. Jay remembered feeling relieved, even though they were all wondering if he would come back later, they chose to ignore this and Jay remembered his mother's soft lap and embracing perfume as he lay watching television with an ice pack on his face. Penny sat on the other side of their mother and their physical closeness made him feel safe.

Jay squirmed on the couch now, burrowing into his mother's lap as he could hear his father's taunts and teasing and the chilling disdain of his father's cackle when Jay brought home school accolades. He remembered hiding report cards and certificates from his father. Severe lines formed on his father's face and black sharp circles in his eyes fixed their murderous gaze onto Jay. He never understood why he did this. Only once did he think he saw a glimpse of a hidden chasm of insecurity in his father, but, even now at 35, he still couldn't comprehend his father's cruelty.

They both knew their mother was planning to secretly leave their father because Penny told Jay she had overheard conversations to someone about opening a bank account and other things. Penny didn't understand, but Jay sort of did. He'd seen stuff like this on television. How some women left men like him and had to be on the run. He didn't like the sound of it much, but thought it would be better than this. It annoyed him how his mother never spoke badly about him to them. They all knew what he was like, why not be honest?

He wished he hadn't argued with her about his father the day the ambulance came in flashes of red and took her away on a stretcher, after she fell onto the linoleum, unconscious from an aneurism. He saw himself sitting beside his mother's bed in hospital that whole week, even though his father had tried to remove him. Repeatedly, he had told her he was sorry, until one morning he was holding her hand and she squeezed it. That was enough for him. He knew it was his mother's way of responding. He told her he loved her and when she died, he remembered crying as if he could not stop.

Jay whispered, "Mum..."

"No, it's not Mum."

He abruptly opened his eyes and felt a sharp pain across his forehead.

Penny was looking strangely at him.

"Sorry, must have been dreaming. Hey, I've gotta go."

"Yeah, of course, got to get back to it, hey?"

"Something like that. Hey thanks for dinner and everything, it's been really nice not to eat Hare Krishna food with smelly street men."

"Sure, Jay, that's fine. It is good to see you when you're not..."

"Yep, let's not go there."

"Fine, let's go?"

A loud, shrill ringing shook Jay from his heavy sleep. He grabbed the telephone to stop its pitch driving deep into his consciousness and he put his ear to the receiver.

He could faintly hear a female voice, "Jay, you better get over here as quick as you can."

"Who's this?"

"Penny, remember me? I haven't heard from you for a week now, which probably means you don't care. But, I thought you should know."

"What?" Jay didn't like that he really wanted to know what she was talking about.

"It's Dad; the doctors have told me he's deteriorating, it won't be long now. He's fitting and he's in and out of consciousness..." he could hardly hear her now, "I don't know if you care...but I thought I should tell you."

"I'll come."

Falling off the couch, he arose in the same clothes he had worn the night before. Everything appeared to be moving in slow motion. Jay felt his chest tighten. He moved quickly out the door, slamming it hard on its hinges.

After locating his last \$20 from his grimy jean pocket, Jay climbed into a taxi. As Kings Cross' pink and blue neon streaked past him he saw his father in their backyard with the cricket bat, playing on a makeshift pitch with him. Jay could see his large smile as he called out, "Give it to me, Jay." He chuckled now, thinking of how he did give it to him, he bowled him out and then wondered if he would be beaten, but nothing happened. His father laughed and handed over the bat "Good work, Jay", the rarest comment he ever received from him. These occasions were like light falling in dense, damp rainforests, rare and enjoyable.

He reached the hospital and walked briskly to his father's room.

Penny looked up at him as he entered, her face lined with exhaustion and her cheeks splotchy and swollen.

"You're too late, he's gone." She started to cry.

"What?" He looked at his father's body, his mouth dropped open.

"He's dead?" Jay was winded.

"They worked on him after he arrested and then after 30 minutes, they declared he was gone." Jay sat down next to the bed. He touched the edge of the bed clothing, as nausea overwhelmed him.

"You shit," he said to his father.

Penny got up and walked to the window, looking out onto the grounds.

"You were a fucked father and now you're gone. There won't be much to miss, will there?"

"Why do you have to be such a bastard?" Penny turned to him.

"Why are you such a suck-up?"

She looked away again.

"Well, Dad, I guess this is goodbye. What am I going to fuckin' miss, Dad? How can someone miss something they never had?" Jay covered his face in his hands and cried bitterly.

He raised his head, his throat aching and looked over at his sister. She was perched on the hospital chair near the window, her knees drawn up in a foetal position, crumpling her navy pin striped suit into soft layers like pastry folded onto itself. Penny's eyes were closed and her mouth was biting onto her hand. In this moment she was his 11 year old sister sitting crying in her bay window the day they lost their mother and after they both realized they were alone with him. Jay remembered holding her on that day, and many others, and comforting her. Now, this brotherly concern overcame him and he wanted to embrace her again. But she was a stranger to him now.

Against all his instincts, Jay crossed the distance between them. He awkwardly attempted to put his arm around her shoulder. She jumped forward in shock and pushed his arm away. He moved back, startled.

"What are you doing?"

"I was trying to comfort you or something..."

"Well don't. You've never given a shit before, so why start now?"

"I thought..."

"The thing is Jay, you don't think... Not about me, anyway."

"That's not true."

"Of course it is. Right now, you're probably thinking of how you can get out of here and score something."

"Very amusing, Penny. Why are you being such a bitch?"

"Because you're so self centred and you've never given a shit about me. Especially, when you left home, and me with Dad, thank God for Aunt Jenny."

"I did think about you." He could see her little features pressed against the lounge room window the day he left home, her pleading eyes watching him leave on that dark evening.

"Yeah, in between scoring, shooting up and whatever else you do."

"Where do you get off judging me?"

"I don't."

"What do you want from me?"

"Nothing. I gave up on needing you a long time ago."

Jay looked over at his father's body.

"Anyway, all that stuff shits me and it's all done now. What's the point in even talking about it? You don't get it, even now, after Dad is dead."

"I do get it. But what can I do about it?" He shouted at her.

“Nothing. You are like Dad, a selfish prick. And what shits me now about all of this,” she was getting louder, “is that I thought when he died...I'd feel different...better, relieved or something. But I fucking don't,” she directed her words towards the body on the bed.

She stood up, scraping the chair loudly and stood looking out the window.

“I hate him,” she said, looking out the window.

Jay was marooned in the middle of the room. He had wanted Penny to open up, but he hadn't expected this.

“Do you want me to leave?” he asked.

“Whatever you want.” Her voice was altered, low, like she had run out of air.

Jay looked at his sister's immaculate clothes and her aggressive stance facing the window, but he saw in her face a vulnerability he had recognised in new men who arrived at The Wall.

For a moment, she was his little sister again, arranging her dress neatly on her lap, crying softly when the noise and violence got too much in their household. He knew she was right to be angry at him, he had been a selfish bastard, but he didn't know how to tell her this.

Penny's life crystallized for him now and he saw his neglect in it. She had suffered the most; she had borne the weight of it all. 'Penny was left twice; by Mum and by me, abandoned to deal with Dad on her own,' he thought.

“For what it's worth Penny, I love you, I can't change the past, but I'm sorry for what I've done.” He spoke quietly, looking at his feet.

She looked over at him and he saw her eyes soften towards him and then she looked away again.

Jay walked over to his father's body; kissing his hand he put it onto his father's cheek.

“Bye, Dad. It's been real.” He looked into his father's face half expecting and even hoping for a sarcastic remark or a snide response. He touched his hand.

“Let me know when the funeral is and maybe, sometime, you could have a junkie like me over again.”

“Yeah, maybe.” She didn't look at him.

He left the room, stopping only to look back at his father. Walking out of the hospital's sliding doors into the sun he lit a cigarette and made his way back to the bus stop.

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Author: Suzanne Strong

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Comments: 106



this story is great



[wayne m.](#) commented Dec 12, 2006



Awesome!!



[Paula S.](#) commented Dec 12, 2006



I love that Jay is raw and broken but not without hope and empathy. Good story that had me pushing away the distractions until I'd finished reading.



[Jo H.](#) commented Dec 12, 2006



Wow, I could smell Sydney and by the end, I had tears in my eyes for Jay's loss. That story is fucking good shit. :-)



[Matt B.](#) commented Dec 13, 2006



Thanks so much, Jo, Wayne, Matt and Paula. I really appreciate your comments. Thanks heaps.



[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 14, 2006




This story was very interesting, sad and poignant. Good work.




[annette s.](#) commented Dec 14, 2006



 This story was very interesting, sad and poignant. Good work.


[annette s.](#) commented Dec 14, 2006



 I found this very moving and powerful. The characters were really real to me, i could hear their dialogue and feel their emotions.


[John S.](#) commented Dec 14, 2006



 Great story, it pulled me in and kept me interested. Interesting and well developed characters.


[steven s.](#) commented Dec 14, 2006



 brilliant, it moved me.


[tony s.](#) commented Dec 14, 2006



 Thanks a lot, Annette, John, Steve and Tony.
It is great to know people are getting something out of the story and characters. It brought tears to my eyes when I was writing it.


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 14, 2006



 Wow! I have tears.


[jennie a.](#) commented Dec 15, 2006



 Thanks Jennie, I did too when I wrote it.

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 15, 2006



 Wonderful Suzanne

[julie I.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Thanks, Julie.

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Good flowing story, vivid, with good conversation. sentence are not to larg and it is easy to keep readers attention. Bravo Suzane!

[Sonja S.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Beautiful story. Very realistic and sad, but with a modirum of hope at the end.

[Nancy S.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Thanks a lot, Nancy and Sonja. I appreciate your comments!

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



"Everything appeared to be moving in slow motion. Jay felt his chest tighten. He moved quickly out the door, slamming it hard on its hinges."

After getting slow motion, I was not ready for "moved quickly." Just threw me a little.

"his friends watched from their usual wooden bench, some of them high on heroin or speed, some stoned or drunk" I wasn't sure about this. I thought pot heads usually cluster with pot heads, speed freaks with speed freaks, junkies with junkies. But I have not been on the street since the 70's, so maybe things have changed or are just different in Australia.

I certainly agree with the other comments. The story is very hard edged and sharp, and was a good read. One thing is I don't remember "seeing" anything. You could work on getting more images into your story. For example, those friends on the park bench...what did they look like? Could you look at them and see how one is stoned, another drunk? Better to show what they are than to merely tell what they are, I think.

Charachters came through very well, human and dimensional, easy to sympathize with them.

best wishes and good luck with this.

R

[Richard H.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Thanks a lot, Richard. Useful comments. Thanks again.

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Suzanne, this story resonated with me, probably because I have actually lived this. My father was an alcoholic, my childhood didn't exist and I saw him when he was dying - but zonked out on the morphine (in the hospital) to ease his passing.

My son and daughter both got hooked on heroin, etc, and they went into hell. I had to go there to pull them out - it took many years but we succeeded. During that period I knew junkies who died - none of these reached the age of 30.

Best of luck in the competition. And do have a happy Christmas.

[I am Magi - St Nicholas is counting down the sleeps](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Hello Magi,

Thank you for sharing about your life with me. What a horrible situation for you! And I am so happy for you that you were able to pull your children out of the abyss!!!! Thank God for that!

I have known junkies as well. My brother is an alcoholic but I am praying one day he will be free. Here's hoping...

Thank you so much for reading my story, voting and commenting!!!
Have a peaceful and blessed Christmas.
suzanne

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Nice job !

[Kathryn Esplin-Oleski](#) commented Dec 16, 2006



Thanks a lot, Kathryn.
suzanne

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



It is a very engrossing story, Suzanne, and one that made me realize how far removed I am from the dark things in life, I didn't understand a lot of what was going on at first (there seemed to be some expectation that the reader would understand) as I have never been a drinker, have never used drugs, and my nuclear family was not dysfunctional. I have been blessed, and it's good to read things like this to help me remember and appreciate that. I was uncomfortable with the casual use of what I think of as "hard" swear words. That also has not been a part of my life, and I found it distracting - but that's just me. It is such a sad story, and the ending though not happy, had a note of hope...brother and sister may yet connect again. I have worked some with trying to get alcoholics into detox, etc., and I know that, so far, every one has returned to the bottle. Thanks for a good read, I wish you well.

[James Harris](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



A fine story. Great comments, too.

[Wilhelmine Estabrook](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Your portrayal of Jay and Penny is excellent. Well done composition and very good read!

[Paul L.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Solid story, Suzanne, feels real.

[John Beck](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



there are some really great moments her, but i do have a few concerns . . .

so far, the only character who really has any depth is the mother. the other characters, i have to say, still are a bit flat. not round. i wouldn't spend too much time developing the friends of jay (as another reader suggested, though i do agree more imagery would be good) because they are minor minor characters and if you develop them then you will have to bring them into the story and have them mean something. right now, they have nothing to do with the outcome.

im assuming that you want for jay to be the main character. but im not certain that jay has learned anything real that makes him stick out. what he comes to understand about his sister is fairly good, but he doesn't really come to understand anything about himself which is what a protagonist needs to do. what's his realization?

although the scene about his father entering his room and his mother coming to his aid is very well done, the rest of the story is too familiar. it needs more depth. the end is too easy.

what happened between jay and penny when they were younger that you can exploit? his anger isnt really at his father, its at penny. does he resent her for never sticking up for him when he was younger because he would turn around and abuse her after getting beaten by his father?

in the first scene in the hospital, the father seems to reticent. dont let him off the hook. and even though many of your readers think jay is a bit edgy, i say he isnt edgy enough. hes too normal for someone who is that far gone.

slow the piece down a bit. give the reader more about the past. show us more of the scenes like the one with jay and his father and mother. in that brief moment you gave more depth to the mohter than any other character.

im not sure i believe pennys "perfect" life she developed for herself, even if it is her overcompensating for her broken one. i dont know that i believe the kids wouldnt be afraid of jay. i dont know if i believe that she would still be married. and jon, as is, adds nothing to pennys character development. does he resent jay? i dont know that jay wouldnt create some sort of tension between her and her husband. i personally would have a hard time letting my wifes junkie brother come over and spend time with my kids. (but for the record wife has no brother and we have no kids)

and what happened to the christian girl in the beginning? she was interesting. and you gave her so much time then dropped her. maybe he sees her later and mistakes her for penny? his mother?

hope i have helped

[ralph pannel](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Your story line was pretty good, but I feel it could use a little more depth. I'm also not comfortable even reading this, not because of the storyline but because of your constant use of swear words. Sorry just don't see the need for it, and if you're going to use it, then perhaps right the first letters and some spaces or something.
Good luck with the contest.

[Dawn M](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Very, very nice story, Suzanne. Dialogue and emotions were real. I found myself feeling empathy for all the characters in your story. Jay and Penny, for having gone through such a miserable childhood. Their mother, for having lived with her husband for so long. Even the father, just for being such a rotten prick. Interesting how Penny and Jay went in such different directions. The tension, pain, and love between them is obvious.

Keep writing

[Ken S.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



This is one of the reasons that Gather exists!
MORE!!!!!!

I wanna know what happens after Jay's father died? What about the relationship between brother and sister?

[Thea Olson](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Nice one. Good luck, hon.

[kate leader](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



I disagree with Ralph! What he says is a stylistic editorial - how he would write it - and this is a trap for the unwary. This is a slice of life story - life is as it is.

Follow your own star, Suzanne - it's your story, not Ralph's! If you do it his way, why bother being you?

[I am Magi - St Nicholas is counting down the sleeps](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Thanks so much, all of you Magi, Kate, Thea, Ken, John and Paul. Thank you so much for your nice comments.

I need to address the swearing issue!

When I wrote Jay, I had to be as true to his character as I could and I knew this would mean he would swear! We may not like that fact, but this character is a male hooker for a living, this is not the only rough area of his life!!!

Like people have said above, this is a slice of real life! Not sanitised life!

I think there are questions at the end of the story, but I don't want to give away stuff for people who haven't read it, but I wanted to show there was a light for Jay, and there were people in his life that could provide a way out for him and that love him.

Thanks for all of your comments, for taking the time to read, thanks heaps. And thanks for your encouragement!

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Powerful story, Suzanne, you seem well in touch with your characters.

[Sheri Fresonke H.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Thanks a lot, Sheri.
suzanne

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



this is a great story and one that a lot of people will be able to relate to. I had tears myself as I could relate to some of it from my own past experiences. Well Done! and best of luck in the competition.

[maria B.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Good story line and also good dialogue with characters. I liked it.

[Angie O.](#) commented Dec 17, 2006



Sue, I enjoyed your story! I am at work and should be working but I just had to read it all. One day I hope that my own kids will not say the same thing to me on my death bed (not that I am a violent dad), but you showed that each child does perceive things in their own way, each deals with their upbringing differently, and each approaches their own life with different levels of loyalty, sacrifice or selfishness. These characters are apart of all of us, and I suspect is some ways this story reflects your own story and so you have been brave enough to share yourself with us. from your soul and in your own style. You have a talent that people will listen to.

Thank you!

[Scott s.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



Powerful and raw but not without hope. Some good comments too, including some things to ponder from Ralph. I suppose everyone would like to know more about different aspects of this family but for me, I would like to see something more of Jay and his dad before the alcoholism kicked in. Can Jay remember the first time his dad came home drunk? What was his reaction then? What was it that drove this man to drink and abuse? Anyway, as I say, there are so many choices to be made, and I've certainly enjoyed the ones you've made. Great stuff.

[Michael S.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



I like it.

[saimy f](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



thanks a lot, Maria, Angie, Scott and Michael.

I appreciate and value all of your comments and your nice words. Thanks for your comments and input about the story.

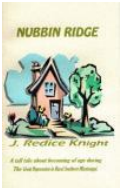
Thanks for taking the time! Suzanne

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



Very well done.

[Jack S.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



Suzzabe I could cop out and Tell "Great Story, etc"but that would not help your writing or my reasoning. I had difficulty identifying and staying with you th rough the whole story, maybe it was just me. I would give the characters a little more depth. We need to know them a little better. Maybe a little more narration and not so much dialog. All so the word shit appears too many times, once or twice is OK. I have never heard it used in the way you used it.Maybe it is down under thing.

I really felt uneasy while reading it and thats a good thing, since you can bring out strong emotional response from your readers.

Anyway it is a good story and just keep doing what your doing.

[Jack K.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



Well done Su, while reading all was knotting up inside.

[Teena D.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



Thanks so much Teena and Jack S! I really appreciate your comments and I am glad the story could effect you in that way.

Jack K, thanks for your comments as well. I guess you liked the story as you said it made you feel uneasy the whole way through, which meant that it was dramatic and powerful enough to impact you.

And you said keep doing what you're doing, which means I must've been doing good stuff. The swearing issue I have already addressed above. These characters would have sworn as much as I wrote. Maybe it is a down under thing. thanks a lot for your comments.

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



A powerful story Suzanne that resonated with many of us who had known such abuse whether of ourselves or of our children. I'm glad that you gave us a moment of humanity in Jay's dad and a moment of grief -- perhaps for never having known more of that dad -- in Jay. And you've left us with some hope . . . that the ties between Penny and Jay have not been severed irrevocably. And, you have shown as well the truth that some children seem to make it through such ordeals better than others. I've often wondered why. Body chemistry perhaps. Or maybe a nature determined to survive.

[Beryl Singleton Bissell](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



Thanks a lot, Beryl. I really appreciate your comments.

It is a mystery, of our choice and our personalities, maybe...I also think that neither of these two characters, were better than the other. They dealt with things very differently, but deep down they were not so different as well. Penny hid her anger and shame, whereas Jay didn't, the whole world could see his.

Thanks so much for your comments. I really appreciate your input and comments. Thanks.

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 18, 2006



very well written. All the best.

[Lalitha B.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



Hey Suzanne.
thank you for the story, and for encouraging me to post one too. My strongest impression of your story was what I felt. And I felt anger alongside Jay, I felt hopeless a bit, I felt regret at the end, and a bit sad that Jay and his dad would never sort it out. So on an emotional level, your story really hit the spot.

[Chris Bekker](#) commented Dec 19, 2006




Thanks a lot, Lalitha!

Thanks a lot, Chris. I am glad that my story had an emotional impact on you and also that you have been inspired to post as well. Good on you.

Thanks so much.


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



 Very good story ,I like it very much!!
I'm Chinese, could I make friend with you ? I want to know where are you come from? I guess your English is very well, so , I have a thought that I hope you could help me to develop my English? well...OK?


[lintao z.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



 Suzanne, your story made me want to take to Jay with a lump of four by two. The ignorant little peasant should be hung from his mother's apron strings and beat. Tough love baby. H


[harley k.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



 I felt like I was there in every moment. In the character's heads and hearts. It was fantastic. Also I felt a real thrill at the imagery particularly at the end (the rainforest one was magic). I would have liked it to be longer but I also liked the fact that we carry the hope for the characters and their futures rather than it all being laid out for us. I really loved it and would love to see it made into film - perhaps at a film festival? Hope you win.

[Kylie N.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



 A marvellous piece of work. Sad, true and powerful. Loved reading it.


[vijay kumar](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



 Thanks, great story!


[John B.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



 nice one mate

[jill w.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



 This is a high quality story, and though I agree that there could be more development of both Jay and Penny, I don't agree that Jay is completely flat. He does change at the end. There is a need for more change, and the end could be extended to show the development of the sibling relationship. There are numerous possibilities. Jay could die, or Penny could start drinking, and Jay could step in to redeem both himself and his father by being there for his sister and her children only to be hit by a bus after Penny gets off the sauce. I just want to know a little more.

I love this story: it is tactile and human. Jay doesn't understand his father and

he cannot understand himself. He doesn't see that people are not one character trait or weakness or the bad deeds they commit. We are the total of our failures and accomplishments, even when one outweighs the other. His father is not just a drunk. He is also the man who played with him, however infrequently. Whatever drove his father to be nice for those fleeting moments contrasts with Jay's tenderness toward his sister. Whatever it was inside Jay that drove him to prostitution and drug abuse also drove his father to violence and alcohol. Just as Penny is able to watch her father die, she is able to treat her brother with dignity while he destroys his body and life. Penny needs to be more developed in this area. How is Penny different from Jay? What made Penny able to function and support these men the way she does? What did she see that gave her a compassion that Jay represses until the last few lines in the story? It is alluded to in the beginning, but never fleshed out.

[jennifer a.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



Great gripping story, Suzanne. Very well written. The dialogues are nicely done and realistic. In spite of the images of the abusive father and the son's scorn at father's deathbed, Jay seems to be a man of feelings though very subdued. The picture of the broken home and mother's quiet resignation to her situation and the helpless endurance of the abuses is sad and makes a lasting impression. Penny is enigmatic, controlled and forgiving; which perhaps made her successful in building a fine nest for herself.

[Dolphi D.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



This is a sad story, yet all too real. If it's fiction, it's excellent. If it's reality, I feel for the person it happened to. Memories can be painful. Others so wonderful. Unfortunately we hang on the the painful ones when we should let them go and grasp the wonderful ones.

[Pamela G.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



loved your story. I was able to relate all too well to the characters. Do you see your brother now?? Holidays can be a tough time for alcholics. Keep your faith (:

[Debbie S.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



The story grabbed me immediately - very believable characters - because I'm not young, it worried me a bit for a young writer, hoping your imagination, rather than raw experience was in play - but guess it must be both. In any case, a real writer indeed is at work here. Glad you stick to your guns on the pious criticism. The craft is more important than people pleasing.

[Christopher G.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



Suzanne, I read it before and commented on it but I just went through and read it again. It is an amazing story. I would appreciate if you would go and read my entry into the contest

<http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.jsp?articleId=281474976864933>

that is the link to mine. Have a great day and good luck with the contest

[julie I.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



I found your story to be very enthralling. I was immediately hooked and although I needed to be getting ready for work, I couldn't stop. I know some people have mentioned the cursing, but I think it fit well into the scheme of things. Excellent!

[Karma M.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



Great stuff! Very descriptive and evoked emotion... Think this is your thing, go for it!
Cheers Brig

[Brigitte R.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



I thought the characters and the background to their lives were put together very well; I liked it a lot

[Barbara F.](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



The story was good and well put together. I will tell you, though, as a published author, I've never found the necessity for profanity.

It's much more challenging to find a phrase that conveys the same meaning without entering into the realm of George Carlin's "9 words you can't say on radio".

[Walker Bennett](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



Suzanne,

This was very, very well done. The kind of thing I am very glad to see here. It is a rare, poignant, powerful and insightful piece. I do not hand out high marks in this particular contest lightly because I think too many get by without real critical feedback. This piece, however, rates as it stands.

I would suggest that you ignore most of the honest and heartfelt advice you have here. Well intentioned tho it may be, I did not find a single turn of phrase or word out of place. (Cultural allowance for spelling etc were obvious.) This specifically includes the very minor profanity, which I feel, would be much more severe in reality.

I also found the fragmentation to be exactly on par with the character's perspective. In fact the depth of the characters was also quite on par from the perspective in which they were written. (One who is intentionally brain numbed sees things in just this way.)

The fact that there are no simple answers, no happy and pat moment of truth

and understanding is the POINT, not the flaw.

In a brief glimpse of characteristic moments, milestones in a journey, if you will, you have given us the life story of each of your characters and you have left us with exactly the questions and answers each of them would face in a full length novel.

BRAVO to you. May you go far with your skill, your insight and your aspirations. I'm highly, highly impressed with this story.

[Webwriter \[pb\]](#) commented Dec 19, 2006



I gave you a 10 despite the fact that i think the story needs some work- but i only say that because i do think it is pretty good- at least, its a pretty enjoyable plot with interesting characters. I don't like many short stories, and i'm really sensitive to inconsistencies in dialog of characters. I think you could look at some of the dialog between the brother and sister, as it seems a little to quick - like everything resolves to quickly and that was unsatisfying to me. I think the characters are good and their stories are good but their dialog felt too much like an R rated version of full house at times. I am pretty sure that it could be improved with a little revision.

sometimes the narrator is confusing, as he/she carries so much of the characters emotions in his/her words- there is something strange to me in seeing a third person narrator say "He felt like a real bastard." I guess its that "showing vs telling" thing - I understand he feels like a bastard if you show it to me, and if after showing it to me you tell it to me its like underestimating my ability to understand whats going on - it feels redundant. If you havent shown it to me through action, and you simply tell me "He really did fill like a bastard," Then its somewhat boring.

again, i wouldnt make critical comments if i didnt think it was worth revising. And usually on Gather i dont think these stories are worth much at all. so i hope you understand. sorry its so confusing - my advice. i'm used to having a print out of a story to write on and make comments - for creative writing workshops and stuff. I could have cut and pasted a bunch of sections - but, meh. Heres one narrator section that stuck out as not-worthy of your plot:

"He walked down into the sunken lounge room and allowed his body to relax into the red cushioning of the couch. Leaning his head backwards and closing his eyes, Jay experienced the familiar jarring of his past. Sounds pounded his skull like it was about to explode. He was glad he had taken that valium before he came, it would hold him over until he could score again. Right now, his body was anchored to the couch.

think it would be better like this:

He walked down into the sunken lounge room and allowed his body to relax into the red cushioning of the couch. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. The normal sounds of the room pounded in his head; his skull felt like it was about to explode, despite his having taken a Valium only an hour earlier. Soon the red light behind his eyelids became the dull light of his home of many years ago, one of those evenings he wanted to forget."

i'm not saying thats any good, but i think its good to take out the line that tells us "he experienced such and such."

one final thing: its easy to come in here and make a couple critical comments. I suck at writing fiction, and think you have developed some interesting family dynamics here. I wouldnt have said all this if i didn't thinks so. I think you should keep working on dialog and the narration.

[John G.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



other notes:

of course you have to swear. Its a mistake to think that you can create a character such as the ones you are describing without having them swear. actually putting effort into keeping your characters from swearing would be a huge mistake, and would be taking away from the honest development of your character.

I think the word "permeate" in the opening section should be removed. Just my opinion. I like simpler words that are miles away from sentimental. I'd probably use a word like "hung" so that the word doesnt distract from the scene. ok.

[John G.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



This is truly excellent. It absorbed me, moved me to tears and best of all I could relate to your characters. Good easy narrative and fine expressive writing. You earned this well deserved 10 Suzanne.

[Candida Bohne-Eittreim](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Nice job Su!

[Andy F.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



A beautiful story! It reminds you that underneath all the mess and confusion we get ourselves into we are all just the same.....little softies

[sasha T.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



I agree with Walker about profanity. Part of an author's gift is finding words that are just as strong and just as meaningful,

[Leah Christensen](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Great Story!
Very real and gutsy!

B.J

[Barbara J. Barger](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Thanks a lot, Lintaio for your nice comments.

Thanks a lot, Kylie for your wonderful comments. When I was writing this I could see it as a film moving around the streets of Kings Cross. I can still see all the scenes and the rooms and the houses and everything. I am so glad you felt part of everything and could see and feel the things the characters could. Thanks again.

Vijay and John and Jill - thank you very much for your comments I am glad you thought it was powerful and worth reading.

Jennifer a. thank you for your comments in regard to Penny: I wrote this story originally from two points of view. Penny's and Jay's. My tutor at the time said I should focus on one point of view. So penny had to be put back into the background and things only seen through Jay's eyes. I like that though, because he was always the main character for me. Thank for all of your other comments they were wonderful.

Thanks Dolphi, you seem to have a great understanding of the story and the characters. Thanks for your lovely comments.

Pamela: thanks for your nice comments. The story is not true of my family, it is fiction, but thanks a lot for your comments.

Debbie - thanks for asking, yes I will see my brother at Christmas. I see him often and talk to him all the time. We communicate a lot. Thanks so much for your comments.

Chris: thank you so much for your comments - I am really glad you found the characters believable and real. Fortunately none of this was from my life. And thanks for the comment about the craft, I totally agree. Cheers again!

Thanks Karma, I am glad you were hooked in straight away!

Brigitte and Barbara and walker bennett: thanks so much for your input and comments.

Webwriter! Thank you so much for your comment! Your comments were so valuable to me in regard to the other critiques. You understood this story very well! Thanks so much for your very encouraging comments! I really appreciate it.

Thanks John G, if you don't write fiction, I don't really understand how you can re-write paragraphs of the story... anyway, I am sure some of your critique was valuable but word choice is a very personal thing. Thanks for taking a lot of time, to look at it! Looks like you did a lot of work.

Thanks so much Candida, I am glad you liked it so much. Thanks Andy and Sasha.

Thanks Leah.

Thanks BJ, thanks for the word gutsy, I think that's a great word in regard to this, because i had to be brave to write this, in a way.

Thanks heaps everyone. A big day of comments and I have enjoyed every single one of them!!!!

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Amazing and powerful story, I felt the character's pain and frustrations. Very well done.

[jordy a.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Like others, I have to say that this is a very powerful and well written story. I relate to more of it than I care too.

I gave it a Ten even though I think it could use some polishing. A few sentences required re-reading (for meaning's sake) because of some awkward phrasing; and I found a few commas missing.

I want to disagree with some of what ralph said. I think the father's reticence is totally correct. It portrays the father's awareness of his vulnerable state and the son's expected hate.

Also, Jay's hate is not primarily for his sister. Although he may have some anger for her, Jay hates himself most of all. That hate is the source of Jay's self-destructive behaviour and his joy of blackouts; usually the way of it in these kinds of situations.

I have to agree that the sister is a little flat through most of the piece. She was keenly portrayed in the final hospital scene. Kudos!

Although the Jesus Girl did not reappear (and there was a feeling of expectation for that) I found her echoing in my mind at the end of the story as Jay walked out and headed back into his life carrying a bit of optimism.

I'll say it again. This is a well written and very powerful story. For personal reasons, I am very glad that I read it.

Best of Luck in the contest.

[Bill's Spirit](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



the story made me want more, and you could have written parts of this about my own brother, father, etc...not so much the main plot as the characters themselves. Shoot, we couldnt handle dad SOBER, as he was much like the dad here! And yet, as my dead brother would say, "gotta love the ol bastard!" and we all do. Its also a good lesson in forgiveness, and some folks can,

some cant, and who are we to judge either choice? Id love to spark as many comments in my stories as yours has, both good and bad. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

[Katheryn D.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



This is a bleak, powerful story and I was itching to edit it, to reveal its sharp edges. The swearing (which upsets some people) could be handled by using a word once, twice at the most, to establish character. I was sorry that "Jesus girl" didn't make an appearance. Good luck in the contest. Moya

[HGM Moya Goatley](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



thanks Jordy for your lovely comments.

Bill's Spirit, thanks for your insightful comments, you understand the characters well. The father is feeling vulnerable, that is the whole point of that scene. As for Penny being not developed, as I said above, in a short story, you can't develop everyone of the characters to the same level. Penny had to take a back seat to Jay, otherwise we would have a novella on our hands. I think the unveiling of her true feelings at the end shows a lot about penny, no one knew much about her until her father died and then she let out her feelings. You totally got the point of the Jesus girl. I also had written another scene with the Jesus girl which was taken out. But she is there to show hope in Jay's life. I am very glad that she remained with you. If I choose to make this a longer piece in the future she would feature highly. But as a short story, you are limited, to make everything count. Thanks so much for your comments. I am glad you found it powerful.

Thanks so much, Kathryn for your comments. I am sorry that it reminds you of something in your life. Thanks for sharing about that. Forgiveness, yeah, the point of the story is to show Penny hadn't actually forgiven him, she was being a dutiful daughter. She still held the anger inside. I think that's what makes it interesting is that no one has dealt with this better. They are both angry and hurt still. Thanks so much.

Moya: As I've said the Jesus girl did have a scene previously but it was removed. I am so glad the characters were able to live for you. Thanks a lot.

I am so glad that people have told me they were wanting more at the end of the story. This means the story was able to absorb and engross them. Thanks so much.

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Suzanne,

I honestly think that if you had put more into any of these characters you would have lost your focus on Jay. I also feel that the portrayal of them all, through Jay's eyes, is just about as deep as it can go without giving him more clarity of vision than an abused and addicted mind could muster.

As his mind clears toward the end, we DO get more of Penny, and we DO get the hope represented by the Jesus girl, but before them, Jay's fuddled state

would have been damaged by more.

I've read this twice more since my original comment, and I still wouldn't change a thing. I think you stayed true to Jay. I think you paint a picture that not many minds can grasp, not having been there, but he still rings true.

I'm torn between the "more" comments and realizing that this is fantastic as it stands. It forces the imagination to mull over what happens next. This makes it a story not just about Jay and his family, but about each of us and the way we view the world.

I think that is the intrinsic value here and would truly hate to see it messed with.

Another Bravo. The third read is as good as the first.

[Webwriter \[pb\]](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Loved the story. It's totally believable and doesn't need changing. Perfectly captures how I remember Sydney everytime I visit. I feel like I saw something I wasn't supposed to almost like I was intruding on Jay by reading the story.

[Matt M.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



Thank you so much, Web writer. I thank you for your well thought out comments and your wonderful compliments. I am so glad that you see it as complete as indeed I do. All the things you said about focusing on other characters is very true, Jay was the main deal here. Penny is known at the end. Thanks heaps! I am so glad you have liked after reading it over a couple of times! I really appreciate your comments!!!

Thanks heaps Matt for your comment as well. I think that is great that you felt like a voyeur with Jay. That means the story was able to pull you in, like a fly on the wall! I am so glad! thanks for your comments.

[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



You're very welcome, Suzanne, thank you for writing it!


The more I think about this (yes, it haunts me) the more I think what a fantastic creative writing exercise it would make. You've had such a clamor for more detail, a happy ending, more, more more. Wouldn't it be interesting to see where a couple of dozen other writers would take it from here? I think it would be a profound statement on the different outlooks we all possess.

Don't get me wrong, I think it's QUITE complete as it stands, but it makes me wonder what those who want more would write!

People fascinate me, and I think that's why I'm so attached to this one.


[Webwriter \[pb\]](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



 Very strong emotional impact, and so raw. Well done.


[Auntie Smedley](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



 This is a powerful story and rings true of family relationships. Some wounds don't easily heal, and I found Jay's relationship to his sister and to her family moving and well drawn. I love that the father's death is bringing the siblings together, and that Jay realizes something about his sister's pain from this. There even seems to be the promise of redemption from the fact that he realizes this, and asks to be invited back to her home. The way he interacts with her children is great. The other standout for me was the shorthand of their conversation, including the telephone conversation, which seemed perfect. Well done!


[Ann H.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



 Well done Suzanne!!
You have a wonderful gift of description. As I read your story I could feel the movement of the characters within the story as well as their emotions. I was able to imagine the visual background that you have weaved into the story. Good Luck!


[Elly H.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



 thanks Web writer, that sounds like an interesting idea. I find people fascinating as well, I guess that's why we like writing(?)
Thanks Aunt Smedley, for your comments.
Thanks so much Ann H. I am so glad you liked it and that you enjoyed the dialogue!
Thanks heaps Elly, I am so glad the words were able to create pictures for you. Thanks for your great comments.


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 20, 2006



 a good story well executed


[david ashworth](#) commented Dec 21, 2006



 Thanks a lot, David.


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 21, 2006



 Great story Suzanne! So, true to life. Two Thumbs up!!! Good work.


[Jim H.](#) commented Dec 21, 2006



 Thanks a lot, Jim.


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 21, 2006



 Good job Suzanne, Best of lucks in the competition, I gave ten!


[Esaiah Udhayakumar](#) commented Dec 22, 2006



 Good material. Concrete details in places are very strong - add more! Develop this story! Ending didn't satisfy. The rock scene was fantastic! Wonderful. Maybe develop Penny's character more fully? And the dad? Make it a little harder for reader to hate the dad, make addict more likeable as you helped to do with the rock detail. Make us feel conflicted about the dad...? Just like main character has to be because after all it's his dad, even if a shit.


[Kelly T.](#) commented Dec 22, 2006



 A great story, well done.


[caleb s.](#) commented Dec 23, 2006



 suzanne - great writing! i felt for a character i have *nothing* in common with. wow!


[jessie voigts](#) commented Dec 23, 2006



 thanks so much, Jessie. I am so glad that it could effect you in that way.


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 23, 2006



 thanks caleb, I appreciate all of your encouraging comments.


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 23, 2006



 Great read!!


[Michele D.](#) commented Dec 24, 2006



 thanks a lot, Michelle!


[Suzanne S.](#) commented Dec 24, 2006



 I loved your story and wasn't quite ready for it to end. I would like to know more about them and what happens next. You kept my attention throughout.


[Shelbia Chandler](#) commented Dec 24, 2006



 Great story! A great read.


[ben s.](#) commented Dec 24, 2006



 A very intense story. The character's memories were done vividly.

[Robert H.](#) commented Dec 25, 2006



 Thanks a lot Shelbia, Ben and thanks Robert as well. I really appreciate your comments!