

Tyler Fick  
October 30, 2001  
Dr. Rosenthal

### **Tyler Page Suzanne Fick: The Identity**

Female. I watch as the word comes out of some people's mouths, the fear in their voice makes you begin to wonder if female could possibly mean shark, hurricane on the horizon, or a demon... not woman, not the mother we all know, not half the population that inhabits this earth. Like somehow to a male co-worker, the word female means incompetence or short skirts. To a male classmate it means 'kiss-up', slut, or high fives to egos through her pretty face/body. The word female brings with it the black trail of mascara from tears that would be shed when things get stressful, because we all know how "emotional" the female can get, and we just don't have the money for the mops that can wipe up the female mess. The word female brings with it children that need sitters during important conferences, which means females are not reliable. The word female brings no intelligence, only monthly bills blamed on "Auntie Flow," from each shopping spree, because all females are not complete without the latest fashion they just read about in their subscriptions to *Cosmo*. (And yes, we all do subscribe to *Cosmo*... how else would we learn to keep our men satisfied in and out of the bedroom?) When I was a little girl, yes I lined up across the gym with the rest of the girls, and yes, I stood there and waited for the boys, that were lined up across from us, to make their way over to ask me to dance. I read my *Cosmo*, and yes, I have left black trails of tears. I am female. I am the shark, I am the hurricane over the horizon, and I am the demon. I have played the part assigned to me at birth and along my journey I have heard the assumptions and asinine definitions that follow the word female, as well as any other female would. I hear, but I was taught not to listen. I was taught by a line of women, which somehow remained strong through decades that insisted on shouting these definitions at them as they were lined up in the gym across from the boys. I was taught by an all-girls Catholic school, which let me be female, even if it did mean I was going to end up a demon. I was taught by my girl friends that would show me how to love, show me how to love everything about myself, including the mascara that, on occasion, runs... they helped me mop it up, even when they couldn't afford it. I was taught by looking directly ahead, without getting distracted by the glitter of Brittany Spears, or the height you get in a high heel, or the beauty and acceptance you receive in being silent. I was taught, but it took a long time for me to finally listen and understand. I stand here embarking on my twenty first year of being a female, and I am still being taught, but today my ears are open and my *Cosmopolitan* subscription has been cancelled.



I remember when I was a little girl, sitting at the foot of my Grandfather's chair as he sat there and told me the story of how he met my Nana. He used words like *shocked*, *beautiful*, and *I knew*. My mother's parents met at a Christmas party, my Grandfather noticed my Nana before she even knew who he was. They were a couple born from World War II. He was a navy boy searching for someone to receive his letters; she was a high school graduate searching for a husband to help start her life. He asked for leave, and one day they married in a courthouse... she wore a coffee brown suit, and he wore his uniform. He tells the story, fifty years later, like his love has never died, like she still is the beautiful woman that snuck into the corner of his eye.



*Mrs. Harriett W. Bayham  
announces the marriage of her daughter  
Suzanne  
to  
Carroll M. Radebaugh  
Lieutenant, junior grade, United States Naval Reserve  
on Wednesday, the sixteenth day of May  
One thousand nine hundred and forty-five  
Long Beach, California*



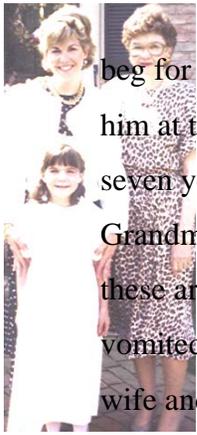
As a little girl, I secretly told myself the story of how they met

over and over again, looking forward to the soldier that was to fall madly in love with me. When I was a sophomore in high school my father's parents were involved in a horrible in a car accident. When my father went to go through the wreckage of their half eaten car, he found impacted between the seats, covered in broken glass, and torn medal... a tiny felt box. Inside was a diamond ring, which was intended as a surprise for my Grandmother from my Pop for their fiftieth anniversary. My

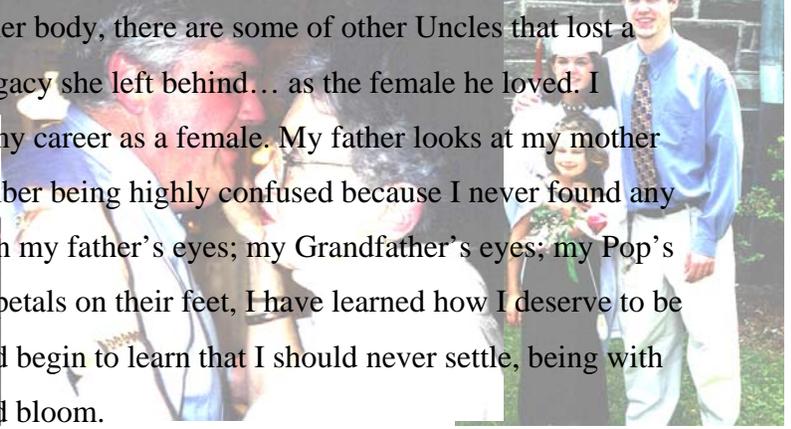
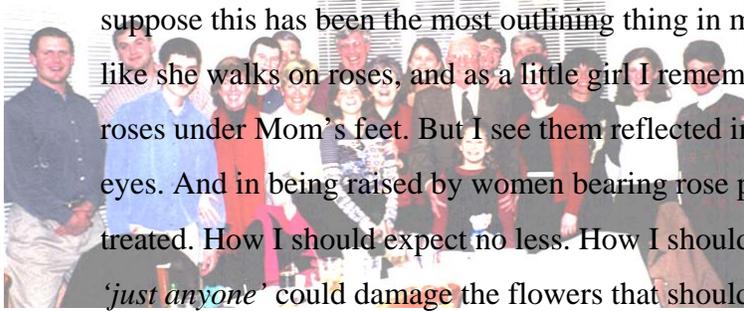
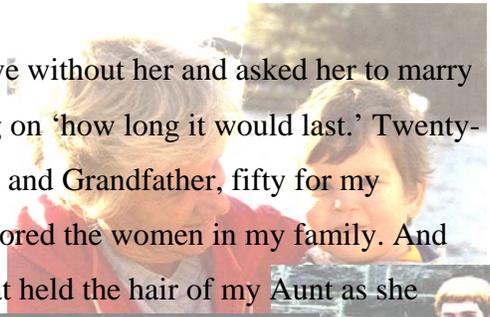
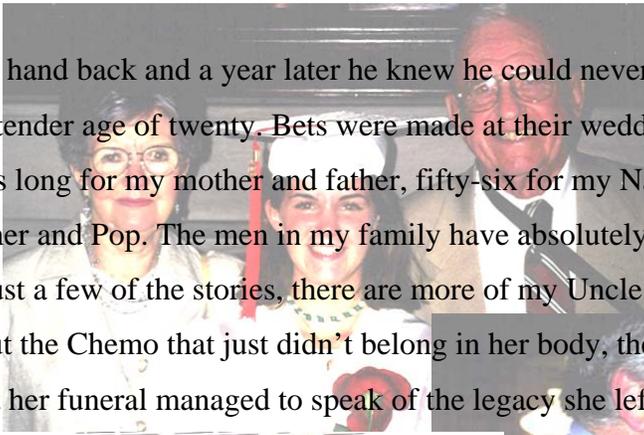
Grandmother died in my Pop's arms, and although he would cling to life for a few months after the accident, he never would regain his sanity. Like somehow it was lost with her spirit. One day, he told his nurse that he saw his wife sitting in the corner of his hospital room, when the nurse returned an hour

later to check on him, he was already gone... gone to be with the woman he loved. My mother met my father in the second grade. He was the older pesky boy that teased her, best friends with her cousin. She loved him from day one. They dated in high school; he broke her heart, only to then realize he had made a horrible mistake. Then she made him

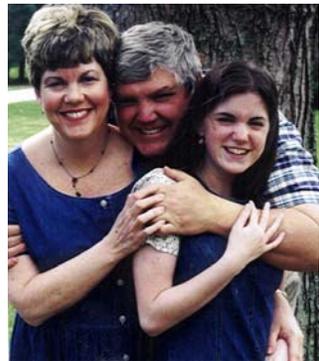




beg for her hand back and a year later he knew he could never live without her and asked her to marry him at the tender age of twenty. Bets were made at their wedding on 'how long it would last.' Twenty-seven years long for my mother and father, fifty-six for my Nana and Grandfather, fifty for my Grandmother and Pop. The men in my family have absolutely adored the women in my family. And these are just a few of the stories, there are more of my Uncle that held the hair of my Aunt as she vomited out the Chemo that just didn't belong in her body, there are some of other Uncles that lost a wife and at her funeral managed to speak of the legacy she left behind... as the female he loved. I suppose this has been the most outlining thing in my career as a female. My father looks at my mother like she walks on roses, and as a little girl I remember being highly confused because I never found any roses under Mom's feet. But I see them reflected in my father's eyes; my Grandfather's eyes; my Pop's eyes. And in being raised by women bearing rose petals on their feet, I have learned how I deserve to be treated. How I should expect no less. How I should begin to learn that I should never settle, being with *'just anyone'* could damage the flowers that should bloom.



The women in my family are strong. My Nana's father died on her first day of first grade, forcing my Great Grandmother to get a job as a music teacher and raise a little girl all on her own in a world where widows were as useless as boats with holes. My Nana came to Baltimore on her own, leaving behind her hometown of California, and somehow made a home in weather that she had never seen before... like snow. My father's mother raised five little boys to bury one in Vietnam, watch one be destroyed by drugs and alcohol, marry two off, and let one live in the basement of her house until she would eventually pass away. My mother's sister



educated herself, earning degree after degree during an era when high-heel pumps, looking thin and 'secretaries' day' was established. My Aunt beat breast cancer while keeping her job and four kids in line. My own mother, who is the inspiration for most of the courage I own today, sat in a hospital room and was told that her son and new born baby girl would probably die within two years because they had just been diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis. She fought with doctors when they told her to "not get attached to me" and to "let the disease run



its course." Twenty years later, she still fights with insurance companies so my brother and I can get the

latest and best medicine that can help us fight this fight. She was always the first face I saw as I opened



my eyes from another surgery; she held my hand and told me to fight and to sometimes cry, but to never give-up. She is quite possibly the most beautiful shark I have ever known.

These women in my life have been living role models for me, it is as if

they have stepped out of the pages of a Jane Austin novel and told me to be who I am. A female. The men in my life have inspired me no less.

My father is a pillar to everything I expect out of myself, he sets high goals and he expects his son as well as his daughters to reach those goals. He sees nothing of gender, he only see the potential and talent

each one of his children posses. He is firm and fair, giving me daily doses of self-esteem every since I was his little baby girl upon his knee. The generations of men and women in my family have taught me

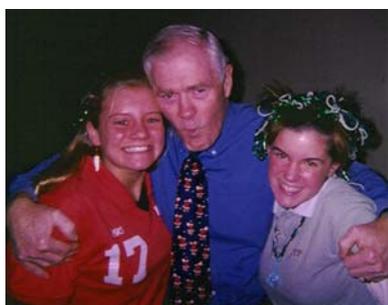
to embrace myself and then like magic, everything else in my life will somehow fall into place. I owe it to myself to be a success first. With the

path of success there will be adversity, disease, and boats with holes. But that is okay, because my family has taught me that education will help me no longer be ignorant to adversity, that courage will teach me beauty and that walking this path with dignity and confidence is merely a shortcut to gathering my rose seeds.



My family is a division of religions, when I was younger I was baptized Catholic and then when I was old enough to choose, I was confirmed Catholic. I went to a Catholic elementary school so when I started looking at middle schools, and high schools it was not a shock that I went the private, catholic and single sex direction. I would end up choosing a school that would ultimately change my life, as well as my view on my own gender. I was twelve when I would choose Maryvale Preparatory School. It is hard to believe today that I was only twelve when I made the decision that has had the most important impact on my life. Maryvale was a small school; my eighth grade class was made up of only twenty girls. We were each other's best friends. We went to the movies in packs of twelve and the mall in packs of fourteen. We struggled at graduation, fearing the girls that would be added onto our "packs"

with high school. So with lumps in our throats, at orientation we sat together glancing over the new faces, holding each other's hands tight, taking new hands and embarking with the rest of the freshman around the world into the doors of high school to become to class of 1999. You may laugh when I say this, but when I talk of my high school class, I still receive goose bumps. Every morning, the entire school would congregate in the gym, we would lay over each other's book bags, trade homework assignments, eat our bagels and talk about how we really should *at least consider* shaving our legs sooner or later because we were really starting to look like hairy apes, then we would laugh and grab each other's hands and walk arm and arm to homeroom. Our ponytails would swing back and forth as we skipped through the halls, and the stench of innocence would reek through the air we exhaled... the stench of hurricanes on the horizon.



What I would receive from Maryvale on June 4, 1999 was not only a hard earned education, but it was a shine. A shine I keep buried in the deep parts of my inner being that I let belong only to my female self. The place my individuality truly belongs... the place I shine. I had Miss Malone for Honors English in ninth grade, and then again for Speech in twelfth grade. She never married, and from the look of her, you worried that one-day she might shrivel up inside her aching arthritis. The first day of English she opened her mouth and her spirit came out. She had opinions, and she voiced them. She believed in culture, art, literature, and most of all she believed in the power of the female... the shark, the demon. For Speech class, before every speech we gave, she would make us say, *"I am a beautiful, intelligent, clever girl. I will nail this speech, because I worked hard."* And if the week before I had struggled on confidence and eye contact, she would make me alter what I had to say, *"I am a beautiful, intelligent, amazing girl. I am not afraid to look you in the eye, because I am confident!"* She would sometimes take whole classes to speak of women authors that 'knew what they were talking about vs. authors that did not.' Of course this was all her own opinion, but she welcomed on those who challenged her. It really did not matter anyway, because everything she said sounded like it had come from some mystical textbook we all vowed to read the day we decided to become an intelligent woman, like her. She spoke of men like they were a passing phase in her life to young girls that were dying to be kissed by a boy. She spoke of her friends like they were the spine God

forgot to give her, to girls that had a new best friend every other week. And she spoke of beauty to girls that cursed their mirrors, to girls that were hidden in a forest of make-up, to girls that wondered if tomorrow was really worth living. She spoke... loud... and that was enough for me to realize the unmarried status, the arthritis... (the Cystic Fibrosis) was just a decoy to who she really was. Rather, what society may think of as faults, were the areas she kept in her shine. Maryvale had a breeding ground for teachers like her. Miss Malone was one of many that would inspire me, inspire me not as a human being... but as a female. My Biology teacher would encourage all of us to work hard... she would run around with smiles and excitement during Science Fair, (that she made sure all of us entered.) stating how important it was to keep science in a woman's life alive and fertile. My trig teacher talked of a deep love for math, and even though I wanted to give up and accept the D+, she made me work hard to correct answers, she cleared her schedule for me. My twelfth grade English teacher looked at us like we were his own beautiful daughters; he cried when he hugged us goodbye at Graduation and he always smiles when his beautiful daughters come back for a visit with their 'old man.' During my senior year, my Spanish teacher was going through some very rough family problems, during our last Spanish class, she hugged us... we had become a small family. Four years together, she looked us straight in the eyes and said we saved her life day after day. My honors history teacher taught a college level course, he raised the bar higher than we could reach, he made us jump to reach. His tests were hard, we all failed in the beginning; he ripped off a door from an old rundown refrigerator and gradually we all had an A+ proudly displayed on it. Our teachers helped us realize the impact we could have on the world, by telling us the daily impact we had on their worlds. Although it has been three years since I graduated, I still miss the teachers at Maryvale. They became friends; friends that forced me to look at the world ahead of me and say... loud... *"I am a beautiful, intelligent, amazing girl. I am not afraid to look you in the eye, because I am confident!"*



There is no place on earth like Maryvale. It is a planet of its own. The second after the World Trade Towers fell; the only place I wanted to crawl to... was Maryvale. In my head I pictured the entire school; teachers, faculty, seniors, sixth graders... huddled together in our gymnasium, just placing heads on shoulders as they watched the unfolding tragedy on a

small television. Education was important to Maryvale, but humanity always came first. There is a certain spirit that creeps around the halls of the school, and each girl would embrace it as it passed through her soul. We wore our blazers proudly, and even though we whined, we secretly ran to Maryvale as our *home away from home*. Through spirit weeks where the school would be bursting with so much life you would nearly be knocked over; to liturgies held in our gymnasium, where you would touch the hand of your 'sister' next to you and swear you could actually feel the hand of God inside your



own; to the retreats where we snuck out in our 'packs' to watch the stars fall; to dances where we always seemed to lose our dates because all we cared about was holding onto each other; to open discussions in classrooms where all of us, the future females of the world, would eventually learn that silence is a form of fear and fear is a form of death. We were girls of the new millennium, but we cared nothing of what

the new millennium was or what we were supposed to be doing to prepare for it; instead we met in the morning, laid over each other's book bags, and traded secrets on how to shine. Maryvale delivered me into the adult world. Delivered me ready... they started the motor to my hurricane.

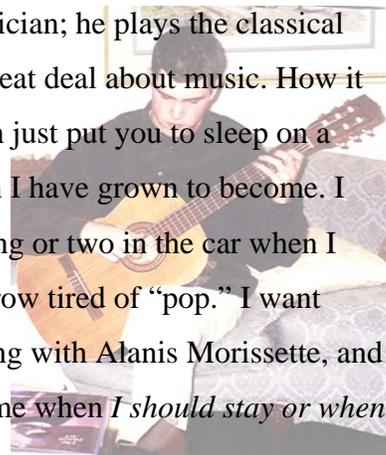
I met my four best friends on the grounds of Maryvale. If someone were to ask me today exactly how the five of us met, I would never be able to answer correctly. The stories of our creation have been varied and misplaced through the years. But here we stand, eight years after we walked through Maryvale's doors and we still stand together arm in arm. In high school I always knew how special they were, but it was not until our senior year did I really begin to understand how deeply rooted our friendship had become. We immersed ourselves in each other, we often passed up nights filled with kegs and lacrosse players just to huddle together in Brooke's basement, drink a few beers, and talk about life and what we dreamed our futures to be. Our friends would call the next day, hung over and covered in hickeys, and tell us what we missed the night before, but it didn't matter because nothing seemed to be as good as the way we lived life. The summer before we left for college was something out of a movie, filled with road trips, ocean breezes, daily dinners together, lazy days at the pool, random nights at the bar, dancing,



and nights with stars that linger inside your veins to this very day. I hold tightly onto these girls because they fulfill my life the way no one ever has. They have taught me of faith, love, and beauty. When we are together, the world seems to disappear. And this is a world that tells me *I should* have a boyfriend at twenty, that *I should* be flirting with boys to be accepted, that if you love another female *too much* then people will think you are a lesbian, and that *I should* give up this nonsense with these girls and actually start my life. It has not been easy to always ignore the world, but we manage to put behind us the most trivial stuff and put ahead of us, our own dreams and desires. Being a part of this friendship has been a comfort for all of us. We all possess our own talents, our own beauties, as well as our own shine; together we encourage individual traits when the world does not; they catch me when I fall, but they watch me when I shine... they watch, smile and applaud the path I took. We share bruises, we share trials of injustice; we share fuel for the hurricane. If a genie's lamp fell onto my lap today and offered me one wish, I would ask him if he could deliver to each girl the ability to be loved by a pack of sharks, demons, and hurricanes. Because sharks can bite away nets that fall from boats with holes, demons can scare away insecurities that harbor within, and hurricanes can brush away the tarnish and bring out the shine. We celebrate our friendship on Christmas Eve; we call it our anniversary. It is a day dedicated to one another; the females our mothers, Maryvale and the five of us have taught one another to be. It is just another day where we get to ignore the rest of the world and live our lives the way we want to live them. It is just another day where we get to immerse ourselves in true beauty.



I have grown to become a person that has a deep affection for art. I find passion in things created by man's hand. Whether it is a painting, a story, or a chord from a guitar, I see potential for my own growth in watching the process of another's creation. My brother is a musician; he plays the classical guitar and creates pieces for orchestras in his sleep. He has shown me a great deal about music. How it can heal the soul, how it can guide you to answers unknown, or how it can just put you to sleep on a restless night. Music is one of my biggest outside influences on the person I have grown to become. I have heard the voices of the modern generation and I have even sang a song or two in the car when I think no one else is watching, but I, like the rest of the world I suppose, grow tired of "pop." I want something that will stay with me for years. So I listen to Fiona Apple, along with Alanis Morissette, and Stevie Nicks. Van Morrison takes me *into the mystic* and The Clash tells me when *I should stay or when*



*I should go.* My best friend, Amy, makes mixed tapes for me; she's done this since high school. She says, "Music heals the soul." She made me a mix tape when I got my first broken heart, she told me, "The music would help me grow a stronger, better heart." She made me a mix tape as we watched in disbelief the distance grow farther between us with college, she said, "Music will build bridges." She made me a mix tape when I fell in love, she said, "Music will make the love sweeter." Music has influenced me, because it has allowed me to speak when I have no idea what words I want to use. When I am angry, I throw in *The Donnas* and push play to their jaded female egos that strum on their guitars. When I am sad I rewind to David Gray and I allow him to tell me, "*all these useless emotions churning round as I search these bare walls for a clue. And all the time the truth is flashing in my mind that when a heart gets broken, ain't nothing you can do...*" And when I am happy and want to dance I really do believe Michael Jackson when he says *I shouldn't stop till' I got enough.* Music has enhanced my everyday emotions, and at times it has even made them more real... and certainly more capable to express. Even when I was afraid to feel what was harboring inside these female walls.

Poetry and music have walked side by side in my life. I love words put together so sweetly that they flow off your tongue like a song, or when books speak of the soft wind that you can actually feel because it is so well written. The written word has influenced my life a great deal. I admire poets, authors, and short story tellers with the greatest type of admiration. With a deep envy to live their lives and own their thoughts for just one day. I read Jane Austin, wishing I could be her writing during an era where women were barely able to speak without their husbands' consent. I read J.D. Salinger, my favorite author, and wonder what it is about him that makes him never finish any of his stories with something concrete and solid for the reader to walk away with. I try to grasp some piece of the magical world Emily Bronte and her sister's created when they were younger through her poetry. And I look into my mirror at my own image and wonder if I will ever be as female as Marge Piercy. Through reading, I am inspired. I attempt to better myself, as well as my own writing. My dream is to follow in the footsteps of those that I admire so greatly now, and maybe one day a young girl struggling to find her own identity will pick up and read something I have written, and just as it has happened with me time after time, the answer will sweetly flow from her lips like a song; she will lift her hand, feel the breeze and go where the wind in my story guides her.

There is much to be admired in this world, we live in a free country and we are given the ability to dream. It is unfortunate for many young girls that the dream gets lost among the magazine models, the romance stories on 'lifetime', and the tell all books on "the rules" of staying happily married by a woman who just



received a divorce from her husband. I think too often we think someone else knows what is best for us, when in reality it is only you who can say no, or yes... or maybe, if you're not ready to commit to anything concrete. But no matter what answer you give, it is yours, and you should stand firm by it. All of my experiences have taught me to stand firm behind every decision I make, even if in the end it lands me in debt, dejected, or kicked to the curb with only the clothes on my back and my pride left to my name. What is wrong with thinking you are perfect at being you? No one is better at playing you, then you... so therefore, you are perfect at being you. But it seems people still want to call you vain, selfish, even a stupid bitch that thinks she's better than anyone else. Luckily I don't have to sleep with those

people, instead I have chosen to surround myself with people that give me advice in deciding, but whatever decision I make, not only do they encourage me, but they stand behind me. Confidence is a hard thing to keep a tight grasp on; people always seem to want to knock it out of your hands when you are not looking. But in



being a female, confidence is our only defense in a world where women are not allowed to carry weapons. I hold on tightly to my confidence, and I try with all my might to pass some of it on to my little sister, who is slowly starting to disappear behind the glitter of Brittany Spears. I do not know how the lucky few acquired confidence. I suppose in the beginning it started with just one, and she chose to take a bite out of an apple. All seemed lost, but now here I stand today, reflecting the image of generations of women, standing together still tasting the bitter aftertaste from that apple. All of what I have listed in this essay has helped me find my own identity in some way. In a dream, Eve comes to me, tossing the apple up in the air with one hand. She looks at me, smiles a tilted smile and asks if I want a taste... the demon in me says yes, the shark in me takes a giant bite, and the hurricane in us both revs its engine. Female... it's a scary word. When fueled by family, education and self-belief just imagine how scary the actual female can be... her power is limitless... look for the hurricane on the horizon.

