

## Happily Ever After

Growing up, I was fortunate enough to be one of those kids who were told stories which began with 'once upon a time' and ended with a 'happily ever after.' My nights as a child would begin with me snuggling into the covers of my bed, waiting patiently for whatever book my mom was choosing to read for me. Without fail, the tales would always end with an inevitable 'they lived happily ever after'. This went on until I was about six years old, and I was introduced to a little Disney film known as 'Pocahontas.' With the conscience of a six year old, I was sure, positive even that Pocahontas would live happily ever after with John Smith. It is without saying that the ending to 'Pocahontas' disappointed me and I vowed never to watch it again. My taboo on Pocahontas was kept in the closet for the remainder of my childhood years. I invested my time watching and reading other tales that were sure to provide me with a satisfying happy ending.

It wasn't until I was about twelve years old that I truly began to appreciate the story within the story of 'Pocahontas.' At this confusing time of my life, my English teacher had assigned me to write a report about the lessons learned from the 2004 Tsunami. Thanks to Google and my 'take-for-granted' internet access, I had written the usual report, commenting mostly on the facts and statistics, and the inevitable improvements in technology and security. Since my school was big on 'reflections', I found it appropriate to include a section on the life lessons learned because of the Tsunami. Among the thousands of searches that popped up, I was taken aback by an article written by a woman who had survived. She had written that survivors had learned to live their lives positively and to leave the negative thoughts behind. I was completely bewildered by her words. This survivor was saying that she could be positive despite the true horrors of the event. My thoughts were clearly lost in translation. I knew I was in need of a mother and daughter conversation. Of course my mom, being the older and wiser of us two, immediately understood the woman's words. She explained, I listened, and that was that. I knew two things at that point; the meaning behind the survivor's words and the perfect ending to my report;

"The tsunami hasn't just taught us how to prevent death and destruction, but it has made us notice that we are lucky, lucky to still be alive, and to make a difference in this world. We still have a home and a family to share our love and comfort, to understand us. There are children out there without homes and a family to give them warmth and care, whilst we spend each day not caring about what will happen to us, and the people closest to us. The impact of the survivors' lives has made us reflect on our own lives, and the importance of making the best of each day. The tsunami has the potential to advance us into a higher level."

When I understood that happiness didn't come in the most obvious forms, I realized that Disney writers didn't make a mistake by making Pocahontas and John Smith star crossed lovers. As a kid, you presumed almost immediately that any Disney movie was sure to grant you with a 'happily ever after.' So if you think about it, it's quite evident to see that Pocahontas will still lead a happy life, despite her separation with John Smith. She will find that happy ending. Disney movies aren't there to promise me an everlasting smile; they are there to ensure me that I can smile. I can be happy, even when it seems like I'm not living happily ever after.

This 2009 New Year, I found out the closest meaning to happiness. As a Thai citizen, it is expected of me and my family to visit our older relatives annually for New Year blessings. I was expecting the usual blessing of a 'prosperous, successful and wealthy year.' Instead, I was looked in the eyes by my respected grandfather, and was told that happiness is found by realizing the simple things in life, things that will forever be true. A storm of examples came into my head. If there is no darkness, there can't be light. If there is no sadness, there is no happiness. It's as simple as that. I then realized that my New Year blessings weren't hopes for me to be happy, but rather the ingredients to making myself happy. Knowing your 'darkness' and appreciating the 'light' will be an everlastingly true ingredient for happiness, whether it be from 'once upon a time,' or 'forever after.' I knew then and there that life doesn't have to be perfect, not even Pocahontas will live a perfect life, because in truth, living is not about perfection. Life is far greater and far more promising than any fairy tale, because life is not restricted between the boundaries of 'Once Upon a Time,' and 'Happily Ever After.'

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