



[Home](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011-12](#)

[Summer 2011](#)

[Winter/Spring 2011](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011](#)

[Summer 2010](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Contact](#)

A Real Winner

by Richard Combs

I'm eight years old and in the second grade. If I hadn't been held back I would have been in the third, and I'm pretty sure that means that I would now be nine instead of eight. I'm a little confused about that.

My mom said that I had been held back to allow me time to adjust. Grungy Wilson, my best friend, said I had been held back because I'm stupid. Who knows? One thing for sure though, I caught up quick. I'm one of the best readers in my class.

We call Timothy Wilson "Grungy," because he always has dirty socks. One day, when he took his shoes off I noticed his feet smelled like my Grandma's mildewey basement. My dad said Grungy's dad is a drunk. I guess a drunk is someone who doesn't wash their kid's clothes.

I told my mom that Dad had called Grungy's dad a drunk. She said that for Dad to call anybody a drunk was like Pinocchio saying the boy who cried wolf was a liar.

One day at school I got to thinking about my dad.

There's no doubt about one thing, he's a real winner. I know that's true because that's what my mom always says. When Dad's running around the house bragging about how he's gonna make a lot of dough, or do something big, she always says, "Yeah, sure George, we all know you're a real winner."

Sometimes my dad talks to me about Mom, and how he feels bad about letting us down and all, and how he's gonna really get rocking one of these days, and then we'll all see how smart he is. I told him I didn't want him to do anything different. I liked him okay just the way he was. But I could tell he wasn't really listening, because he just rubbed my head. When he rubs my head it usually means he's thinking about something else.

Last week, late one night, when I got out of bed to use the bathroom, I heard the front door open. I peeked around the corner and saw him sort of stumble in. He was acting kind of funny. As soon as he got in the house my mom started fussing at him, and as he headed for their bedroom he mumbled, "I'll show you, Dorothy, I'm gonna really make it, starting tomorrow."

My mom hollered, "Oh yeah, George. I'm well aware of the fact that you're a real winner."

The next day I heard him and my mom arguing about the fact that my dad was out of work. She said she was really concerned about how we were going to pay the rent and all that. She kept asking him when he was going to get a job. Evidently, she wasn't satisfied with his answer because she said that he was just goofing around and not really getting anything done.

Then one day, they had a big fight and my mom made my dad move out. He was gone for a few days. Then she let him back in, but he was still out of work. I was pretty unhappy about the whole situation. I was really glad when he came back home, but it wasn't the same around our house. It seemed that they both were always mad about stuff. I wanted everything to be like it used to be.

One day at school, Miss Woods, my teacher, looked at me and said, "Brian, come with me. Your dad is here and wants to talk to you."

My dad was standing by the principal's office.

"Brian, how would you like to go on a little trip to Cedarville?" he asked me. Cedarville is in Kentucky and it's my dad's hometown. It's about four hundred or so miles from where we live in Detroit.

As much as I like school, I like to take trips with my dad even more, especially to Cedarville, because my dad buys me stuff, and I always get money from my aunts.

We rode in a 1998 Pontiac, that dad borrowed from some guy. Man that was cool. All the other times that we visited Kentucky we had hitchhiked. My dad had a sort of follow-through with his hand when we were hitchhiking. When somebody would drive past he'd move his thumb in the direction of the passing car and replace it with his middle finger. When I told my mom about it she said that wasn't nice and, yes, everyone knew that George was a real winner.

We pulled into a country store and loaded up on stuff that my mom would call junk, candy and all that. It was a great day and everything smelled real clean. Dad said football was in the air.

He got to talking about some money that he had coming to him from his aunts, and he kept saying that there was going to be a showdown. He claimed he was tired of messing around. The only problem, he explained, was our Aunt Violet. She could be cantankerous as hell, according to him. I wanted to ask him why he and Mom couldn't get along the way they used to, but all he wanted to do was blab about getting his money.

He kept repeating himself First he'd say something like, "By God this is it, I'm going to get that long green this time. Your mom is really gonna change her mind about me when she feasts her eyes on all that cabbage." I could tell that he was really trying to make Mom happy. It made me feel really great thinking that maybe we were gonna be a normal family again.

But then he'd change his mind and say, "Hell, we might as well head on back home, that damned Violet will never agree to giving me what's coming to me." By the time we reached Cedarville I was pretty confused, and Dad had talked himself into a bleak mood. I guessed he was finally convinced that there was no way Violet would ever agree to give him anything, and he would be left out in the cold as always. It was a pretty sad deal in the old Pontiac. Dad kept saying he didn't know whether to forget the whole damn thing or go for the jugular, whatever that was. We got to Cedarville and went to Aunt Violet's. Then I was pretty tired, so after eating I went to bed. Before I went to sleep I thought about Grungy.

Grungy and I were the same age, and were born within a day of one another. I sort of grinned as I thought of his smile. Grungy's two front teeth are absent, and when he smiles, the way his upper lip stretches across the cavity and all, I always think of the entrance to the old railroad tunnel outside of town. My dad said Grungy has summer teeth—some are here and some are there. Grungy said he really liked it when his parents had a fight, because after they made up they all went to McDonald's. Grungy sure did

like McDonald's.

The next morning we went around to all the relatives, and just about everybody gave me loot. I guess Dad decided to go for the jugular, because later that day he told me that he got his money and everything was going to be alright. He said he wanted to get an early start in the morning. That didn't surprise me. My dad always wanted to get an early start when we were ready to leave Cedarville. By the time I went to bed I had twenty-two dollars.

We took off the next day and my dad didn't stop all the way back to Detroit, only when it was necessary. Right before we got back home he snapped his fingers and said, "damn," as if he'd forgotten something. Then he pulled a roll of bills out, and peeled off a couple, which he stuck in his back pocket. He told me to keep quiet about him hiding any money.

We got home that evening and, as usual when we returned from trips to Cedarville, Mom was mad. When we got in the house she started in on Dad, telling him that she thought it was a bad idea for him to take me out of school and all that. I did notice though, that she seemed to brighten up when he handed her that roll of cash. Maybe now that she had some loot, things would go back to being the way they used to be, and we'd all be happy again. After Dad gave her the money he headed toward the back of the house. As he went he said, "That's not all Dorothy, I'm gonna really get things rolling around here."

"Yeah, sure, George, the whole world knows that you're a real winner."

Richard Combs graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1990 with a general education degree and is now studying at UK for a degree in English emphasis on creative writing. He has self-published a novel titled *Oscar* and have written three others which I hope to introduce to the market in late 2013. This summer his short story, "Boozer," will be published in the *Journal of Military Experience*. He received an honorable mention in the Dantzler writing contest at the University of Kentucky. He received honorable mention for a short story entered in the Harriett Rose competition. He also has study fiction at the Carnegie Center for Literacy in Lexington, Kentucky.

Copyright 2012, Richard Combs. © This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.
