Underneath the Surface, Into the Whole

My identity is a product of my father’s differences from the world. Constructed of jumbled memories and intrinsic truths, who I am cannot escape the fact that I am my father’s daughter. Through his attention to a broken loom, my father gifted me with a holistic view of a broken world. Thus, his story has become my own.

The right pedal of the loom was broken. When you tried to push it, it would yield, but never came back up like it was supposed to. The result was a mass of tangled threads, so that the colored thread could no longer weave between the skeletal structure of the strings.

For many years, the loom stood in a room at my dad’s senior center, where women and men with soft hair and thin lips went on Wednesday mornings. My dad taught the class, though he didn’t know how to weave. Some of the seniors pushed the pedals and slid the spool through the template strings, changing hands in an odd dance, as if they had been born with this intricate knowledge. Kind eyes understood the delicacy of the machine, and the loom’s ability to bring them joy. Others couldn’t remember the right order to press the pedals in, so that the pattern was never the same. My dad said he couldn’t distinguish the difference between the good and the bad, his seniors just wanted to weave, and to him, they did it beautifully.
As months went on, the class size dwindled. Looms that had once been active were now worn and unused. Constant pressing had shaped their pedals with shallow but detectable dips into the wood, and tapestries lay half-finished on their scarred frames.

When my dad learned that the looms were going to be thrown away, he bought one and packed it piece by piece into our green mini van. In the coolness of my grandparent’s basement, my father and his father reassembled the loom. For the pedals, they substituted new wood, and for the scratches they rubbed sandpaper and furniture polish across the broad surfaces until only faint marks remained. My grandfather checked weaving books out of the library, and showed me how to make a checkerboard pattern with white and dark blue thread. I spent hours at the loom, delighted by the rhythm of the machine and my own hands. It didn’t matter that I could still see the scars, to me, the loom was new.

Underneath the lemon-scented furniture polish, the loom was deeply wounded.

We live in a world where it is logical to throw broken things away. When the looms got a little beat up, no one thought twice about getting rid of them. As people began to lose interest in the weaving class, there was no reason to keep these cumbersome machines around.

My dad, however, has always thought differently than most people. Physically, the loom was broken, but what my father saw was different. His eyes perceived the happiness that the looms had brought to so many people. Rather than the obvious flaws, my dad saw wholeness. Both my father and grandfather put in tremendous amounts of time to repair the loom. They sanded and polished the loom for no other reason than to...
restore it to its original purpose. In the end, the loom came full circle, from youth to old age and back again.

Most people would not have stuck with the loom long enough to see it regain some of its former glory. So it is with many of the people I have encountered. In the entity of the loom, I see the boy who has no friends, the man who devours warm food because he cannot say when he will eat again, and the young girl with a debilitating illness. These are the people society rejects, the ones who are deemed not “good enough.” Yet, they are no less acceptable than anyone else. We are all broken, and we all have a created purpose to fulfill. It has become my habit, as is my father’s, to see the good, the wholeness of people, even in their flaws. This habit allows me to be gentle with myself, understanding that I, like a worn out piece of furniture, can be repaired, and that even if I’m not, it does not negate my value.

What the world places value on, and what my family places value on is sometimes entirely different. Long before the loom had stopped serving a purpose at the senior center, my dad cherished it. Thus, I tend to reject conventions, that newer is better, that physical attractiveness means everything, and replace them with my own mantras. Found items are infinitely more interesting than bought, scars build character, and anything, no matter how broken, can be repaired. Still, reparation is in no way equivalent to perfection.

People have lied to me when they told me I could achieve perfection. At times, I believe they were right. I expect myself to be perfect, to avoid mistakes at all costs. It is the way of our society to mask the scars, and to live in ignorance. At heart, we are people
afraid of knowing ourselves. Thus, we remove all items that remind us that we are not perfect, and all people as well.

In the loom, I found little reason for destroying signs of brokenness. When I ran my fingers through the threads of that loom, I was creating something. I was receiving a precious gift, becoming the author of my own inconsistencies. In a tapestry, I could point to the places where I had pushed a wrong pedal, or gotten the threads caught up in each other. It wasn’t pretty, but it was mine, and sometimes I did get it right. Scars, I learned, were what built character, what allowed our true selves to shine through, what made us different from everyone else. As many times as I didn’t get it completely right, that was how much I had to get back up, to try again, to broaden my view and embrace more than my flaws.

The world may see the breaks, the tears, the scars of life, and merely walk away, but I look at them and see them in the context of an inherently broken world and resilient people. Just as I saw the beauty in a broken loom, I see the beauty is people who are still living, scars and all.