



Source: Michael Slackman, 'Islamic radicals spread instability across Middle East', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 19/09/06.

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The hike to Winchester got started by Drew Turnbull after three guys beat up his little brother, which happened after school near the smoking rock, in plain sight of several dozen students. The boys, all in grade eleven, got expelled. One was my twin brother, Alan. If I had been there, I can't say I'd have stopped him.

Nobody wanted to talk about why it happened. Everybody knew. Waterby was not prepared for Eden Turnbull. I used to have a certain way of describing kids like him.

Nobody talked except Ms. Polensky. She called an assembly the day Alan got expelled. Gave a lecture about accepting kids who are different. Eden was different all right—she didn't talk about that. Went on to announce zero-tolerance toward bullying. Fine. I never knew why Alan liked fighting anyway.

Drew talked, too. He's okay, but it made me nervous the way he came up to me in the hall. I thought he wanted to get me back for what Alan did.

'I'm planning a hike to Winchester,' he said, 'I want you to come.'

'Stupid idea,' I said. 'That's 17 k. Waste of a Saturday. Why don't you get your Mommy to drive you?'

'No, we're doing it on a school day. Polensky already approved it. It's to raise awareness.'

'You don't need to raise awareness that your brother is a freak.'

'Come on, Tom. You're not that dense. I've already got 12 people signed up.'

'Probably all girls.'

'Yeah, well most of them,' he admitted, 'but you being there would make a difference. You won't believe the scenery along that trail. I've gone with my brother a couple times. He's not afraid of a challenge. Behind the surface stuff he's tough, not afraid to stand out. More mature than these adolescent half men, who beat up a smaller kid like it's some rite of passage. What's it prove, except they're losers? If 40 people walk 17 k in Eden's footsteps, that will prove something.'

'You're calling my brother a loser?' I demanded.

'Yeah, but I don't think you are. That's why I'm asking.'

We set off the following Friday. You'd think more kids would hike to get out of classes. Robin Morris said she wanted to, but her Mom wouldn't let her because 'Ms. Polensky has no business imposing European values on us Waterby folks.' I happen to know Polensky was a farm girl from Owen Sound. But maybe lots of parents think like Mrs. Morris.

Not my Mom. Already furious with Alan, she told me I should go.

Thirty-nine students and three teachers went: Polensky, Mr. Mulgrew the gym teacher, and Ms. Cutler who persuaded her whole drama class. It was a terrific day, as if October had borrowed from August.

The Silurian Trail follows the escarpment 800 kilometres across the province. It skirts the north east corner of town

where a ridge overlooks rolling farmland. My aunt runs a B&B that caters to hikers. I've walked maybe an hour out, but never even a quarter the way to Winchester.

The land is rugged: high cliffs with swamps above and below. No roads cut down that way, so the trail offers the only access. We couldn't appreciate the views until we went a good distance from Waterby. It was getting hot at noon when we reached the outlook known as Eugene's Mountain, visible from town. Hardly anyone had visited before. We could see clear to Georgian Bay, blue on the horizon. Polensky called a rest. We sat on lichenous rocks, swigging water bottles, pop or Gatorade.

A grade nine girl, Tracy Durr, stood up, beside a jagged rock like an altar on the precipice.

'Eden is back to school, and we're relieved he wasn't hurt more seriously, but he sprained his ankle trying to run away, so couldn't come today. This hike made him uncomfortable; he couldn't believe we wanted to do it for him. I think it's sad anybody as nice as Eden could grow up believing he doesn't deserve support from friends and family.'

'Eden does agree, and so does Ms. Polensky, our school would be better if it had a gay-straight alliance. Me and Drew are going to help start one. Odds are, 30 or 40 more kids deal with similar problems. They might not all be so obvious as Eden! Some aren't willing to risk their safety, and no one should have to, so we want to create a safe meeting place.'

'This is Eden's favourite place. Once he planned to jump off here, but brought me along to keep him company instead. I'm glad he made that choice. And I want to take this opportunity to launch the Waterby Gay-Straight Alliance on his behalf.'

Everyone clapped. I won't join, but it's a good idea.

My feet got sore after lunch. The path was mostly narrow, so we walked single file. At times we fell silent, concentrating on the uneven ground between us and the hills ahead. I looked forward to the bus waiting in Winchester.

We reached a shady place where a cascade drained a small lake behind. It had eroded the cliff, so we sat around the edge. Lowering sun glowed like fire in some trees behind the falls. Drew sat beside me and started talking loudly enough for everyone to hear.

'This is my favourite resting place. I want to bring everyone here, not just Waterby, but the whole world, one by one. If they could sit a few minutes...'

His pause filled with susurruration of water over the brink.

'It's a nice idea,' I said, 'but it wouldn't affect everyone that way. Some would just see this place as barren and worthless, except for the gravel beds below.'

'But you, Tom,' Drew said. 'What about you?'

My thoughts ran with water down the cliff face, out of my head.

'It works for me,' I said.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Van Waffle.*