

(R)evolutions of Youth

By Sheila Johnson

I watched with proud eyes as my grandson and his father ran up and down the small hills that surround some of the last remaining natural tar pits in America—La Brea Tar Pits that are located in the Wilshire community of Los Angeles, California. Every year these large pools draw thousands of visitors from around the world who marvel at the pits that are filled with thick, black petroleum. Little ones love it, old ones marvel at its longevity, and others quicken their step towards the entrance to the museum as their nasal passages fill with the aroma of aged oil. The nearby museum houses some of the largest remains of the Mastodon world carefully reconstructed and preserved. Beau, my grandson, eagerly digests any information having to do with the animal kingdom. He is quick to remind me that all of the animals in that museum are extinct, and it is a sad fact to know this.

“Gramma, you want to know something really, really sad?” he asks in an almost whisper.

“Yes, Beau, tell Gramma,” I replied.

“It’s really, really sad,” he retorted.

“That’s okay. Gramma can take it,” trying not to show my amusement.

“When everyone like you dies, then you become EXTINCT, and that’s really, really sad because no one will ever see you again.”

Soon afterward, he returned his attention to the reconstructed Pterodactyl—his favorite. He can name most of the dinosaur species, and speaks their name clearly and with ease—at age three! Later, on the inside of the museum, we watched a twenty minute video covering the ice age and other factors that brought the large creatures that we know as dinosaurs into extinction. Beau sat very close to my son and squeezed his thighs when the animals became too real (as we were using 3D glasses). When the video was over, he excitedly repeated the names of every living creature that we viewed. Only youth could recount all of that.

As we walked home, he and his father raced each other, and on occasion, Beau would divert his attention and his legs to nearby birds moving on the ground. He is convinced that one day he will catch one of those feathery fowl.

“Daddy, why did God make the animals so they can run faster than humans?”

Before Mike could answer, Beau said, “I’m going to go to God’s house and tell him not to make any more scary animals that can run faster than humans.” Only an uninhibited, young mind would think about venturing to God’s house and tell Him what to do!

I am grateful for youth in its freedom, wonder, and boldness. I marvel at the new generation that is primed for the world in the womb. I get excited to hear the conversations of three- and four-year-olds. Today, babies are born running, speaking, questioning, and trying to conquer what we believe to be impossible.

Youth is not wasted on the young—not even the young at heart. Youth is wasted only when

there are borders, fences, ceilings, and dark holes that lead to nowhere. I am glad that some of those dark places that I experienced as a sheltered and segregated child no longer exist in Beau's world. I'm glad to be alive and witness a new (r)evolution.