

Room Renovation
Cape May
January 16, 2005

Only light-grained wood and blue throw pillows remained. A little gray too – the fading ink on hanging prints, stamped into their soft paper like a bedside notepad afterimage. But that was all. No longer glow-in-the-dark green, Halloween saffron or radioactive crimson. It took all of two weeks after I moved out for my parents to turn my raucous bedroom into a quiet den. They demolished all of the Batman posters and Simpsons pictures, destroyed the cork board covered in wallet-sized photos – forced smiles of kids I didn't know well but traded photos with anyway, like I wanted a baseball card set customized to our high school.

Where I hung art projects, my mother hung art. An abstract black-and-red painting replaced the eighth-grade craypa spider-plant I thought was a good idea to make rainbow-colored. My comfortable bed disappeared and a quilt materialized on the largest wall, as if a Murphy bed flipped up and folded away – backwards. She threw out the green “Jesse Street” sign and the glued-together 500-piece fantasy dragon puzzle. A colored pencil sketch of a crushed soda can, from ninth grade art class, crumpled from the back of the door, along with 50 shiny trading cards from cult TV shows.

I tried not to let it get to me. For once, I wasn't there to watch my room change. Starting in middle school, I had hung art projects on one wall, and then a few posters from sci-fi movie magazines on another. When I ran out of room the following year, I moved onto the closet doors – I had three thanks to our strange attic location – forever scarring them with masking tape residue. By high school, I filled every square inch of the room with some expression of myself. I would find a new cartoon in my parents' *Trenton Times* on Sunday and replace a previous one on a desk drawer. Above my bed, I would swap a self-portrait from last year's art class with a new photo of the latest navel-brandishing movie starlet, as fast as Hollywood could spit them out.

For ten years, my room was in perpetual transition, transformation, transmogriying every day. I got to redecorate my room whenever I wanted, incrementally, surrounding myself with that minute's pop accoutrements and high school fads. My parents let me – as long as the paper sprawl didn't spread, virus-like, into the hallway.

A month-long video of my room would look like one of those sped-up crowd recordings, where people change and rush by, where if you relax your eyes it all falls into a pattern of blurs. This time – this time it was only a slightly bigger change, I tried to tell myself. But I thought of my carefully laid-out arrangements of cut paper lying shredded on the ground, bleeding off the walls.

The last several days of the renovation found Dad scraping away the Scotch tape. My father folded away his suit and tie every evening and became an archeologist uncovering original wallpaper, a dentist excavating white teeth beneath years of plaque. It was like

him to work diligent, quiet. If you saw him you'd think he didn't mind the task. But on the phone that week he couldn't help but make a snide comment here and there. Along the lines of, "Boy, are you lucky we let you do whatever you want," or "My parents would have made me scrape this off *myself*." I slid out of the guilt by reasoning that he was the one who wanted a new den anyway.

The room transformed from a collage of Calvin & Hobbes newspaper cartoon clippings and schoolbook teacher caricature doodles into a haven for adults. Every superhero poster was annihilated by forces more dangerous than a city-stomping monster or cackling, mustachioed arch nemesis. Pearl Jam and Nirvana packed up their logos and album covers and rode their tour buses out of the room. It was equivalent to an Arctic blizzard landing at Mardi Gras, suddenly limiting visibility to only blank space.

The room convulsed through its painful puberty and ... didn't look too bad when they were done with it. Without being able to see them, all of my decorations quickly scraped away from my mind. What was there to miss, what had I been concerned about? In the new den, the eye, with less to distract it, easily caught the verdant view of our backyard. Had that always been there, always looked so lush? I had to admit, the new space was certainly calmer, relaxing. As charming as my parents hoped.

In my new studio apartment, one month after graduating with a bachelor's degree in art, I hung a few nice works, some my own, all framed and dignified. Maybe I was too lazy, or busy, too hang a million scraps of memories and drawings. I couldn't resist at least one montage of magazine clippings and vacation photos – but I confined them to the fridge.