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Prompt: Describe the influence your hero has had on your life.

There are some people in the world that you meet and automatically know you'll never forget. These people comport themselves so boldly and unapologetically that they simply slip through the grip of social standards. It seems that these individuals are bound by nothing. After all, when they own their actions so brazenly yet publicly admit fallibility, there's really no room for error.

You sit down in Pre-Calculus on your first day visiting a new school, and she's already made her mark. The first time you talk to her you can't look away. She says anything and everything, and people listen.

You spend several evenings with her at a coffee shop or a Whole Foods or a booth in an empty Subway restaurant. Even during these small encounters, the minutes of conversation turn into hours. The windows darken until your reflection appears, and your coffee is cold and you need to get home. But you wouldn't dare leave, because if you cut this conversation a minute short you might miss something of such monumental importance that your own life pales in comparison.

When you're in class with her, everything's an argument. You hope she'll contradict your claim that Faulkner uses black comedy and a constrained social setting to satirize social roles. You hope she'll ask why you used black and white only for your "American Dream" art project. You hope this not only because then you can argue your point, but because if she disagrees you'll come to question your own mind. When your own thoughts are torn down it's exciting, because you have to rebuild them and then they can be anything. She proves you wrong when no one else will.

She's a year older than you, and when you finally hug her goodbye at graduation, you know you'll never really see her again. She'll be too busy organizing fundraisers and studying abroad on scholarship money. But her mark is not lost. Going through senior year with a graduating class of ten people, you have to be conversationally scrappy. When the group discussion turns yet again to the imperfections of the new headmaster, you like to throw in a question about the validity of their sources, just like she taught you. Your specialty is taking cyclical dialogue into new ground.

You can ask your best friend to tell you something you do that annoys them, and when you hear it you're ready for the tiny flash of cold heat that pricks your veins. It may be right, but you're not offended. Because now you value honesty above courtesy, and the truth above all.

She taught you to push the boundaries of conversation. She taught you never be passive, always be instigating. She taught you to see the world in third person. But mostly, she taught you to

vanquish your fear of being wrong. After all, to argue is to seek truth, and to be proven wrong is the ultimate privilege - the opportunity to start again.