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### Elmo

Twice a year, summer and winter, we made the long, brutal trek to Pilgrim Pines, New Hampshire, a paradise of sand castles, mozzarella sticks, ice skating, and of course, frog jumping contests. It was a place where we slowed down and took the time to enjoy our beautiful surroundings, and maybe even the people around us.

One summer in particular, I must have been in the fourth grade, I remember lagging behind my two older brothers down the gravelly dirt road that led to the golf course, home of the mother of all frog ponds. Nets and buckets in hand and swimsuits on, we were ready and determined to find the frog that would lead us to victory over our friends and enemies.

When we finally reached the pond, which was glazed with slimy lily pads and gushing with gooshy brown muck, I could hardly resist jumping in. I had to retrieve the biggest and best frog before he was taken by somebody else. But I can't just rush into things like this, I told myself, I must take my time. I got myself under control and took a few slow steps towards the steep sandy bank of the green reservoir. From the corner of my eye I could see my brothers doing the same. In this stance I made my way to the edge of the pond, and steadily lowered myself into the mud, the warm goop sliding in between my toes and covering my ankles.

Tightly gripping my net in my right hand, I stood, and waited. A few lily pads away I caught a glimpse of movement and my body tensed for action. I wasn't quite sure if it was the bright afternoon sun glinting off the reflective surface of the water, or a big green amphibian, waiting to be caught. The movement flickered again, a frog. And it was going to be caught.

I took a deep breath and tightened my grip around the net. Launching myself forward through the jumble of lily pads, I brought my net down on that little green guy with so much force and precision he didn't even have a chance. I clenched my hand around the top of the net and quickly ran out of the pond and plopped myself onto the grass.

"Thanks a lot Jennifer," my oldest brother growled, both of them glaring at me.

There was no way they were going to catch a frog now, I had just scared them all way. Plus, I caught one before them. But I didn't care if they were mad at me. I had just caught a frog, a Goliath or Godzilla, judging by the weight of the net. Along with my frog, I had caught chunks of mud and lily pads. I turned my net over and emptied it, ready to pounce on the giant hopper before it could escape, but to my surprise, nothing hopped out. Afraid I had totally misjudged my ability to catch frog, I frantically dug through the pile of pond junk, and there he was. He was no giant, in fact, he was probably no bigger than a golf ball, but he was a frog, and he was mine.

I named him Elmo. My brothers thought it was stupid, but I knew they were just jealous. It was the perfect frog name. Elmo was the cutest frog in the whole wide world, he was little and green and slimy. Just perfect.

When I showed up to the contest with little Elmo, I could see the doubt in my competitors faces when they saw the golf-ball sized frog sitting in my hand. All cradled frogs bigger than at least five little Elmos. But we weren't discouraged. Especially not Elmo. He jumped right out of my hands, weaving in and out of the crowd's feet. Scooping him up, I carried him to the starting line. He was ready and so was I. All Elmo had to do was hop the length of the track, a patch of designated sand about a yard long before his opponent, who Elmo would easily beat.

Just as I was mentally prepping Elmo, Ryan Wolfe sluggishly strolled up to me, holding in his sausage fingers a gigantic green monster that looked a lot like his face. Same huge round shape, same bumpy texture. Gross.

“This is Fabio,” Ryan gurgled, “And he’s gonna kick your frog’s butt.”

“Right,” I sneered back at him.

I didn’t really like Ryan much. He was mean and he smelled bad, probably just like Fabio, and I couldn’t wait for Elmo to kick Fabio’s big bumpy butt.

Ryan and I kneeled down, frogs in hand, in front of the long slab of white wood that served as the starting line. I could feel the sputter of Elmo’s rapid heart beat against the palm of my hand as we waited for the ref’s whistle.

“Phheeeewwwww” The sharp sound of the whistle broke the thick tension that filled the air that surrounded the track. Elmo was out of my hands before I even fully loosened my grip. Leaping over his enormous opponent, Elmo speedily hopped his way to the other white slab of wood, the finish line. Fabio tried to catch up, but there was no way he could move as fast as Elmo. As soon as Elmo crossed the white slab I jumped to my feet, screaming with victory. Fabio, on the other hand, who obviously had eaten one fly too many, lay lazily in the middle of the track accepting his defeat with what sounded like a labored croak.

“Elmo won! We won!” I screamed, as I caught up to the little guy.

My brothers, along with everyone else congratulated me and Elmo. I was ecstatic, I knew Elmo was too.

Little Elmo won the frog hopping contest easily. With Elmo’s quick spastic hops the big Fabio was no competition. Every year after that, every frog I caught, I named Elmo II, III, IV, in a tribute the original Elmo, the itsy bitsy frog, that hopped a long, long way.

