

**Honorable Mention, Prose**  
**Grades 7-9**

***“What I Know About Me,” Phoenix Flamenbaum***

I stepped into the dimly lit room, the lights slightly flickering. It was busier than usual. And louder. The baseball game blared on the TVs, but I could barely hear it over the noisy people in the sports bar. It was me and my dad’s tradition to go to Arty’s every time the Cubs played.

The bright TVs hurt my eyes, so I looked away and down at my feet. I wasn’t that interested in the game anyway. My dad has lived here in Chicago his whole life and still loves the Cubs. I can't say I exactly like our tradition of going to Arty’s, but I know it’s important to him. Personally, I would have rather been playing video games in my room or doing anything by myself to be honest.

My dad was very excited since it was the first game of the season. I can’t say I really cared. We sat down at a booth in the corner, but it still felt crowded, and my head was throbbing. It felt hot and sticky in the bar which was making my headache worse. The pinball machines in the corner had less people around them.

Just as I was about to leave and play pinball, my dad grabbed my shirt and asked, “Where ya goin’?”

“Pinball,” I replied, annoyed, while turning around again.

Pinball is my usual thing when I go to Arty’s with my dad, but he always asks me where I’m going when I get up, as if he doesn’t know. I think he kind of wanted me to sit with him that day. I didn’t care. I walked over and started to play pinball shrugging off my dad. I took one of the quarters out of my pocket. It slipped out of my sweaty palm and onto the floor. I always bring quarters to Arty’s, because I know I’ll eventually end up wanting to be alone, playing pinball. I bent down to pick up the quarter. It felt like everyone was watching me, when in reality no one was.

I plopped the quarter into the machine. It started to whirl, and the circus music started to play. The little clown inside the machine bobbed side to side. I pushed the flashing button that said begin. I kept losing my balls, and I only had one left.

Disappointed, I tried hard to keep the last ball I had. I hit it faster and faster but started to feel dizzy, and my headache got even worse.

I walked away, not really caring about the game anymore. I just needed to get away from all these people. I stepped outside to get some fresh air, not noticing my dad wasn't sitting at our booth anymore. It was even hotter outside than in the bar, but it was nice to get away from all the people. The air smelled of cigarette smoke and exhaust, which made me want to hurl.

I stepped back inside and squeezed through the tightly packed people. When I got back to our booth my dad was gone. I told myself not to panic and looked around. I thought I saw him sitting on one of the bar stools. I walked over and saw him.

"Where were you?" I asked him, irritated.

"I told you I was coming over here to get closer to the TVs. I assumed you had heard me," he replied, giving me a disgusted look, as if I did something wrong. I guess he told me while I was playing pinball and I wasn't paying attention. I sat down in stool next to him.

"Sorry, bud," the bartender said to me. "If you want to sit up here, you'll have to show me some ID," he said while snickering.

"Oh sorry," my dad replied as he escorted me back over to our booth.

There was a waitress sitting in the back corner sluggishly looking at her phone. Someone walked through the kitchen door in the back with the name tag "Arty." When the server in the corner saw him, she immediately got up and walked over to us. I think he was the manager.

"Hi, I'm Josylin. I'll be your server today. Can I get anything started for you guys?", she said in a low, monotone voice. She had obviously said this line a million times. There were bags under her eyes, and she looked tired.

"Can I get a lemonade?", I mouthed to my dad. He nodded.

"I'll get a lemonade," I told Josylin.

"Mhm," she said as she wrote in her little pad, not looking up.

"And what about you, sir?", she asked my dad.

“Could I get the happy hour special?”, he asked.

“Mhm,” she said, still not looking up.

Josylin walked away staring at her phone again.

“So how was camp today?”, my dad asked me.

“Fine,” I replied, looking down at my feet under the table. I went to a day camp each summer because I don’t love being away from home.

“What’d you do there?”, he asked.

I felt like he was prying.

“Nothing,” I replied, just wanting to be done with the conversation. “I’m going to play pinball, again,” I told my dad.

“You sure?”, he asked.

“Yes.” I said, bothered.

“In that case I’ll go over to the bar and watch the game,” he sighed.

Instead of walking over to the circus pinball machine, I walked outside, hoping my dad didn’t see me. I sat on the green bench outside the restaurant. The paint was peeling off, and the bench was covered in graffiti. I scratched at the peeling paint with my fingernails, thinking how I wanted to go home. The disgusting cigarette and exhaust smell filled my nose.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw someone walking out from the alley. He had a cigar in his mouth and was talking to himself. My dad tells me to stay away from those types of people. I immediately went back inside. I walked back over to my dad and tugged at his shirt, wanting to go back to our booth.

“Guess what?”, he asked me excitedly.

“What?”, I asked confused.

“José Quintana is coming to Arty’s next weekend to sign autographs and...”

“And what,” I said irritated.

“And I got us VIP passes to get some behind-the-scene with him,” he said grinning.

“No!”, I yelled, heating up. “I don’t want to do that. You always expect me to like everything you like. Well, guess what, I don’t. You never leave me alone and never pick up social cues. Do you really think I know who José Quintana is? No! I don’t. Leave. Me. Alone,” I told him defiantly.

I was angry. It had been building up in me since the beginning of the summer. Ever since I hadn’t been busy with school, my dad would *not leave me alone*. He looked shocked, and angry.

“Summer is the only time I get to spend time with you. I really thought you liked being with me and spending time together,” he said scowling.

I could tell he was angry and was trying to keep his cool.

“All I did was try and be with you!”, he yelled.

“Well guess what? I don’t want that,” I said.

“Come on, we’re going home,” my dad said, gesturing towards the door.

I walked into the car but got into the back seat instead of my usual spot in the front. The ride home was dead silent. I knew my dad would always stay the same, but that doesn’t mean I have to change.

*Phoenix Flamenbaum is in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School. Phoenix loves to swim, run, and draw.*