“Take a picture with your minds-eye,” my dad would often stop us and say. He would point to a set of trees, on a vacation or an exploring trip that took us to faraway places only hours from our house. He would point off in the distance and say, “See those trees over there? Tomorrow, when you are in school, they’ll still be there. A month from now? Ten years from now? They’ll still be there.” I’d squint and snap my minds-eye picture, adding that moment to my catalogue of memories.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped squinting. I replaced mental captures with photos. I refused to go anywhere without storing my digital camera somewhere in a deep recess of my purse. Its strap missing, silver case scratched, a worn sticker on its front advertising its indestructible powers: I used this camera to capture the scenes I set up in my life. Displayed on my fridge in orderly rows of plastic magnetic frames, I have pictures of family, I have pictures of friends. I have pictures of holidays, of childhood memories, of the events of my life. But hidden in my memory remains my minds-eye. All along, I realize, I have been using it to recognize the full moments: the befores, the afters, the in-betweens. It has been there with me at the spontaneous moments, the unplanned joys, the breaths in my life that have been too quick or too difficult to capture properly. Using it, I can see the emotions that fill every word that pours out of my mouth. I can see the tradition that connects minute pieces of daily experiences to form something greater. I can see the sounds as they echo through my actions, creating the spontaneous soundtrack that fills my experience. I can see those people that have the power to unknowingly shape me into the person I am through the shared moments captured in my minds-eye – those people that mean the most to me: my family.

I can see the sound of my mother’s laughter. Her hands forming the perfect pyramid around her mouth, as she closes her eyes, almost pinching her nose as if to hold in the joke- to savor it just a little bit longer. I can see her sharing the honesty of her joy as she sits, perched on the edge of my bed while peeling back the top layer of a paperback cover as we share a book together. I can see us sitting next to each other, matching reflections of one another in vision and spunk, buried in the depth of a cushion couch while dangling our matching feet over the floor as we settle in for our discussions and debates about the gossip and conspiracy theories that we love to interject into our lives and our reality TV shows.

I can see the noise of the implementation of a childhood plan. I can see my brother using his wooden garbage pail to prop open his bedroom door, acting as an anchor in our elaborate Scotch-tape-colored-string-pulley system that we would create every time we were sent to our rooms for fighting with one another. I can see the hours we would spend putting this creation together, and the nearly equal length of time we would take transporting a note of little significance from my room to his. I can see the strength of my brother’s protective shield he uses for his little sister to be momentarily conquered only by our mandatory lifelong sibling banter.

I can see the quiet custom in my father’s voice as he recites the accompanying commentary to our annual Thanksgiving Day neighborhood tour. Weaving slowly up and down the numbered streets of Oklahoma Avenue, I can see my dad waving a friendly hello to neighbors he has never met as he recalls tales from his childhood of profiting off of penny-candy store runs, crossing the street to avoid haunted basements filled with household pets, and speculating about the true origins of the stolen tires stacked precariously in the yard of a corner garage. With a sound of pride laced with nostalgia, I can see our voices connect with his, as we all recount the stories, the punch lines, and the conversations that took place in a time and place far removed from our own realities.

It’s true: time has made my handle on my minds-eye go missing. Experience has made its exterior scratched as well. But it needs no sticker to tell me of its indestructible powers. It’s more than ten years later, and the
trees may or may not still be where we left them. But their image is still in my memory, my family is still by my side, and my minds-eye remains poised to capture my next moment.