Consequently Curious

“Okay, is everyone ready to go?”

My excitement nearly sprang out of my body and became its own entity as these words spilled from my teacher’s mouth. We were going on a tour of the basement of Elkhart Central High School! Several of my classmates found this idea repulsive; however, I had been counting down the days since Mrs. Korn even mentioned ECHS having a basement. The unknown, even the most simplistic of it, has always kept a painstaking chokehold on my curiosity.

“Everyone listen up! Grab any notebooks or electronics you’ll be taking with you! Anyone with long hair who isn’t using a hair tie enters at their own risk. Questions?” Mrs. Korn asked, pausing for any remaining inquiries.

“Okay then! Everyone meet me in the Student Center for further instruction.”

Her every word began to transform into distant shot gun fire, beckoning me to surge at the speed of light to the finish line. That dare devil spirit only disintegrated once Mr. Kincaid, our school’s head custodian, unlocked what would become our fate. Upon taking the first step down one of many staircases, a sudden chill inched its way through my flesh and deep into my spinal cord. The overwhelming presence of dust swallowed any trace of oxygen, leaving a miniscule percentage for my lungs to consume. Eerie, mechanical disturbances echoed through my eardrums and disappeared into the refuge of the nearest object just as fast as they came.
“This here,” explained Mr. Kincaid, “is the boiler room. It regulates heat and air conditioning within the building.”

Pencils clawed against paper and cameras blindingly flashed as we ventured on our designated path. Our tour guide led us around a corner into a dimly-lit, cave-like chamber. The temperature skyrocketed until it felt like I was standing up against a heater on a school bus. Years of hydraulic pressure devoured the entire surface of the already barren concrete, leaving humid moisture for us to struggle on with every movement.

“Now I need you guys to be careful! As we proceed, there will be lots of pipes and the ceilings will become noticeably lower. Watch your heads!” Mr Kincaid announced to the clumsy line of distracted, clattering footsteps.

After hesitating for a moment to locate everyone in the crowd, we continued our escapade into a synthetically-illuminated maze of pipelines and uniformal structures of concrete. Cobweb-encrusted cables adorned the walls like Christmas tree lights. Low wattage bulbs were crafted into makeshift lanterns every few feet, mimicking the inner passageways of a castle. My paranoia shot into overdrive as my mind tormented me with unrealistic threats to my safety. Each tunnel had been strategically placed underneath two massive levels of classrooms, hallways, and a high enrollment count of people. What if the above capacity exceeded its maximum weight? What if the immaculately-constructed entirety of the school crumbled to pieces, compressing us into the dust that occupied our every breath? My insides acted as a metronome, churning in time with every ounce of unrhymthic inhalation my body could grasp. The undetectable isolation conjured my legs into immobile boulders. An onyx-colored accessory cuffed to my wrist read numbers that couldn’t possibly account for the loss in time I was experiencing.
Despite how badly these conditions toyed with my senses, my undying curiosity drowned out my internal screams, perpetuating me to comprehend this wasteland. My madness was coerced into eternal silence by the refusal of my questions to cease. Why are there so many misplaced, inanimate objects scattered in here? What’s causing that door to rock back and forward with nothing but an aging hinge to provide friction? How can a place of such magnificent size make the confidence I once possessed wither to nothing instantaneously?

“Come take a look at this, guys!” called Mr. Kincade. “You see all of this blue and black tubing? It connects to every sink in the science labs throughout the school. When you dump residue into the drain, it filters into the tubes, through these canisters, and turns to solid waste.”

No matter how captivating he attempted to make this, I couldn’t fully concentrate. My mind was spinning into thousands of directions at once and the ungodly stench of the 143-year-old atmosphere made my stomach uneasy. My vital organs nearly plummeted to the floor, along with any confidence I previously feigned. I no longer knew the feeling of the natural sunlight on my skin or the smell of fresh air circulating through my nasal passages. In fact, the irritation of my watering eye sockets and the flavor of my mouth slowly drying out became normal. Throughout the entire voyage, Mr. Kincaid continued to ask us which hallway of the school we were lurking beneath, but I unconsciously tuned him out, only to be hypnotized by the faint, sharp melody of running liquids and shrieking walls. Being too caught up in the artificial scenery to care of anything else, I didn’t realize the noises had disappeared. The chalky chicken scratch and thriving calcite trails on the walls decreased in quantity and a torpedo of air almost pushed me to the ground. The most beautiful of light cast itself onto our skin and the environment no longer tasted of rust. It was over. Oh my God, IT WAS OVER. Completely
ignoring the scorching fire in my nose and shaky perspiration of my legs, I rushed to be the first out of the doorway. Never in my life had I felt more gracious of breathing purity and absorbing freedom. Never again, in the remainder of my existence, would I take for granted the security I had lost for just a single hour.