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Facing Your Fears

The theme that is most relevant and intriguing in *Tangerine* is facing your fears. This comes up a lot in the book and plays a big role in the major events that occur. One major character that faces his fears is Paul. He is the underdog for most of the story until he stands up to his older brother. Once Paul faces his fears he gets to be rewarded and feel relief. Everything that happened in *Tangerine* that mattered most, came from characters facing their fears.

Paul is the underdog throughout the story until he decided to stand up to his fears. When Lake Windsor Middle School classroom trailers were destroyed, he had the chance to transfer schools and start fresh with no IEP. He stood up to his parents by saying, “Mom, you ruined my life at Lake Windsor Middle when you turned in that IEP. This is your chance to un-ruin it! Dad, I won’t complain about Erik, ever. I want to go to Tangerine Middle School, and I want to go with no IEP” (Bloor 94). He decided to face the fears of his parents to get a fresh new start, which he deserved. The next time he faced his fears was when he decided to tell Tino about how he snitched on them for the carnival. As he was talking to Tino about the incident he said, “Well, I’m the one who ratted you out. They accused some of the Lake Windsor soccer players of wrecking that exhibit. The Ax Man? I’m the one who told them it was Tangerine Middle soccer players” (Bloor 175). Paul started out at Tangerine Middle with the fear that the soccer players would find out about him snitching them out for wrecking the carnival exhibit. After Paul befriended some of them he decided to tell Tino that he was the one who told on them. Paul

decided to face his fears and after he told Tino, it made their friendship stronger and it lifted a big weight off his shoulders. This is where Paul starts to realize that telling the truth and facing your fears is much better than hiding and lying. The next time Paul faces his fears at the senior award banquet. Tino and Victor showed up to fight Erik because of what he did to Luis. When they started fighting coach Warner got a hold of Tino, but then Paul stepped in. Paul “landed hard on Coach Warner’s back and held on tight, riding his neck and shoulders. He lurched to one side, losing his grip on Tino” (Bloor 259). Paul knew that Tino would have gotten in trouble if Coach didn’t let him go and so he decided to act. Paul also knew that Erik deserved what was coming and so his confidence overcame his fear. If Paul decided to let Tino get caught, then Erik would have never gotten in trouble for what he did to Luis. In this part, Paul overcomes his fears of Erik. The next and final time Paul decides to face his fears is when he hands the witness statement over to his parents. Paul “went downstairs, handed the disk to Mom and Dad, and said, “Here. Here’s the whole truth. Here’s what really happened” (Bloor 302). Paul knew that turning in Erik was the right thing to do. No matter how much he feared Erik he knew that turning in that witness statement to the police and his parents was the right thing to do. This is the moment where he finally came to terms with his fear of Erik. He knew that Erik couldn’t hurt him anymore because Erik had hurt himself too much to hurt anyone else ever again.

Although Paul is the main character to face his fears there are still people who did the same. One person in *Tangerine* that faced their fears was Luis. Luis had a lot to lose with his tangerines and his family, but when he heard what Erik did to Tino he didn’t care. He decided to take matters into his own hands and put Erik in his place even though he knew he was dangerous. Luis showed up to Erik’s practice and said, “You would smack a little kid in the face, right? Why don’t you come over here and try to smack me?” (Bloor 211). Although Luis was

beat up and eventually died, he overcame his fears and stood up for his family. This led Erik being exposed for the person that he has always been. It led to everybody seeing the truth, instead of hiding behind their fears. Another character to face their fears is Paul's mother; Caroline. Caroline is very protective of Erik and Paul, although she is oblivious to what they really do and go through in their every day lives. When her and her family first moved, she had to make sure everything in the house and community was perfect. She said that "This is not a joke to me. Your house is your family's biggest investment. And you have to protect that investment" (Bloor 44). When she says that, she is addressing Paul because he doesn't understand the big idea of a perfect neighborhood. Caroline explains that when she was a child she never had the opportunity to live in a nice neighborhood, let alone a nice house. When she makes sure the house is perfect, this is her facing her fears. She doesn't want the past to reoccur and she doesn't want to put the strain of living in a bad home on her family. The last person to overcome his fears was Antoine. He had been playing for Erik's football team illegally for years, while his sister had to stay in the dark with her talent. One night Antoine and Paul ran into each other and Antoine said, "It's time to start telling the truth, little brother. Do you understand what I'm saying? Don't spend your life hiding under the bleachers, little brother. The truth shall set you free" (Bloor 269). In this moment, Antoine was encouraging Paul to face his fears of Erik and tell the police how Luis really died. This led to Antoine facing his fears about all the lies he has told over the years. He told everyone about his playing football illegally even though he knew that it could cost him his football scholarship. Paul saw how Antoine faced his fears which gave him the courage to face his. This then led to Paul turning in the witness statement about Erik killing Luis.

In *Tangerine*, many characters learn to face their fears. Many characters also inspire others to face their own fears as well. I believe that facing your fears is a very strong act and will lead people in the right direction. Every time a person in *Tangerine* faced their fears something good came from it. Conquering and facing your fears will lead to a “golden dawn” (Bloor 303). It will lead to the truth and will allow karma to take place. Facing your fears is tough because it takes a lot of courage, but courage tends to pay off in the end.

Works Cited

Bloor, Edward. *Tangerine*. Harcourt, 1997.