Adapted from Benjamin Zhao

“May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” - Nelson Mandela

In the story, “Sometimes a Dream Needs a Push” by Walter Dean Meyers, a boy named Chris gets into a car accident which hurts both his ability to walk, and dashes his father’s dreams for him. The story details his father’s journey in losing then reclaiming hope. Likewise, the poem “Dreams” by Langston Hughes stresses the importance of holding tight to dreams, as Chris’ seemed unable to do. Both pieces send a thematic message that while dreams may be central to a fulfilling life, pursuing them requires more effort than most people may have.

At the start of the story, Chris’ father, Jim Blair, a former professional basketball player, “hoped that one day… [Chris] would play the game.” This dream gave him purpose and focus that inspired him to work regularly to teach his son how to play well. Unfortunately, tragedy struck. One rainy night while the family was out driving, a truck slammed into their car and Chris lost the ability to walk. As Jim was the one driving, he felt he was the most at blame for the night’s events. Chris’ mother tells him that Jim “Whenever he sees you in the wheelchair he wants to put it [his car crash] out of his mind.” What began as high hopes for his son to follow in his footsteps and play professional basketball were destroyed. As the Hughes poem describes, Jim’s dreams suddenly had become a “a broken-winged bird that cannot fly”. He became frozen, as Hughes also describes, unable to move forward or find an alternative path to pursue his goals.

When Chris raises the idea of playing wheelchair basketball, Jim seemed opposed to the idea, perhaps because the pain of raising his hope only to see them dashed again was too much to bear. Jim’s first response was something his son described as, “grumpa-grumpa.” He could not reclaim his dream and envision success in another way easily at all. His actions did not reflect his hopes, but his fears. However, with his son’s persistence, his hopes slowly rekindled. Signaling his opening up, he called the coach to see if he could watch practice. When he attends, he provides constructive criticism and encouragement to his son, even saying “I think we can do it” about beating the rival team, which signals the emergence and return of hope now. Left to his own devices, Jim’s path would not have taken him back to hope. He needed the external pressure of his own son’s persistance, hence the importance of “hold fast to dreams”. Without hold on with effort, we are unlikely to achieve dreams.

Jim had been a former professional basketball player, and his whole life was spent trying to play to the best of his ability. To see his son unable to play amplified his loss, but also his shame and pain, especially when he dreamt his son would follow in his footsteps. Jim seems to have found new life and deep inspiration when his hopes returned. When Chris’ mom commented on the fact that Chris could likely play better than Jim, given how hard it is to play from a wheelchair, Jim “mumbled something.” Chris assumed his dad “was saying there was no way he could play as well as me, but I didn’t ask him to repeat it.” Chris had pushed Jim to reclaim his dream, and the outcome was far more than Jim could have wished for. His son, in the end, did exceed his abilities and under even far more challenging circumstances. Not only did he achieve his dream, but even more he drew deep inspiration from his son that he had not expected.

Having dreams is important toward general happiness and purpose. But Hughes stresses hanging on so tightly and dearly for even deeper reasons. The depth of fulfillment Jim achiveved came from seeing his deepest dreams realized, yet all this joy would have been lost so easily had Chris not given the push Jim’s dreams needed. We can lose sight of hopes and dreams so easily. They can be so fragile. Yet, unless we want to leave our lives to chance, as Jim did when he gave up so easily, we must hold fast to our dreams. When setbacks arrive, and they inevitably will, we cannot succumb as easily as Jim did. Although life may send endless setbacks, our best course of action is not to let such events blind us to new possibilities or modifications. Tragedy will always strike, but the moments that really define us is not the tragedy, but our reaction to it and our ability to discover new possibilities, as Chris did. We hold the choice of a broken winged life versus one that is deeply fulfilling in our own hands. Will we let go and leave this to chance or will we fight on to achieve our dreams.

(I know there should be a ? at the end, but I left it off for effect.)

