

## **A Little Big Adventure**

by Isaiah Perine

Located in a small park just five minutes away from my dad's apartment is a statue. This statue is of a polar bear made of reinforced concrete. It lies at the entrance of Leonard Gordon Park in my hometown Jersey City, NJ. The statue itself is noticeable just as you enter the park gates off to the left staring at you with its huge mass. The statue is at least 6ft 9in tall, a large sculpture of concrete with all interstices and gaps filled as well. It's a polar bear, but not the most accurate one. It's positioned with its hind legs squatted down as if it was sitting and the bear stands tall with its front paws. This polar bear has been in the park for years, decades at this point, and even back then the statue was deteriorating. With paint chips falling off and peeling at the surface, the white paint was more of a greyish dirty color from the weathering and from us kids climbing all over it. You can specifically see the wear and tear along the backside of the bear climbing upward toward the top of its head. The snout of the bear hung off the front with good clearance underneath the jaw, just barely high enough to reach for us kids 10 years and younger. With all this detail one would still figure "It's just a polar bear statue, so what could kids possibly want with it"? While that curiosity is justified with there being a playground and swing set both within 50 feet of it, the statue just had a thing about it. It was our little adventure.

To us kids, not even having reached 4ft 10in yet, this statue was a mountain. A tough obstacle to overcome and a rewarding view at the top of its head. Me and 3 other friends who lived in the same apartment building would always go to the park to play there. Within the short 5-minute walk there we'd always discuss our new little adventure and scheme to climb this huge polar bear. One day we might have climbed on top of it and tried to stand on top of its head to get the best view just past the gates of the park. The next day we might seek to climb to the top

just to try to fall off and land hilariously at the ground beneath. For this reason, we have left plenty of evidence of it. Alongside the bear and especially underneath the head of the bear you can see the damage we have done. The usual field of grass is worn down to dirt and mud in the areas that we would land in and the areas we'd try to climb up the bear from. Hundreds and hundreds of times me and my friends came back to this park. New challenges, new purposes, and all the same excitement every time we see that big old polar bear. It was today that I went back to the park and saw that bear. I could practically hear the rubber from sneakers sliding against the paint from when we climbed it and the laughs and cries from the numerous times we would fall off the bear. Remembering and visualizing all four of us climbing up on and trying to all fit on the back of this bear, smiles across our faces with no cares in the world, it put a smile on my face today, and that is what inspired me to write about this place.

This is one of those random places in life that grew and gained its own meaning. That place that served a multitude of purposes when we usually arrived without one in mind. I'm glad that I could come back to this place and still see that weathered down, battle-scarred bear still standing strong near the gates. I know some that are not as lucky as I am, since things tend to not stick around for too long in today's age. Everything is becoming modernized, redone, repurposed, or just outright removed. Within my city alone I could say for sure that every place or structure that could possibly have more purpose will be used as such. Whole parks renovated and given fresh mulch and trees and play areas. Roads constantly under construction whether it be side roads or main highways. Buildings torn down to be replaced with high-rises and expensive condos on the farther side of the city. Everything is being torn down and being given more purpose. It's usually only protected grounds such as reservoirs and reserved landmarks and parks like Liberty State Park that remain untouched for legal reasons. This all happened due to

the location of the city. Jersey City was the bordering city of New York City, connected by the Holland and Lincoln tunnels. New York and Jersey City were very business orientated and had large populations. Due to the less favorable living conditions of NYC, condos and businesses and apartment buildings were being constructed all over the city. This allowed people to commute a couple minutes to New York under slightly better or cheaper living conditions. Even with all of this occurring, to still see that statue standing in its old and deteriorating state today and getting to relive my younger childhood memories from more than a decade ago is truly astonishing to me. While the place itself has indeed changed with the increased weathering and damage to the statue, at least the bear hasn't "changed". Not replaced with a more grandiose statue or remodeled to be more accurate or etc. I appreciate the memories I earned and worked for with the people I cared about back then. The childlike innocence to live freely and make a day out of anything. To lose that and see it modernized like the rest of this city would be quite tragic to me. Almost like I lost a part of myself and what childhood I had. I want to experience what I felt today again in the future, so I can hold onto those memories of bliss and adventure. Yet, it is not just for me that I wish this place to remain as it is.

While I appreciate the place for all it was back when I was a child, I also appreciate it for what it still is. I saw kids, just like I was, playing on the statue. Their parents giggling on the side without a care as the kids climbed on top of the polar bear with a glint of excitement in their eyes. It's not just a place where I created my own purpose, but a place that can continue to give that same feeling to other generations. Nowadays everything is structuralized and systemically planned. Even playgrounds have structures to them that insist kids to play in it the way it was meant to be played in. That polar bear on the other hand has way more possibilities, for me and

apparently for those kids as well. It's a world on its own, an opportunity for all sorts of little big adventures. I'm glad it still stands today, and I hope it remains standing for as long as it can.