

## “Oliver”

"Oliver Peterson is my name, sir!" The short man said .

"I don't care for you, Worm Peterson!" The sergeant shouted at Oliver. "And I'll see you crawling out of here for your mama before this day's over." The tall slim man in uniform stood up straight, having to have bent over to shout directly into Oliver's face . "I'll see you crawl out of here on your belly!"

Oliver stared straight ahead, avoiding eye contact with the vicious animal breathing foul smelling pizza breath into his face .

"I said something to you, worm!" The sergeant with the stark face shouted; this time staring almost straight up .

"Thank you, sir!" Oliver blurted out, not knowing what else to say to the man, in order to appease him .

The deep voice rolled from the gunnery sergeant's chest along with a loud laugh .  
"You're welcome, worm."

Oliver held in his breath, he held in his stomach, he held in his lunch, and he tried in vain to hold in his sweat . His eyes stared straight ahead, focused on the flag pole .

The pizza breath moved down one recruit . Oliver wanted desperately to breath . He was almost passing out when he gave in to his desire to go on living, and let the carbon dioxide slowly seep through his nostrils . Cool, fresh air then flowed into his lungs .

Oliver let his eye lids close as he heard the harsh voice push one hundred decibels into the face of the man on Oliver's left .

"Are you as bad as Worm Peterson?" the voice mocked .

"No, sir!"

Oliver didn't care . His eyes were able to blink for the first time in five minutes . The inside of his eyelids felt as if they contained the sands of the Sahara . His eyes began to involuntarily blink very rapidly, feeding much needed water onto the cornea .

"Are you trying to pick somebody up?" The hot breath returned .

"Onions and Pepperoni." Oliver quickly thought to himself . "Cooked in Hell."

Oliver tried to no avail to stop the butterfly dancing of his eyelids . “No sir!” Oliver shouted back . “I have something in my eyes, sir!”

“What the hell is in your eyes?” The sergeant bent down and almost touched noses with Oliver . “Are you crying, baby worm?”

“No, sir.” Oliver returned to staring at the flag pole beyond the field . “I think there's a piece of sand in my eye, sir.”

“Does baby worm need to go to the infirmary? Is baby worm wounded after serving twenty minutes in this man's army?”

“No, sir.” Oliver sunk a full inch under the large ogre's stare .

“Can we go on with this morning's training, baby worm?”

“Yes, sir!” Oliver began to regain some use of his eyelids .

Oliver tensed every muscle in his body . He felt as if he could be used as a steel girder . He consciously took deep, silent breaths .

The sergeant paused for what seem like a decade in front of Oliver, steadily breathing the rotting smell into Oliver's space .

“I'll tell you what I want, worm.” A smile gathered within the leathery face of the sergeant . “Drop and give me fifty!” The older man shouted with glee .

Oliver began to tremble . He knew that even on a good day, he was only good for ten push ups . In his present condition, Oliver wondered if he could even make it to the ground .

“Are your ears blinking now, worm?” The drill sergeant pointed to the earth beneath Oliver's feet . “I said drop and give me fifty quick push ups!”

“No, sir.” Oliver answered in a broken voice .

“No sir, what?” The harsh voice lowered a bit . “No problem hearing, or no push ups?”

“Yes, sir.” Oliver managed to squeak out before his throat completely closed up .

“Yes, what?” The commanding voice almost became sweet . “Are you going to entertain us with push ups, or you can hear me?”

“Yes, sir.” Oliver almost silently answered .

“You're confusing as hell!” The sergeant's voice resumed its blast like quality . “I don't want to guess what the hell you're thinking, I want fifty push ups, and I want them now!” The twisted voice reached new volume; enough to force Oliver's legs to crumble, causing him to fall to the ground .

"That's a start, worm." The sergeant's voice mellowed quickly . "Now, straighten up and entertain the rest of us."

Oliver remembered all the play grounds he haunted with his silent presence . He remembered all the glares he looked away from . He remembered all the beatings he endured from all the bullies in all those play grounds .

The tears which poised on the edge of his ducts waited . He willed his body to obey this time .

Sweat replaced the tears . It dropped to the dust, forming small balls of mud under his forehead as he stiffened and rose on his arms .

"Very good form, worm." The pepperoni voice oozed . "How about some push ups now?"

"Maybe if I do five push ups real fast, he'll go on to the next victim." Oliver's mind quickly thought .

Oliver quickly fell to the ground and rose again; each time feeling increasing pain in his upper arms . He paused after what seemed an incredible number, perhaps a new push up record for Oliver .

"That was eight really fine push ups." The sergeant almost lyrically said . "How about the other forty two?"

Oliver hovered on his straightened arms, two and one half feet from the ground . He began to lose feeling in his left arm . The numb arm trembled just before it buckled, taking Oliver with it .

Oliver fell on his face, blowing a small cloud of dust past his cheek .

He felt a large, vice-like hand gather up the back of his shirt and pull up . His whole body rose from the ground; he felt the out of body levitation sensation throughout his entire being .

As quickly as he had risen, Oliver fell back to the earth in another small cloud of dust, as the vice released him .

Immediately following the thud from his body hitting the ground, he heard the voice from above . "I'll help you with your next forty one, worm!"

The barricades cracked; the barriers pushed back a fraction . Oliver felt a small, steady wetness fall from the corners of his eyes .

Oliver lifted his right hand over his head, still facing the earth . He clenched his fist tightly and slammed it downward .

"Damnit!" The mattress rebounded enough to quickly bounce his head up, and slap it firmly back down .

"Oliver opened his eyes and stared into the darkness of his room . He focused on the blurry red numerals of his digital alarm clock .

"God, it's four thirty." Oliver wiped his eyes, sniffed, and turned on his side, perchance again to dream .