

Nobody Ever

Written by Ivan E. Coyote



Ivan E. Coyote was born and raised in Whitehorse, Yukon. A renowned performer and an award-winning author of six collections of short stories, one novel, three CDs, and four short films, Ivan's first love is live storytelling. She has become an audience favourite at music, poetry, spoken-word, and writer's festivals from Anchorage to Amsterdam. Ivan's column, *Loose End*, has appeared monthly in *Xtra West* magazine since 2001. Her first novel, *Bow Grip*, received the ReLit award for best fiction, was named by the American Library Association as a Stonewall Honor book in literature, and is in development to be made into a feature-length film.

Before

The title of this essay begs for completion. Predict a few possible endings for the phrase "Nobody Ever."

During

As you read, record questions about the text you would like to revisit for clarification.

Tip

sentence fluency:

sentences that communicate meaning clearly, using varying sentence type, structure, and length to suit different purposes

It was raining the day I met her. The kind of rain that hits the pavement and puddles so hard it bounces back at the sky, backward and defiant. It was the kind of evening best spent inside, but there she was, standing soggy on the sidewalk, waiting to talk to me.

As soon as I emerged from the back door of the theatre, she speed-walked in a straight line toward me. Her name was Ruby, she told me, and she was from a small town, about a three-hour drive from here. She was almost twelve years old and she wanted to be a firefighter when she grew up, or maybe a marine biologist. Her mom had driven her here, so she could see me perform at the Capitol Theater. It had said on my website that I was going to be reading in Olympia, Washington, and since it was a Saturday and there was no school she had made her mom drive her all this way for my show, but then it turned out that since they were selling alcohol in the theatre she wasn't

allowed inside, not until she turned twenty-one, anyways, which was like, ten years away, practically.

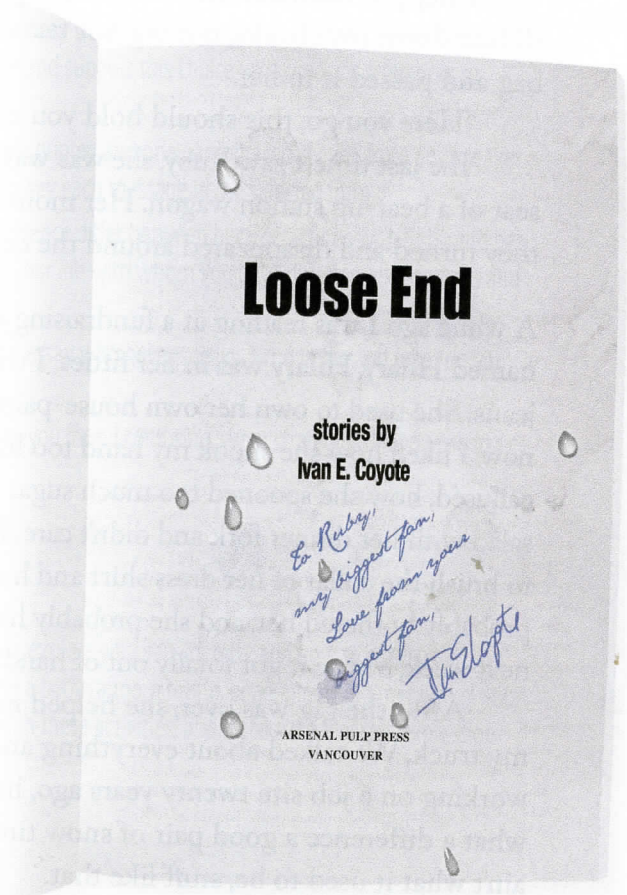
She took a deep breath, and continued. She had seen me at the folk festival in Vancouver last summer, and I had read a story about a tomboy I had met at the farmers' market, did I remember the one?

I nodded, yes, I did.

She shifted her weight from one sneakered foot to the other and back again, like she needed to pee, and flipped her head back to shake her shaggy bangs out of her eyes. She blurted out her words like machine gun bullets, like she had been rehearsing them for a while, her mouth pursed in a determined little raisin.

When she first heard that story, well, she was just amazed, she told me. She had begged her mom to buy her all of my books right there on the spot, but her mom had enough money for only one. She had to wait until it was her birthday, which was October by the way, until she could get my next book, and then she got one more from her aunt at Christmas, but when was I going to put out a new one? She liked them all, nearly the same amount, except for *Loose End*, which of course was her favourite because it had the story "Saturdays and Cowboy Hats" in it, which was the very first story of mine she ever found out about, when she heard me at the park in Vancouver last summer but she had already told me that part.

By this time I was ready to scoop Ruby up in my arms and hug her, but I didn't, because her mom was waiting



in the car parked two feet away from where we were standing and I thought it might seem weird.

Ruby stepped sideways, farther under the awning over the door of the theatre. She pulled a love-worn copy of my book out from her rain jacket, and held it out to me.

"Could you sign it for me? To Ruby, Love from Ivan? You could say, To my biggest fan, Ruby, too, if you felt like it. Whatever you want."

I wrote "To Ruby, my biggest fan, Love from your biggest fan, Ivan," and passed it back to her. She tucked it under her arm for safekeeping. Her fingernails were bitten down to the quick, just like mine used to be.

"Thanks. I really love your books a lot. Especially the one about the tomboy, cuz, well, the little girl in that story, she reminds me of me." She paused for a second, met my eyes, and held them. "And nobody ever reminds me of me."

I stepped back out into the rain, hoping that it would look like raindrops sliding down my cheeks, not big hot tears. I pulled one of my CDs out of my bag and passed it to her.

"Here you go, this should hold you until the new book is out."

The last time I saw Ruby, she was waving back at me from the passenger seat of a beat-up station wagon. Her mom honked the horn twice goodbye as they turned and disappeared around the corner.

A while ago I was reading at a fundraising dinner in Ottawa, and I met a woman named Hilary. Hilary was in her fifties, I would say, wearing black boots and old jeans. She used to own her own house-painting company, but she was retired now. I liked how she shook my hand too hard, how the skin of her palms was still callused, how she spooned too much sugar into her coffee. I liked how she ate her salad with her dinner fork and didn't care. Her hair was just getting long enough to brush the collar of her dress shirt and hang over the tops of her ears. This probably bothered her, and she probably had an appointment to get it cut early next week, before it got totally out of hand.

After the gig was over, she helped me carry the rest of my books out to my truck. We talked about everything and nothing: what it used to be like working on a job site twenty years ago, how it is better now but not by much, what a difference a good pair of snow tires can make, how the old back just ain't what it used to be, stuff like that.

The snow was falling in fat lazy flakes. The parking lot was empty, except for two trucks, one hers, the other mine. Finally, she shook my hand hard one last time and then pulled me into a hug.

“Make sure you keep in touch,” she told me. “It was great to meet you. You remind me of me when I was a kid.”

What Inspired Me to Write This Selection

“ I wrote this piece for all the little tomboys out there, whether they are grown up now, or still young. I want them to see themselves reflected in our culture. I want them to know that they are not alone, and that their people are brave, and beautiful. I want them to know that I am here, and that I see them. ”

After

- 1. Reading for Meaning** Why do you think the essay is entitled “Nobody Ever”? Find a line in the essay that supports your view. Suggest an alternate title and support this choice using specific references to the essay.
- 2. Understanding Form and Style** Choose one quoted and one paraphrased section from any speaker and hypothesize why the author has chosen to convey each message in the selected form.
- 3. Student Voice** Ivan’s self-perception and confidence differ between her interactions with Ruby and her interactions with Hilary. Select two individuals in your life with whom you have differing relationships and explain how these relationships are different.
- 4. Critical Literacy** Someone is mentioned in the essay who never speaks. Who is she and what do you think she would say?
- 5. Metacognition** Reread those parts of the essay you found confusing. What strategies did you use to clarify understanding?

Beyond

Student Voice Following the author’s example, explore your self-identity and how to convey it to others. Create a representation of your identity using a body tattoo, a motto, or an interesting medium of your choice. Reflect upon what you can conclude, through these activities, about the nature of self-expression.