“But the truth is it is scary to look down at your foot that is no longer yours and see attached a long long leg.” –Sandra Cisneros *The House on Mango Street*

Like the best teen novels, we met under unusual circumstances. It was our freshman year, and we had both recently been awaken to the cruelty of adolescence. Having cut all ties from mentally abusive relationships, we had resorted to self-destructive methods of coping with our insecurities. These methods didn’t work.  
 I cannot pinpoint that quintessential “hang out” or “moment” when we became friends as I can with many people I know, but it was long overdue. Having lived just three houses away from each other in the same development for three years, it seems unfitting that we never cultivated a relationship prior to high school. I suppose our friendship developed out of convenience. We sat on her front stoop and cried all day, and at night, we laid in her driveway and looked up at the dome sky. She told me I was a worthwhile human, and I told her the same. It was an easy contract to fulfill.

My best friend Stephanie Alessandra Acuna, is a graphic design student at Warren County Technical School, and someday she will be famous, so remember that name. I see her roughly once a week when we catch up and stress out just like we used to, only now about college instead of boys. Things are simple. We made them that way. Together.

And, I firmly believe that. From the onset of high school, we had both harbored certain expectations about being a young adult. We would have friends and boyfriends and go to dances and to the movies. We would have purpose and we would be happy. When the ebb and flow of freshman year didn’t follow accordingly, we blamed ourselves because it was easy. Over the years, Steph and I have gotten over this notion, through never-ending support and encouragement for each other. We have become independents, without reliance upon others to determine our happiness. We lay and look at the dome sky and we have purpose. That is all we need.

Though self-worth is probably not something that can be taught, I am convinced that she has been a primary facilitator in my journey to valuing myself. It’s an ongoing lesson, one that still has its glitches, but that began on Steph’s porch. Our interactions have never been negative or complicated. She makes it easy for me to be myself. She expects little, and praises often. She is my best friend.

People say that growing up is hard, but I really can’t attest to that. After freshman year, my life has been virtually care-free. I look around at the complicated lives of others, and simply cannot relate. My life is simple. Of course, there was an initial culture shock, as Sandra Cisneros describes in the aforementioned quote; an initial moment of fear, and insecurity, and guilt that is to be expected with growing up; the unfamiliarity and awkwardness; I felt it all. But when it did happen, I had Stephanie. She had good timing. And, we figured it all out pretty quickly. We figured it out in her driveway under the dome sky.

She gave me individuality, something I have come to look for in others and come to attribute as the reason for my easy aging. Because I am confident in the person I am, because I value that person, and want her to succeed, I find myself less susceptible to dependence or to negativity. I work on self-improvement in my spare time. I explore new things, and embrace my quirks. And, while I can accept my flaws, I no longer blame myself for things that I cannot control. I have dreams beyond this suburban development, but I will never forget where they began.