



# Wallace Park: The Compelling Coming of Age Story of Love, Hope and Friendship

*Eddie Regory*

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Alberto rushed at me in the school hallway, pushing me and then punching me square in the face. I cried and ran down Essex Street to Uncle Carlito's and told him what had happened. He was furious, so he put a razor blade in his leather jacket, grabbed my hand, and said, I'm gonna go kill me a bully! C'mon! Carlito pulled me briskly down the street back to the school. It was hard for me to keep up with Carlito's stride, but I was determined to see the look on Alberto's face. Uncle Carlito pushed open the classroom door. The teacher took a step back, and her voice cracked when she asked him to leave, but Carlito was determined to find the bully. I pointed him out.

These were everyday occurrences. The screams, shootings, noise, and bizarre behavior were part of everyday life in the projects. It infected us all, but our strength as a family kept us together. Even though we were poor, living on welfare in a roach-infested apartment, my mother believed in the future someday we would live in a better place. But times were tough. My father took the meat from free lunches that kids threw away more than once to provide us with a meal. My brother was once stabbed while saving my life. My parents finally scraped together enough money to send us to a place called Portland, Oregon. It was a desperate attempt at a safe new life, but our sudden escape from the ghetto actually meant the beginning of the struggles I faced growing up in Portland. Here, I write about failures, triumphs, and the changes we went through every day.

I wrote how the loss of my mother at an early age and, years later, the loss of my father were put into perspective by the love and support of a childhood friend who would later become my wife. This is a story of my internal fight to see my mother's dream for me come true; it details the stark contrast between surviving the ghetto and facing the challenge of starting a new life in an unknown place. It shows that, like a recovering alcoholic, a person who has lived with violence must forever fight to channel that violence into new tools for survival, and it chronicles the passion and frustration born of such a beginning. It shows that the dream for a better life can come true. I'm an average person, and my story is everybody's story.

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