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Dancing with tigers; Good for the heart, good for the soul.

Everyone grows up eventually. The ballerina-astronaut-superhero fades away into the fry cook, the salesperson, and the grown-up. Recently, though, it has become a trend for this transition of dreaming youth to cynical adulthood to occur in the teenage years instead of actual maturity. Society has become inundated with video games, social media, movies, and “reality” television. No one really takes the time to imagine anymore. Sleep and dreaming have been swallowed up by bloodshot eyes and caffeine. What once was a society of radical dreamers, re-imagining the world around them into a place where a cardboard box is a portal into a secret universe, has now become a collective of soulless addicts striving for mediocrity. We scream for the sake of being heard, but have nothing of interest to say. In this image, a re-envisioned work of a comic done by Bill Watterson which appeared in “The Complete Calvin and Hobbes” in 2005, we see how the subjects showcase youth and joy in a world where growing up is hurried and true happiness is marginalized.

Bill Watterson began his career in 1980, working as a temporary political cartoonist for *The Cincinnati Post*. While this position only lasted about six months, it became one of the springboards for his satirical style, which later launched into his career of writing Calvin and Hobbes. A comic strip which ran in major newspapers for ten years, Calvin and Hobbes centers around a boy and his

imaginary friend, a stuffed tiger that becomes real from Calvin's perspective. They have adventures in imagination, inventing games with no rules, creating “transmogrifiers,” “cloninaters,” and time travel ships all from a cardboard box. They fight the tyranny of cynical teachers, nosy girls, and a tyrannical babysitter. From 1985 to 1995, Bill Watterson offered his view of politics, society, the artistic community, and growing up by writing this fun and imaginative comic. He spent his entire career fighting against consumerism, never cowing to publishers looking to license his characters as merchandise, rarely giving interviews and never participating in book signings. Anytime you see a Calvin urinating on a logo, it's unlicensed; anytime you see a Hobbes doll, it's a fake. Bill Watterson wanted his creations to speak for themselves and not detract from their characters by using them to sell products. Watterson personified creative individuality and freedom, without buying in to mainstream marketing. He stood for creativity and freedom. His creations embodied youth, and the imaginative spirit of youth.

They say that the eyes are the window of the soul, though so often they fill us with mere facts and noise. Calvin and Hobbes dance through this image keeping their eyes closed. We close our eyes to sleep, to dream, to focus; as children, we close our eyes to fight off the monsters, to muster the will to overcome, and to wish. When was the last time an adult closed their eyes other than to blink or sleep? Calvin and Hobbes demonstrate their trust and hope in each other, waltzing through the music that only they can hear, living their dream. When you consider the poses that Watterson has chosen, you see four traditional and classic dance styles erupt from left to right: ballroom, country western, swing, and hip hop; marrying these styles together, he has joined all ethnic groups and backgrounds together into a single imagi-nation, joined in a roundel of life and joy. The scene completes in the background; the dance is over and the smiling pair bow deeply to one another as if to say “thank you, well done.” This lost form of respect is the icing on the cake, coloring the whole encounter with a look of satisfaction and a final sort of contentment. The last thing to really focus on in this quintet of joy is the idea of

movement through the piece; each character takes a turn working their way around each one another somewhat like a merry go round. Think back to your childhood; nearly everyone had that favorite uncle or grandpa who would pick them up and twirl them around and around until there was nothing visible but whoever else was spinning with you. You could leave the world behind and lose yourself in that single moment. Watterson captures that moment by having the pair dance across an empty field of white; the whole world has drifted away into nothing. The general impression we get from this piece is one of happiness and frolicking through a world all your own.

Watterson continues to live his private life, living in Ohio with his wife, and contributing to non-profits and painting with his father. He has abdicated from the social norms that most artists choose, and his life is an example of how one can live in the moment, and without losing that spark of imaginative youth that he has shared with us through Calvin and Hobbes. We see this image and can easily grasp how youth and joy are attainable; in fact, most people can attain them simply by looking at this image. The last thing to note: while Calvin and Hobbes have long since retired from the public life, things like this image, an edited piece from a back cover of one of Watterson's compilation books, continue to pop up on the internet and in stores. People want to have the adventures like these boys. What Watterson has done is create a true archetype of youth, where his characters continue to grow and evolve even without any new material. We can be reminded of that old cliché of “Dance like no one is watching” through studying this image of a simple boy and his pet, twirling through life and exploring its mysteries. Calvin and Hobbes spent their entire careers dancing in front of us, letting the world know that it's okay to play; that it's okay to have adventures; and that it's okay to dream big. Let's join these two in their twirling, and live our lives to the rhythm of our own songs, and dance like no one else is watching.

Works Cited

Bill Watterson. "The Days are Just Packed" Comic Strip. 1993. Universal Press Syndicate. 2012. Back Cover. Print.