

Brett Roche's "Within Us All" was chosen as a winner for **The 2008 Will McDonough Writing Contest**. Judges selected his essay from a pool of over 1,800 entries.

### Within Us All

He has nothing. He has never once had more than nothing. They shout not words of encouragement, of support, only remarks of doubt, of pity. There is no hand to help him off the floor. There is no torch to guide his path. All heads are turned, all tides reversed, all odds are against him and him only. Though there is nothing, nothing weighs down on him like the Earth, the planets, and every star in the universe, weighing him down, crushing him. And the blackness of the tunnel he walks grows dimmer, deeper, darker, consuming him with the ferocity of beasts unknown.

But at the tunnel's end, *he* sees the light.

Where there is nothing, *he* sees all.

And this is what drives him. This is what fuels the endless fires in his mind; the endless fires of dreams, and hopes, and desires that burn and consume, burn and consume him not with pain, regret, or shame, but with ambition, wild, indestructible ambition. It seers not only his mind, but then in his arms, his legs, his back, shoulders, fingers, and toes. And then the fires even scorch his heart, eating it all, pumping and pulsing desire to every organ, to every cell, every last fragmented strand of his DNA. He feels it, he knows it, he is *it*.

Nothing can hold him back; nothing will ever hold him back, not ropes, not chains, not bars, not ideas, or words. He is limitless; he is ever-growing and ever-stronger.

On the fields, at the gym, in his home, in his mind, he labors himself to near-death, until work and play becomes pain, and until pain becomes sensation, until

sensation becomes pleasure. He struggles even after drawing first blood. He works through the pouring of sweat, and he remains strong through the string of tears.

He lives for the game. He lives for the pounding of his heart, for the cheering of the fans, and for the cheering within himself. He is unlimited ambition, he is relentless struggle. His name is Determination and he lives within us all.