

Nintendo in the Playroom  
By Frederick William Schroeder IV

Tucked away on the bottom shelf, below newer, sleeker pieces of hardware, it sits: charcoal gray, unimpressive. Dust rests in the years of silence atop its matte, rounded surface. Empty controller ports, where once a tangled thicket of black wires tied four friends together, for summer days, for snow days, for New Year's Eves, for sleepovers without sleep; over. A box of game cartridges contains the memories: saving princesses from desert kings, racing karts through trap-laden tracks, and sending opponents flying with the oh-so-powerful black hammer.

Moments from the finish line, a cheap shot with the red shell gets me a swift kick in the shin. I drop my controller in surprise, then laugh. We had time for a rematch; three more hours until my parents would wake us up for breakfast. The four of us would trade victories throughout the night. I probably won more than anyone back then, but why did I never keep score? I've since lost track of everything.

One by one, you each moved away, leaving me alone, my grip on the controller loosening with each passing year. A phone call was all it would take to reconnect, but I avoided it. Sports, schoolwork, girls, and beer had all become infinitely more important than a night spent inside mashing plastic buttons with the boys. The camaraderie faded along with those past victories, and our friendship, my best friends, were gone. I don't even have your phone numbers anymore.

If we somehow reunited,  
we could have one final grudge match.  
We'd blow up the air mattresses again, huddle around the old Zenith.  
You could be Yoshi; I might even let you win,  
in memorial for what has been lost between us.  
Crouching on the rug, like I'm ten again,  
I know that the Nintendo must remember it all.  
I flick the power switch, hoping to see a sign of friendly recognition.  
Its red eye blinks groggily awake,  
for just a moment, before fading gradually away.