

Eternity McDonell

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Death, darkness, and chaos- how it lurks around strange corners, breeds and festers within life's twists and folds, and strikes its mighty fist upon us when least expected. Oh how it surprises us. When life is good. When life is blissfully and infinitesimally sweet, these are the times catastrophe loves most. Yet, how tragedy underestimates the strength of the human condition. The resilience that is stamped into our DNA as if crafted by the armor of the most powerful animal or constructed by the strongest material that can withstand any storm. Isn't it interesting how in our darkest moments, our bodies and minds go into autopilot. Survival instinct takes over and suddenly it is as if someone is walking for us, holding us delicately in their arms and leading us from space to space. Often when a situation occurs in our vicinity, to someone we know, we cannot imagine ever having to carry a burden so large. Instantly we call these people strong, we believe they are much tougher than us. However, in reality, this strength lives in each and every one of us. It comes to us only in extreme catastrophic circumstances. To truly illustrate this point, I feel as though I must reference a story near and dear to my heart. It's the story of my brother's accident.

I will attempt to give life to that terrible day for the last time before I lay it to rest in my mind. After writing this, I will finally allow it to catch cobwebs, and permit it to decay in the deep chasms of my memory as time goes on. Today, I will allow myself to relive that day once more. There is not much I remember from the evening of May 12, 2021, yet the parts that I do

always come back in technicolor and spurts of pain. I have nightmares of walking along the road I have always called my home, which had been dusted in shattered glass, like fresh snow after an icy cold day. It glistened in the sun and rainbows refracted up from the surface of the glass and casted prism shadows across the pavement. It would have been beautiful if it weren't for the circumstances or the sight of the street littered with metal that had been crushed and bent; formed into awkward, unnatural angles. There was a white truck smashed against the beautiful tree that stands upon the horizon just before the laguna, directly in front of my house.

We wake up every morning to this view of the laguna and a view of where this devastation took place. I remember that the street was blocked when I went to get my puppy out of the house and to get to the front yard we had to park a ways back and walk past the debris. At the sight of the crushed bicycle, I knew my brother was dead. I felt it in my bones, in the shiver in my spine, and in the stillness of the wind. Time seemed to slow down or cease to exist all together as I looked upon that crushed bicycle and I asked myself what the last thing I had said to my brother was. Was it angry words of spite that I had snapped at him after he did something to annoy me? Had I even told him I loved him? Would I ever look into those beautiful chocolate brown eyes, or hear that youthful laugh that could light up a room?

That night I was sick, I threw up everything in my stomach. I vomited that night because my body could not handle that trauma. The bile that rose from my stomach and burned the side of my throat was the only thing that kept me grounded- reminded me I was alive and that this was truly happening. I could not handle the twisted metal, the bent tree, or the stillness of the wind. My body could not rationalize a world in which my innocent, little brother did not live. I purged that awfulness from myself. When I found out my brother was alive and would be okay, there was relief followed by a sense of dread when my mother with a deadened voice told me

that the doctor had to amputate his leg. I thought about my brother's passion. How my baby loved to run. He would run miles and miles. In those moments he was captured in time, a force of nature, and most importantly he was truly, incandescently, and fully alive. He was consumed by intrinsic peace. The youthful innocence was stolen from him when he was forced to sit in a hospital, being poked and prodded by needles, writhing in pain.

This affected my parents in ways that could never be comprehended. I had to look into my parent's eyes and see nothing looking back at you. I saw the light and life leave my mother's eyes after my brother's accident. She blamed herself for letting him ride that bike that day and she saw her baby lying unconscious in the thorny embrace of the blackberry bushes wondering if that was the last image she would ever have of him. Wondering if the last thing would know his touch was the thorny leaves that pawed at his still body. This image was accompanied by the weighted feeling of helplessness knowing there was nothing she could do for her baby. This is not to mention the tremendous pain of his surgeries and exams that my brother will remember for the rest of his life.

This brings upon the memory of the first time I saw my brother in that ghastly hospital gown. How it fell off his skeletal, sickly, baby figure. And that big dark, blue wheelchair with alabaster handles that seemed to consume his small, innocent, broken body. My 13-year old brother who was right on the cusp of manhood was a shell of himself for months.

When I was living on my own as my parents stood by my brother's side in the midst of his procedures, I returned one day to see Mark's friends weeping at the sight of the accident. I had never felt so hopeless and lost in my life. I forced myself to get out of the car not knowing what to say to them. How could I form the words to convey my sadness and guilt at the fact that my brother was alive and their dear one was not? Step by step, I summoned up the courage and

spoke to them. I looked at them in their watery, misty eyes and I apologized for what the drunk driver had done.

Each step or event that has occurred since my brother's accident has not been me. The strength that took hold of my soul and guided me through those dark moments is something profound, something out of body I can not explain. Of course, there are people I knew that showed up for me in ways I will never be able to thank them for. However, the only way I can explain this innate strength in defeat of tragedy is the human condition. There must be some other wordly strength we are born with that carries us through life's darkest moments. I am thankful for the life and resilience it has given me. It is what made my legs begin to walk again after I saw the accident, it is what drove me to study for my exams in the midst of my parent's absence and my brothers procedures, it is what gave me words to speak to Mark's loved ones who were grieving outside my home, it is what planted my feet when I had to sit and listen to court proceedings, it is what inspired me to continue to do well in school, it is what stifled my sobs when I first saw my brother after his accident, and finally it is what is drives my fingers to type this essay. I see this same resilience in my parents and brother each and every day. I thank God for the strength he has instilled in me and I will continue to strive because of the resilience that lives within each and every one of us.