We Just Keep on Swimming

A story of love, life, and death

by Matthew Brignola

Because this is a non-fiction novel I have referenced some people that I know in my real life using synonyms in this book. Let us begin on the next page. We will all keep swimming if we choose not to give up.

Death:

1. I Should Jump

Imagine you are lost at sea but are only miles from the shore. What would you do? Swim. I bet, but then a storm comes. Would you stop or keep going? I'd maybe stop for a little bit wait for the storm to die down and then keep going. So you should do the same in life just and keep swimming. Don't worry too much because all storms stop and life goes on. We Keep Swimming, is the story of my recovery from a brain injury. It's not easy and there have been times where I contemplated suicide. I even called the police hoping I could look threatening enough and they'd shoot me. Alas they didn't and I kept swimming.

You are lost at sea. One-day life begins and one day it ends. Yet each day is what you make of it.

Imagine you are lost at sea. One-day life begins and one day it ends. Yet each day is what you make it. Sometimes this can be extremely difficult but if there's one thing I've learned from having a brain injury it's to keep swimming or at the very least tread water. I would like to dedicate this to my sister Amanda Sebestyen, my mother Zina McDowell and my neuropsychologist Dr. Barry.

Staying swimming can be hard given the circumstances. I wanted to talk to a woman who I planned to ask for her hand in marriage but she me. The fear of losing her before had caused me to be suicidal. So the firm happened to be recently confirmed. This woman who I loved and who said she had loved me as well broke things off. Either It might have been because of my brain injury and the effects it has had on my memory why she wanted to separate, So since she said we could remain friends I asked her why she did it, but she said she needs more space. She needs more space for what? I'm the one she broke up with I'm the one who is hurting and should need space, not her.

I have loved numerous women. I believe that romantic love is practically essential to have in my life.

It's really not something that I was too aware of at the time. How a still-life existence can fade so quickly. How the vanishing point and the horizon always seem to collide in agony. I could feel my life spinning in and out of a vortex. I could see myself becoming somebody I had never been before. My self-awareness had all but disappeared leaving my mind and my body to mop up the mess I had made on the floor and it felt like nothing was happening. It felt as though I might never pop back into reality ever again. I had spent the last six months of my life existing as though I never existed.

One time I had come back from Berlin with no place to live. I was still in college at the University of Denver with only a semester left to my college career. My time in higher education was winding down to nothing and the attitude I carried with it was one I had never borne before in my life. I had removed all fear from my life. I had self-disillusioned myself and diluted my existence into a vial that could easily be dropped and forgotten. A couple drops of liquid that easily could be spilled. I had reached a level of immaturity that I never could have fathomed reaching only three years before this point.

My time in Berlin is still ones that perplexes me. It was one of the best times of my life and also a time in which I was the most depressed I have ever been. This is a story of love, family, self-deprecation, and self-improvement. I was in love when I went to Berlin. I had met someone at a college party and what could have been a one-night, but instead turned into a five-month relationship. The development of this love was one that took place quickly and that would leave a burning feeling in the back of my throat for some time to come. My times in Berlin are directly attached to this brief love story. The consequences of the event not completely resolved.

Ruby and I met, as stated, at a college party. I stood in a circle with several college girls, bantering about some modern conceptions of feminism. They seemed to be enjoying the company and the conversation. I was getting bored. All of the sudden, a girl pops into the circle and tells me that she finds me attractive. She leaves immediately. After some boring party conversation this was the spark my night needed. I left the kitchen I was standing in and headed out the back door in order to find the girl that had so bluntly caught my attention.

I found her outside and we began to chat. Some friends of ours and us had all decided to leave the party. We smoked some weed in a park nearby but Ruby and I decided to leave the group of friends and walk further along down to another park. I told her about how I had slept, drunkenly, with another man while I was in Boulder before. This didn't really seem to bother her. Our conversation developed into a comedic yet unreserved look at our lives. Past events that may have been embarrassing to share with others. We left the park and began walking back to my house. I think we were both under the assumption that this was going to lead to sex. We were nearing my house when she conveyed something to me that made it sound like she wanted to go back to her dorm, so I bid her goodnight.

I woke up the next morning completely enamored. What the hell had happened? I found a mutual friend of hers on Facebook and asked him if he'd give me her number. We met for coffee and came back to my place. As she told me, coffee is code for sex. Which is what ended up happening. I knew I was leaving to Berlin in four months. My mind was not set on having a relationship, but we ever did stop hanging out. The spiral was beginning to unravel.

We stayed together during this time. I was fine with a relationship that wasn't wrapped up in a pretty little bow, with no labels or shelf markers. I was eating psychedelics occasionally at the time. I was smoking cigarettes. I felt transience was the way to go. Eventually, she communicated that she wanted to be asked out and to be in a relationship. I was falling in love. Now that I am single I hope I will find another woman to love who doesn't dislike me because of my injury.

The actual places in my brain that were injured were my frontal lobe and my temporal lobe. Specifically, the left side of my frontal lobe was what was damaged the most. In some ways I should consider myself lucky because I didn't injure my occipital lobe, which could have made me blind. I lost the ability to walk for several months but at least I didn't lose the ability to see. or to love.

There have been a number of complications caused by my injury but I guess in a sense I am lucky because I could be dead or blind for example. I think it is best to focus on the positive. Yes I believe that my injury is horrid but instead I could have died. So even in the worst situations I believe there is always something positive to focus on. As some people might say life is pain. Yes it may be painful but would you rather die? I have definitely wanted to die before at my own hand but luckily I became too scared.

My injury was so severe that it put me into a coma for six weeks. Again I'll make the choice to focus on the positive. At least I woke up from the coma. I may have trouble sleeping now because of my injury but at last I am not dead. One day I will have to die and I have tried to shorten the timeline for that occurrence before. Things may not be perfect but the reality is that they could be much worse.

Rather than focusing on a problem I believe that is ultimately better to shift your focus to a potential solution. For me one of the solutions to my dilemma has been therapy. My body may not be as limber as it once was before I was confined to a wheelchair but at least my therapists have given me exercises to loosen my body up and get it closer to how it was before I had my injury. It is questionable if my body will return to a state similar to how it was before but at least there are a number of things that can be done to get it as close as possible.

A woman that I wanted to marry may have left me but I have found another woman that I am attracted to and the nice corollary to that is that she once admired me. I have been devastated by the loss of love before but I am confident that I will get to love again in my life.

I believe firmly in the romantic emotion of love. I believe that romantic love is essential as well. And I also believe that romantic love is often responsible for why people are alive. Love is inspiring and I personally believe that most people would not have been born without it.

Life isn't necessarily reliant on ritualistic mating but romance is far more agreeable than force. There is only one way to procreate and I believe that procreation is better facilitated if the two participants are in love. I personally believe that love is the glue that binds the universe together. I truly cannot imagine what the universe would be like without love. In fact it might not exist if there was no love. I will even go so far as to propose that the universe might not exist without love. That could also be why so many world religions focus on love. I am not religious but I am a firm believer in the power of love.

Life is infinitely complex and so is love. It seems that life and love are part in parcel. Imagine how much more boring life would be without the complexities of love. I believe it would be far more boring than being mundane. Also I believe that life is made beautiful by love. There must be a reason why the hippies of the sixties believed that love is the answer. Were they just intoxicated on narcotics or was there something to that idea?

Life would not only be boring without love but also it would be uninspiring. Inspiration is also essential to life. There seems nothing simpler to me than accepting the fact that we need love. I do not know what I would do without it. I have wanted to take my own life because of love but I don't think I could live without it. And if that isn't ironic I don't know what irony is.

I have to wake up each morning knowing that things could be much worse. I would also recommend that you try and think the same thing when you're feeling down. The only guarantee we have in life is that we must die so I think it is good to focus on the positive aspects of being alive until you are not alive anymore.

Coming from a therapist who knows how to work with people who have gone through trauma the expectation is that this could be handled well. So here I am writing a novel documenting my recovery and venting about how the woman I intended to marry is lacking the skills necessary to handle those with trauma; something you'd think given her profession she'd be good at.

On one hand I'm proud of her choosing a profession that is intended to help people going through trauma and on the other I frankly think she is demonstrating a lack of the essential skills needed to perform that job effectively. So to avoid calling her the c word that rhymes with bunt I am using every ounce of niceness I have in my body. Would I still marry her? Yes, but I do believe she has demonstrated some significant flaws given her profession.

By saying this am I being merciless and cruel or am I simply being observant. That is a tough question indeed, per haps one I am currently unfit to answer. At some point in the near future I'm sure she will speak with me, but will that be satisfactory? I err on the side that says no because I am too intoxicated with love.

Love stinks, love hurts, but boy is it one of the defining features of our species. So defining without it I wouldn't have been here for me to write this down. We all have those we love and hopefully we have those who love us in return. Love, it is like a flame, an eternal flame that burns for all of eternity. Oh Alison, while the fear of losing you may have made me question my own life I would happily do fall in love over again.

But the question of taking of my own life has itched at me before. Death and taxes they are supposedly the only two guarantees we are given in our lifetimes. What would things have been Like if I had never been born? Well I am very friendly and like to make people laugh so it would probably be less fun.

Yes, but this was not the first time I had contemplated suicide. Once I was in Berlin and felt suicidal. Because of my fear of heights I decided to jump off a building. I found a large bridge one night after having walked around a lake muttering to myself that I should die. Luckily I became afraid I would hurt my family's feelings. I found a partially smoked cigarette and finished it. I.e. I kept swimming. I rode a train to the bridge and one sign that has stuck with me ever since that happened. As I was riding the train the lights went out briefly onboard for about a minute. Then they came back on about a minute later. The lights came back on and I saw it as a sign from a higher power

Gazing into the blackened pathways and the darkened waters, I began to slip into subconscious thought. I unleashed a slurry of tirades upon myself and my character. I began speaking to myself, convincing myself that life was not worth living. I felt as though my life was entirely purposeless and that I was only hurting others. I began saying "I want to die," over and over again. I was more emotional than I had ever been in my life. I was the closest to the cuff of madness that I'd ever been and it was completely taking me over. I came back by to where the apartment was. I was going to search for a tall enough building to leap off of. I felt as though I needed to end it all because I wanted to die. My host brother found me. He asked why I was so upset. He said I had hurt his mother's feelings and that I should apologize. I came in, apologized, and left soon thereafter. I borrowed a cigarette from Rodrigo, my host brother, and smoked it down to the butt. I told him I needed to go for a walk. This brief encounter with another human being did not persuade me otherwise from my pursuit of suicide.

I went to the Mexicoplatz S-bahn station and boarded a train in the direction of Rathaus Steglitz, where I knew there was a bridge tall enough to jump off of. My fascination with wanting to jump off of something to end my life probably came from my childhood fear of heights. I had been terrified of heights as a child, to the point where when I would go climb to the top of some structure in nature or otherwise, my legs began to shake. This was completely idiotic to me. Fear is a reptilian sensation meant to prevent us from entering situations that endanger us but if I am standing on top of a structure I could easily fall off of, it is more dangerous to have my legs shaking than not. This was one of the times of my life

when I realized that I needed to eliminate all of my fears, particularly my fear of heights. I began to climb trees, rocks, one time a crane, and other structures until this fear had been removed. I believe that because this was one of the first true fears I had eliminated from my life, I wanted to jump from great heights to end my life. If I could jump I could fly away and escape into death. I boarded the train from Mexicoplatz and reveled in my mind over the fantasies of death and suicide I had been contemplating at Schlachtensee. This was it. I was trying to prepare myself for the eternal darkness that would soon come after leaping. I sat on the train with maybe one or passenger aboard.

I took a moment to pray, to attempt to converse with the Great Unknown as I had so rarely attempted in the past. I pleaded with this Great Unknown, or Higher power that I had never been entirely convinced was ever really there. I prayed, "If there is ever a time to show me that you exist this is that time." A minute later the lights in the train went out. This was strange. I had ridden these trains many times during my stay in Berlin and I had never had this happen before. The lights came on about one minute later. I couldn't get that out of my mind. I felt as though it was more than just an odd coincidence. I got off the train. I walked to the bridge that I was originally planning on jumping off of. It didn't appear tall enough and I didn't want to just injure myself. I walked over to the Bierpinsel and climbed the steps up it, to which we return to the beginning of this story. Standing up there I couldn't gather the courage to leap. I thought of my family, other people I love, and I thought of the light going out in the train and coming back on. Maybe it was a sign; maybe it was purely a coincidence. I don't know for certain. The only thing I know now is that I am alive and I want to be alive. I don't entertain negative thought s about myself. I don't entertain suicidal thoughts. I don't climb towers to try to jump off. I climb them to see the world from a different vantage point. It is easy to entertain your darkest imaginations of yourself but with practice I have found it is just as easy to dismiss those thoughts altogether

It was one time or is. I went outside with a tea in order to soothe my throat. I had lost my voice from being sick. My voice was so rough it sounded like a motor so then ironically I smoked a cigarette. I was searching for balance; a balance that one probably couldn't understand. That I couldn't understand. If I understood it I probably wouldn't be a live.

Ye those particular moments were rather grim. Even though I loved Berlin and it's an amazing city, the suicidal thoughts I was having were brought on by a tragic discovery on my part. While on my trip, which was being managed by a study abroad program, I met another American named Rachel. Her and I hit it off so much so to the point that we started dating. I don't fully recall what happened but for some particular reason I broke things off.

Because of that she was so upset. At a house we would both frequent, I would go to jam. They had a drum kit and multiple amplifiers. So I went over to jam and Rachel went over to hang out. That evening I retired and she stayed up. She was a climber

and had frequently climbed things when we were drunk together so she decided to climb on the patio. Sadly she fell off, broke her wrist, and chipped a few of her front teeth.

It was an awful accident and made me feel terrible. But my feeling of terror was intensified. It was intensified because the magistrate at the university thought I was involved in her accident. So then, after that, despite how much I enjoyed Berlin, I became depressed and hence arose the darkened thoughts of suicide.

Maybe it had to do with, with what? As I suddenly remembered I heard a car accident. I was banging my head against the toilet and told my friend to kill me. He called to his girlfriend. She sat down by me and Held my head. I looked in her eyes and it was like it was written in crystal; she was there to save me.

Then 4 men came: 2 police officers and 2 medics. They took me to a hospital. I was only allowed to lie in bed without my own clothes. I yelled, "fucking fascists!" I asked them to let me pee. "Let me see my right!" I asked for a telephone. "Fucking fascists!" I yelled again.

More medics came and they fastened my hands to the bed. Then they gave me a shot of sedative. Then I slept. I didn't, so I keep swimming.

Sadly this was not the only time I've been suicidal. Recently I was so suicidal I called the police Hoping I Could find a knife and spear threatening enough that' that they would shoot me. They took me to hospital after I told them I was suicidal so that a psychiatrist could evaluate me.

It was only because The woman I was dating said she was going to move her, from Colorado to Portland. I'm a sucker for love. Ironically this woman, who I had planned to marry, broke up with me. Ah the good times are killing me, as was once said in a Modest Mouse song. Irony knows no bounds.

It's sad how someone you love that much leaves you when you have a horrible injury. But the good news is I got a \$300 Vitamix out of it after I fixed it for her. Love's so powerful. As the saying goes there are plenty of fish in the sea so We Keep Swimming.

I would give anything just to hold her hand one more time. Hopefully one day she reads this and realizes the mistake she made.

One thing I have to mention is the above account you just read I originally wrote in German. Which makes me proud that I was able to translate my own work especially considering my memory was affected by my injury. There were words I used in the original document that surprised me.

Luckily my accident has not made me lose my ability to speak German. Recently I used Facebook to get in touch with my host brother from when I was staying in college. He said he would like to come to America and I told him I would like to return to Berlin. I messaged him all in German and had no issues. I was even able to explain to him in German that I have a brain injury and I obtained it from mountain biking. So that has inspired me to set a new goal; fully recover and go drink amazing and decently priced beer in Germany with my good old German pal.

But yes the final days I had in Berlin sure were dark ones, Which instilled in me a remarkably sad and powerful urge to be suicidal. It all happened because there was a girl I had fallen in love with, started a relationship, broke up with her, and devastated her. On night I had gone over to a mutual friend's house to play music and I believe she imbibed in too much alcohol. It stained her lips purple and she had the genius idea to climb on the balcony on the side of the house. She used to get hammered and like to climb and a couple of times I had to stop her by grabbing her. But unfortunately I was not their that night and she climbed the balcony, fell, broke a wrist, and chipped several of her front teeth. It was so bad, her mother flew in from Florida. The head of the study abroad program then investigated me, knowing I had formed a relationship with Rachel.

I believe, that despite how much I loved Berlin, that this is what lead to me being suicidal. I guess because I felt partly responsible for her accident, and that I could of helped prevent it, Just as I had helped Prevent her from drunkenly clambering over tall objects before.

So love can be at times enjoyable, endearing, and magical and it can be dark, fierce, and dangerous during others. It appears there is no sure fire way to predict which way it will be and to predict accurately.

I may have had been her vigilant watchdog before, but that unhappily fateful night I was drunk and tired. Yes what wonderful excuses? I remember she came back to the United States and even came to Colorado to visit me. But more some weird reason she had refused to shower for almost a month, and we still had sexual intercourse. Oh that smell is a stench I will never forget But I endured it. Well I guess I endured it in order to get laid. Ah yes, the genius of thinking with my second head.

Sex may motivate me and love even more, but with that being my modus operandi, I am still alone. Oh I can only hope that things will not remain this way forever. And with all that having been said, Alison promised we could remain friends when she broke up. I forgot the reason she had used for why we should have broken up and so I told her I forgot and asked her if she would please tell me, to which she responded she needs more space. More space? You mean more space in what regard? You already broke up with me, That is as close to the largest amount of space you can ask for.

So not only have the fires of love burned me, the flames have licked at me as well. Love, it feels so wonderful at times but can also be incredibly dangerous. As I've said before, I'm a lover not a fighter, but there were times like these that have made me think to myself, maybe I should have fought. If I had only fought like I carried Rachel back to where she stayed after wrestling her off of a parked car, her teeth Might not have been broken.

Bu oh man do I miss beer. I used to drink like a fish. One day soon I'm sure I'll be able. For a while I was barred from drinking coffee, but luckily now I can have about a cup per day. so be grateful for the little things. One slip and you may never get to enjoy them again. In other words I'll keep swimming but pretend it's in a bucket of beer.

I am from Colorado Springs and used to go mountain biking on some local trails. So it probably made sense to me that when my friend suggested that we go biking down a ski mountain I said yes.

Since that was the activity that resulted in to me getting injured in my brain I should probably never do it again. It's rather upsetting because mountain biking was exhilarating to me, beautiful because it needs to occur in nature and is a method to help keep one physically fit.

Now instead of biking the way I get my time outside is by walking through the neighborhood where my mother resides. I used to be into another risky sport. I grew up a skate boarder. I had been hurt from skate boarding in some interesting ways. One time I was at a skate park and rolled over my fingers. Rolling over my fingernails caused the fingernails on my index and middle fingers to be ripped out.

Probably the worst injury I ever had from skating was that I had to get stitches in my testicles. I was skating in my mother's driveway. I was just jumping over another skateboard. I jumped with the board and landed on the back edge and it shout straight up into my groin. I thought at first had just knocked the wind out of me.

I went inside and went to the bathroom and held my knees up to my stomach until got the wind back in me. I waited for a moment and then got up to keep skateboarding when the realization hit me. I reached my hand down into the groin of my pants and withdrew it seeing blood on my finger. Then my family and I drove down to the hospital together so that I could get some stitches.

Getting the stitches hurt so badly that it brought me to tears. So from having been into a risky sport like skate boarding I guess that's partly why I was comfortable going down a trail really fast where people have been physically injured, so even though from skateboarding my fingernails grew back at least I didn't get a brain injury. At Craig hospital it was not uncommon to meet someone who had sustained a brain injury from skateboarding.

That was what Annie had to say regarding my recovery. I guess the honest truth is that I was a risk taker. So philosophically speaking did I deserve to have my brain injured? That is without a doubt a difficult question to answer. I would like to assume that I did not deserve to sustain a traumatic brain injury from mountain biking.

I owe much of the progress during my recovery that I've made to the therapists who work there. Craig has two operating programs. One is called in patient and the other is out patient. The types of therapy would vary from speech therapy to meeting with a neuropsychologist to see how I was holding up emotionally. I asked some of my therapist's if they would be willing to comment on my progress.

First I will include the responses from my therapist Annie who is a really sweet and kind woman. She worked with me when I was in patient therapy. At the time when she was assigned to me I at that time had to get around in a wheelchair. Due to people such as Annie I am now able to walk again. I even did one of the things I hadn't done since I was injured. I jumped. I consider that as remarkable since I was in a wheel chair before. Alright now. I will give you the chance to read what Annie hs to say in regards to my recovery.

It's amazing the people that help you when you have a brain injury. I've lived in Colorado Since 3. Luckily the #1 hospital for brain injuries is only about 2 hours from my Parent's house. The hospital is Craig and has the best treatment in America for brain injuries.

Some of the therapists I have had are some of my favorite people. I love to make people laugh so I mess with my therapists all the time. I ask myself the question "What motivates one to be a therapist at Craig?" They are simply beautiful people. All of my progress I owe to these people. Be thankful for the people in your life. and strive to spread joy.

What made you choose to become a therapist?

I chose to become a PT later in my undergraduate studies than most - I had studied Biomedical Engineering and always had envisioned going into the medical field in some capacity, and physical therapy allowed me to problem solve and work with my hands in an entirely different way than I ever could have imagined. My engineering degree taught be how to think, how to create, how to be efficient with my resources, and how to enhance things. Together with my PT education, I have been granted this same opportunity, but now with people and their families - getting to create meaningful relationships by helping to facilitate people walking again, return to activities that they love, and help to give them back their own lives and purpose after a devastating injury.

How did we meet?

We met on your first day you arrived to Craig Hospital to begin your inpatient rehabilitation journey - my job those first couple days was to mobilize you to a wheelchair and assess your current functional status, determine what your deficits were, and come up with a plan with the rest of your interdisciplinary team. You were still in PTA (post traumatic amnesia) and were very confused and motor restless, with extremely poor balance, thus warranting a manual tilt-in-space wheelchair that we could safely mobilize you in, which also gave us the option to tilt you back to relax and rest as we implemented low stimulation guidelines, and began building up your tolerance to therapies.

What's your favorite memory of us?

For a long while, you were in what we call a safe keeper bed, which is very low to the floor and can make transfers extremely difficult; however, we had been practicing "squat-pivot transfers" and while I was assisting you to your wheelchair, in a deep squat position, my pants loudly and clearly ripped in half, unbeknownst to you. We quickly got you safely into your wheelchair and I hurried off to change into what are better known as our "scrub pants of shame," we all share in case of an emergency, and the first words out of your mouth when you looked at me after I returned were "sweet pants," with a smirk on your face. But on a more serious, one of my fondest memories of you was the first time we walked down the hall around the nurse's station without the need for an assistive device, but rather, with what we call "hand hold assist." All the nurses, techs, and other families on the floor watched and quietly cheered you on so not to disturb you, on your first of many victory laps around the 3rd floor.

What do I struggle with?

From a PT standpoint, the more tangible and visible challenges you face are with your balance and ability to walk safely and efficiently; however, some of your other struggles, which can be more difficult to see at first, are with your memory and tendency for increased distractibility. These carry over into so many aspects of your functional mobility and independence, and were easily affected by your fatigue levels. We had to place a lot of structure and 24/7 routines, including vital rest periods in your schedule, to assist you since you were unable to implement this structure yourself, which also allowed for your physical progress to continue in a safe manner.

What are my strengths?

Matt - you always worked with such determination, bravery, optimism, and a great sense of humor. You have a never-quitting spirit with a bold personality and could light up a room with your infectious laugh. You became a welcomed presence on our

3rd floor and were always inspiring others around you, even when you couldn't see it, with how hard you worked in therapies, and with the progress you made during your time at Craig.

What do I need the most help with?

Though I haven't worked with you since your inpatient discharge, upon leaving for home, one of the biggest challenges you and your family faced were maintaining structure and routine at home to continue your healing as you transitioned to outpatient therapies. Though we work on a lot of community reintegration skills while in inpatient, including having you go home on the weekend to trial run home, there is never a substitute for the real thing and it isn't until your are thrust back into reality that some of those struggles and challenges can really present themselves.

What are you proud of?

I'm proud of how far you have come - cliche but in every sense of that - it's the most fitting here. You came to Craig needing a wheelchair and are now walking and writing a book! There was a time that I had contemplated needing to script you a wheelchair to optimize your functional mobility and independence, but you continued to persevere and show us all the fight you had. In doing so, you were able to walk out of Craig on your own two feet with your family by your side. I'm proud of how you have tackled this journey head on and continue to thrive from all your new experiences, and look forward to all the adventures and good that you will continue to inspire in yourself and others.

I chose to become a therapist because I was always drawn to the human brain- I have always wanted to know as much as I can about how it works. However, I could never explain why I was so drawn to it...and I don't know if I'll ever be able to. As far as going into occupational therapy, I wanted to go into a profession where I could learn about the brain, but more importantly, learn how to forge relationships with and get to know my patients. OT in every way matched my personality and desire to conduct science and art together into one symphony.

We met on your very first day at Craig (you won't remember that day, but I know we have told you all about it). I met your mom, and gave her an overview of occupational therapy. While we were doing that, Annie and I were also trying to fit you to a wheelchair, which you were very emphatically swinging your right leg over the frame of. We had so many great memories together, it is nearly impossible to pick just one! I will put together every single time you went into "giggle bucket" mode, and would go into your distinctive laugh bout that every single person in the hospital knew so well. Some of your struggles were mostly related to use of your left arm, doing basic self-care initially (i.e., dressing, showering, grooming), emotion regulation, and functional cognition. Your strength is 100% that no matter how hard or difficult something was for you, you always tried to implement humor into a

situation. I am proud of YOU and how far you have come! You started out at Craig needing help for everything, and you left inpatient almost able to complete self-care all on your own. You were starting to find some movement with your left arm. Whenever I checked in with your outpatient therapists (as I did frequently because I always wanted to know how you were doing), they said you worked very hard and were such a joy to be around...and I concur. Let me know if you need more info from me!

One my favorite therapist was Kara. She is absolutely amazing and drop-dead gorgeous. One time I got to cook as therapy and I chose to cook salmon and green beans. It was honestly delicious. I fed both Kara and Annie lunch that day. Here is what Kara had to say regarding my recovery.

That concludes Kara's remarks. Now back to my remarks.

Apparently things that seem fun and athletic can be risky and dangerous. I mean think of all the concussions That playing football results in. No pain no gain it is said. Really though. On a philosophical level it is fun to entertain the idea of living life without experiencing the sensation of pain.

Because of my accident I will probably never go mountain biking again. The strange thing is that I have to relearn how to ride a bike again because I haven't ridden one since my accident. During my recovery I tried to see if I could ride my road bike but I wasn't able to lift my leg high enough and I figured it was too risky to jump since I can only hop about one inch now. I say that because there are some skills that I was really good at but that I have lost. One example is that I really enjoy playing cards and used to be able to shuffle but now I am unable to.

So because of the Corona virus outbreak and the stay at home order I play cards a lot but sadly I cannot help by shuffling very well like I used to be able to. As well as losing my ability to shuffle I have lost the ability to play guitar and I understand that my ability could cone back with practice but I played for seven years.

While I am aware that I could get the skill back with practice it is tough to say how much practice is needed to regain seven years of skill. Outside of the guitar I was really good at producing electronic music in Ableton under the name Tobo but I forgot how. I looked at some tutorials online and figured it out again luckily.

I really hope that I do not lose my ability to use my camera because just as I used to teach Film I had a camera and would take both pictures and videos. Learning how to take photos using manual settings is rather difficult but I won't know if I have lost the skill until I try.

I used to love filming so much so I taught it when I was a teacher. One time I even took a student to go film at The University of Denver because Elon Musk's brother was giving a talk on teaching students how to grow food in schools.

Film was a rather enjoyable subject to teach but I became fed up with the administration at the schools I worked at, which is why I moved into technology. If my boss at the technology company refuse to hire me back I would only teach again if I got a well paying offer to teach German.

I actually met Alison at my last teaching job before switching to tech and at the end of the year they asked if anyone would teach in another language. I offered that I could teach German but they wanted someone who could teach in Spanish. I would much rather keep working in technology but if I can't get hired back I would consider it. Otherwise I would get a graduate degree in neuropsychology and be a neuropsychologist for people with brain injuries.

I asked Alison over a text and she finally told me why we broke up. She said it was because we are emotionally different and because the fact that I have a brain injury made it to difficult. I knew my brain injury had something to do with it and honestly I don't even really know what she really meant by saying that we are emotionally different. What constitutes an emotional difference? It's ridiculous to think that I had wanted to marry this woman. Well you can't always get what you want but if you try sometimes you just might find that you get what you need. In that case I needed to be broken up with.

I feel like I deserved to be told why but she chose to dump me. I have no idea why she waited so long to finally tell me. I suppose it's normal for a break up to be complex.

But what is truly pathetic is that I wanted to be with this woman for the rest of my life. I was even thinking that I might have children with her. Well it appears that my life's plans were foiled. There are no guarantees to get what you want but I do believe that you get what you deserve although I am uncertain as to how exactly I deserved to have my heart stepped on in this scenario but it happened anyway.

I suppose the takeaway from this sad story is that I am meant to end up with someone else. The only thing that still baffles me is why did she have to wait so long to tell me the reason that she chose to leave me? As I already stated at least now I know that it gave me some closure. Being in love with someone you hope to marry is definitely intoxicating. Love seems to intricate and complex to yield the results that you may want. Thank you universe for the perplexing situation I got myself into with Alison.

I asked my neuropsychologist at Craig if he would fill out a survey and be in this book but he refused because he said he is too busy. Personally I think it would be really good if I worked with patients who have a brain injury because I'd be relatable because I also have a brain injury.

I have looked at universities that offer degrees in neuropsychology and the university I got my undergraduate degree at does. Although I sustained a rather

unfortunate injury I realize that there are still numerous pathways open to me, Life may be short as people often say but there is a myriad of opportunities to be had. I think it would be great to help out people who have a brain injury like I do. It seems as if there might be too many pathways that I can travel along. Life is complex, therefore the more intricate my life's path, the more balance with the universe I will have. My neuropsychologist has helped to inspire me. Aside from that I have chosen to form a nonprofit that collects donations for victims with traumatic brain injuries and teaches them web design. It is called We Just Keep On Swimming

Despite my injury I have a multitude of opportunities. It's good to look at things like that because I should appreciate life more since I almost died. With that in mind I should consider myself lucky because I didn't die. Life is precious. Philosophically the only guarantee in life I see is that you will die. There is only so much that we will get to do and experience so I will do my best to enjoy it. The desire to enjoy might have been what caused me to get injured mountain biking though. As much as I wish that I hadn't have injured my brain that day I believe that it must have happened for a reason. Life is like a gorgeous flower. It is beautiful but must be taken care of or it will die.

Life is also like a flower because it is complex. But to me it does seem that life can be sustained. One day we are destined to perish so we should probably try to make the most of our lives. Life is like a mathematical equation. There can be a number of variables but the equation terminates at some point. So do our lives.

While I am lucky to have survived my accident I am also disappointed that Things I was once very good at I feel like abandoning because I do not know if it's worth the effort to relearn how. At the very least I guess I can say I am lucky I didn't lose the ability to write because if I had then you wouldn't be reading this novel that I wrote.

It appears that there are a number of things the average person without a brain injury should be thankful for. I mean really because there are a number of things that I used to do every day that I am now unable to do. I am of course lucky thay I survived my accident.

In fact I am really luck because of the EMT riding right behind me on the trail where I crashed because I was choking on my own blood and had to be intubated

Memory is a blessing often taken for granted by most. So three cheers to being able to remember. Just kidding. I'm not allowed to drink because it could hinder my recovery. Alcohol is not good for your brain regardless if you have a brain injury or not. Yes, but as stated above the day I can drink again will come and you can count on the fact I sure will choose to imbibe.