

Just Keep Swimming

a story of love, life, and death

by Matthew Brignola

Death:

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 to 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 all storms stop and life goes on. Just 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.

Just keep swimming is the story of how I am recovering from a brain injury. 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.

Tread water the story of how I keep swimming even though I have a brain injury.

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 left me. The fear of losing her before had caused me to be suicidal. So the firm happened to be recently confirmed. This woman I love and who said she had loved me broke things off recently. Either because of my brain injury and the effects it has had on my memory or because she didn't really explain at first she did not tell me 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.

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, and 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-stand 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.

Jade 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 Jade 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. This 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.

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 also admires 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 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 cunt 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, perhaps 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 probably 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. 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 happened, As I was riding the train the light went out briefly 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

Standing on a ledge at the Bierpinsel in Berlin, I was attempting to build up the courage to leap off. The Bierpinsel is translated into English as Beer Brush. It is a colorful, tree-shaped tower in one of the southern neighborhoods of Berlin, Steglitz. I had sought this tower out while trying to find a high enough structure to ensure death upon arrival. Standing atop this tower would mark one of the lowest points of my existence, but luckily I was unable to find the courage to leap off of it. This tower will forever be burned into my consciousness. I was able to, a month or so before standing atop it, to make a photograph of the structure. The architecture of this building still amazes me and the memory it left burnt into my mind is one that mirrors the process of light being captured by a photographic apparatus.

Time stood more than still atop the tower. Even now I am uncertain as to how long I spent up there. I was completely lost in the maze of my mind. I was running through still images of memories I had experienced, while imagining a future where I no longer existed. Truthfully, in this state of mind I existed as though I had never existed but something was quietly calling me back to reality. I had been standing on this tower watching as cars passed by occasionally on the street below. This place was definitely high enough. It was definitely lonely enough. There were two ways down from the Bierpinsel. I chose to go down the steps from which I had originally climbed up the structure.

I continued on back to the train station, finally passing by other humans, able to calm myself and regain a bit of my sanity, which had almost been completely lost. The train station really grounded me. I returned home to the host family I had been staying with. I reported back to my host brother who had been wondering where I was and if I was ok. I managed to give him a good enough answer to leave me to

retire for the night. The night that I left for the Bierpinsel, I had been eating dinner with my host family. I'm not sure exactly what transpired, but suddenly I was upset at the dinner table. I got up and abruptly left. I was walking around the neighborhood we lived in, next to the S-Bahn, was train station, called Mexicoplatz. I walked to Schlachtensee, a lake not too far from the apartment we lived in. 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. 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 thoughts 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 die. I.e. 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 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 just 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.

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 I 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.

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 was still needing 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 has to say in regards to my recovery.

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 me 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 note, 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.

Name some of my struggles.

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 distractability. 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 you 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 - cliché 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.

One my favorite therapist was Kara. She is absolutely. 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 about my recovery.

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!

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.

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. 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. As well as losing my ability to shuffle I have lost the ability to play guitar and I understand that my ability could come 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 but I am too lazy to finish an entire track.

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 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.

I feel like I deserved to be told why but she chose to dump me. I have no idea waited so long to finally tell me. A 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.

Another one of my wonderful therapists was my speech therapist Debra. Here is here interview responses:

A chose to become a therapist because I was always fascinated with the helping profession. I originally wanted to teach deaf/hearing impaired children; however, my speech internship was at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and I was assigned to the brain injury unit. The rest is history.

We met on your first day here at Craig. Your memory was not the best and it was difficult for you to stay focused. I could tell you were scared. I wanted the environment to stay quiet and non-stimulating, because your brain still needed to heal. It is difficult to heal the brain when so much noise etc. is stimulating the recently injured brain.

What is my favorite memory of you? The laughter, the smile, the jokes, and watching how much your family cared about you. They love you so much. Your mother is amazing. I want to adopt her.

Struggles: Patience that the healing of the brain takes a long time. I don't think you had patience before J.

Strengths: Family, Kindness, Willing to work hard, never giving up, ability to ask questions, progressing every single day.

Need more help with: Patience, trusting your therapists to do the right thing, speed of processing information, and using strategies for memory and problem solving.

What am I most proud of?

EVERYTHING about you. You work hard, you care about others, your progress while here, that you walked out of here!! Your compassion, improvements in memory, SMILE!

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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.

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 that I survived my accident.

In fact I am really lucky 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. 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.

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. One 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 there 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 led to me being suicidal. I guess because I felt partly responsible for her accident, and that I could have 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.

Life:

Take pride in the little pleasures, every last one. What Id do for one beer right now. But the more of my time and effort I dedicate to therapy I'll soon be able to. So have a beer on me and toast to loving your brain. But don't forget that drinking alcohol is bad for your brain.

Reality is far more unforgiving than it could be. “Cheers or “Prost” as they say in Germany.

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.

Hello, how have you been, especially amidst this pandemic? Honestly I miss you were so helpful and I can only imagine that you still are, but probably with someone else. I am sending you this because I am writing a book, documenting my recovery and part I want to include Is a profile for the different therapists who have helped me during my recovery. So with that being said I have some questions. I’d prefer if you emailed me your responses but if you’d prefer to write them by hand let me know and I’ll send you my address.

What is your name (first and last?

How did we meet?

What are/were some of my struggles?

What is the best memory you have of us?

How would you choose to describe me?

What inspired you to become a therapist?

What is the hardest part of your job?

Suicide has been on my mind a number of times. That being said I urge you to celebrate life. i.e. Just keep swimming. The most recent time I was suicidal My ex girlfriend said she was going to move to Portland and my plan was to finish therapy and ask her to marry me.. The thought of her being so far away made me want to kill myself. Ironically she broke up with me just a few weeks ago.

Love has a way of guiding me. On that note One of my ex girlfriends from middle school is one of my best friends and has come to visit me a couple times during my recovery.

Yes love: beautiful and apparently hard to maintain. Yes some of you may agree. But really for how beautiful it is it can be quite crippling when it is lost. Right now I am searching but even on a couple dating apps I’ve downloaded I’ve received no response.

Love, what I would give to hold another woman's hand or for a kiss on the cheek. I've been in love with some truly beautiful people but apparently love fades, as a nice pair of denim jeans does.

I'm confident with time and with my recovery I will find another woman to love. Yes, love hurts, love stinks, and all that jazz but if I just keep swimming this is a vast ocean and there are plenty of fish in the sea.

Mystery woman ,when I find you I'll cook you dinner and take you out to go hiking. Yes hiking, another thing I look forward to doing again. Take a moment and relish the multitude of opportunities you have as a non-brain injured person. Unless you are to which I'd like to say just keep swimming and hopefully one day you'll be close to being back to the way you used to be.

Finding solace comes at the price of surrounding oneself with the people one loves. Give praise to those you love and more to those who love you back. On this mystical journey I believe it's better to not walk alone.

But yes luckily I've stopped to pay tribute to love, although my life is clouded with darkness. Yes it's time to return to discussing the times I was suicidal. Take a moment to be thankful for your life before I move on.

So while on the topic of love I'll bring up another failed attempt with another woman who I planned to marry. Her name is Galia or Galina. She is Bulgarian. How she caught my interest was that at the time I was a host on Couchsurfing. Couchsurfing is an online platform where travelers can ask for a place to sleep while on their journey.

Galia stayed at my house and I was interested because She is from Bulgaria and my mother's father who I never met because he died in 1991 from breast cancer; I was born in 1992, and he was also from Bulgaria and I had hoped to find any living relatives there. Alas I couldn't find any.

Galia's trip was soon to end because her visa was expiring. I had offered to move to Bulgaria with her. I went to visit, got offered a job teaching English but I was unable to procure a visa. So then shortly after that we broke up.

Before hr and I broke up I wanted to move to Bulgaria to marry her. I flew out their and even got offered a job to teach English. The only problem was that I couldn't procure a visa so I had to go back to the United States. Galia broke up with me because of the distance which is understandable I found out that she is dating a man that she is going to marry. I am happy for her but is a bit of a let down because I had hoped to marry her as well.

I spoke with her recently and she told me she is currently with a partner and they are about to get married. I am happy for her but there is still a little part of me that is sad; why couldn't it be me? Well so it goes I guess but if I just keep swimming I'll find one I end up with. Or at least I can hope that I do.

I am apparently particularly attracted to Eastern European women. There was an attractive therapist from the Ukraine who worked at Craig who would flirt with me but regrettably I was dating Alison at the time so I didn't ask her out. I spoke with Dr. Berry about my troubles with Alison and told him I was attracted to someone that worked at Craig but he advised me not to date anyone that worked at Craig. It didn't really matter because I haven't seen her again anyways. She worked on the fourth floor of Craig while all of my therapies were on the First and third floors.

It really seems as though romance can occur between two people even if they are extremely far apart and come from different nations. As the saying goes, Distance only makes the heart grow fonder. I have an affinity to Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe is in my blood. Bulgaria is particularly special to me,

My interest in Bulgaria was spurred by the fact that my maternal grandfather was from there. Sadly, I never met him because he died in 1991 and I was born in 1992. The cause of his death was rather unfortunate. He died from metastasizing breast cancer. So I made it a goal of mine to go to Bulgaria and find living relatives. Alas, I was unable to find any living relatives, because there are no things like registries in Bulgaria.

I guess my interest also made me fancy Bulgarian women. After I broke up with Galia I dated another Bulgarian woman named Nadelina. The irony is that the two Bulgarians knew one another and were in the United States at the same time but did not get along very well. Nadelina said to me that she would like to come back and see me again and I would like to see her as well. It's fun to think that maybe I had a fetish with Eastern European women but really I think it just was because I was fascinated with Bulgaria because my grandfather who died before I was born was from Bulgaria and he died the year before I was born. I would like to go to Bulgaria again and find any relatives who may be out there.

I bet I have dated more eastern European women than most American men my age know. I broke up with one of the women and one broke up with me. I guess that is the logical way an international romance story might end.

I even tried to move to a different country to marry one of my Bulgarian lovers. That's probably unlikely that you know many twenty-seven year old males who have tried to do the same thing as me. I suppose it's only natural that every love story should have an ending. I have to say that I'm a lover and not a fighter.

The hunt for members of my family was a valiant one and involved a steamy, international romance. The hunt is not over. Once I am fully recovered I truly intend to find a living relative in Bulgaria. Love, yes it is complicated and at times it hurts, but no love I have ever encountered has even compared to the love I share with my family. And with that, for all I know I may create and raise my own family.

If that happens to be the case I will take my children to Bulgaria, the land of their forefathers and find for them a living relative. But I can only hope that I have not lost my grip on the Bulgarian language. A language I must admit, That is complex, but is remarkably beautiful in its written form.

So I may have never met my maternal grandfather, but a boyfriend of my grandmother's felt dear like a real grandfather to me. Sadly I had to watch him die because he became terminally ill with pancreatic cancer. He was a great man and he and I really connected. He was particularly fond of cinema and so was I, hence the film degree. He was particularly fond of westerns, specifically John Wayne films. And although I dislike John Wayne, We got along and watched many a film together, before he died.

So familial love may be one of the most powerful kinds of love, or at least as much as I can conceive. We owe simply too much gratitude to those we call family. And even though I loathe speaking with my father, my mother continues to amaze me and I am rather fortunate to have her in my life.

Familial love is a love that I am grateful for and has protected me even during the darkest times in my past. If I didn't have my family, I probably would have already taken my life with my own hand and you, humble reader, wouldn't have had the opportunity to read the book that's in front of you.

What is remarkable is that I thought I would have to wait several months longer to find a new lover, but my Friend Carly was online and she posted a beautiful picture of her self, which I thought was rather attractive. I commented and she responded and then we talked. She indulged in me how she had been attracted to me for a while and then I shared that I was attracted to her as well. She asked if she could come to where I'm staying in Colorado Springs, she lives in Denver but my parents declined because the governor of Colorado mandated a stay at home order, barring people from seeing others who are not direct relatives. Also Carly is unsure if she wants to date me because she has not seen me in over a year and she has been sleeping with someone else. I apparently have had sex with her as well but due to my injury I couldn't remember that but she told me over the phone.

So the good news is that I am no longer searching for someone new because I have established a mutual connection, but I must just wait until this virus blows over, to which there is no definitive time frame. So although I am elated I am also

disappointed because I am impatient. So there it is. The search for another woman is not fully concluded yet, thanks be to Covid-19.

Attraction is the key element of a romantic relationship. "I think you look good. Let's get married." As has been said before, there are laws of attraction. Love is a boat in an ocean of feelings. Climb aboard. I continue to ride the boat even though I have been cast overboard numerous times. Why are humans so prone to fall in romantic love if it often ends painfully? You would think I would stop trying to fall in love if I have considered taking my life because of it before. My heart desires love, asks for it, and I listen.

You do not normally choose when to fall in love with someone else. It just happens. Love is tricky like that. I believe that it is highly unlikely that you choose to fall in love. It just happens to you, regardless of whether you want to or not. Let it happen I suppose. Does anyone avoid romantic love? I hope not, although I suspect that the idea of romantic love does frighten some people. I believe it is far more likely that most people are afraid to lose romantic love, rather than to fall in it.

Attraction is a much larger concept than sexual attraction. Attraction is the key element of a romantic relationship. "I think you look good. Let's get married." As has been said before, there are laws of attraction. Love is a boat in an ocean of feelings. Climb aboard. I continue to ride the boat even though I have been cast overboard numerous times. Why are humans so prone to fall in romantic love if it often ends painfully? You would think I would stop trying to fall in love if I have considered taking my life because of it before. My heart desires love, asks for it, and I listen. Do we, humans, deserve to have romantic love? I think it is not a question of whether we deserve it or not. Instead love is earned more often and not deserved.

The human heart is a powerful organ when you are speaking physically, but is a far more powerful when you are speaking of the human heart in the emotional sense. With great power comes great responsibility. I have been carelessly in love before. I do not recommend it. Love might be so powerful that it dumbs down your other sensibilities. It has certainly dumbed down mine. Love has made me suicidal. That means that I was blind to the fact that others love me as well in a nonromantic way.

I love you. You love me. We're a happy family. Love is so important to human society that there are even rhymes such as that written for children about it. Creating rhymes for children, makes love seem like it is quite simple. It is simply not simple. I know ironic chose of words there. But love is incredible but it is complex. It can be painful.

I wish that all the times I have been burned by love were much simpler. But that is the issue with complexity. Learn to love. Try to laugh. Be not afraid. But when I fall in love I become afraid. I fear that I will lose it. Love is so enjoyable though. Why

does it make me afraid at times then? That reality I must face demonstrates to me that it is reasonable and understandable why so many people and philosophers have grappled with the question of “why do we fall in love anyway?” You live you die. You lose love, you cry. Love is not for the faint of heart. Love can be gutturally painful. Ouch. Love stings. Why do we not have a love stings cream. That could make a want to be business man really, really rich. Maybe the closest think to an ointment for love is going to therapy.

With this new love interest and with the fear of catching the virus; my search for love is not quite over yet, although this is a rather promising start and a rather fortunate turn of events, all things considered. Yes, if love were floating in the ocean, it appears that right now, it has drifted far out to sea, and all due to this dangerous and timely virus.

Amongst you life’s path you fall in love with some very interesting people. One of the most interesting was my ex-girlfriend Jade. I met her in Denver because we went to college at the same location. She was born and raised in Crestone Colorado, which is a rather small, an eccentric town. There is actually a rather weird rumor circling around the town that Crestone is very close to a portal that was created by aliens. On top of that it’s rather weird to juxtapose a cultish mountain town Where their teenage children were known to take lsd with a Buddhist monastery.

Yes jade and I were in love and I would visit her in what I consider a hippie community. Love is wonderful and enchanting but I suppose that you encounter strange things along the journey of being in love. So in the vein of the weir folks of Crestone I was likely in the presence of extraterrestrials. I know most people have their strange friends who believe in aliens but the people of Crestone believe that they live below an alien portal. I think it’s safe to say that it seldom gets weirder than that.

I encourage you to think of a weirder relationship that you have been in. Well honestly Jade was pretty normal and that’s why she went to college in Denver; to escape the weirdness. Since I’m on this weird account of love I’ll transition to a weird fact. I suppose this has to do with my brain injury but I actually cannot remember a single instance of why an ex girlfriend has left me. Most men my age would probably consider not being able to remember their breakups as a blessing. So in that vein apparently I’m blessed to have a brain injury.

The sooner a cure is found the sooner things will return back to their original order, but the unfortunate truth is that there is at this point, no accurate way of predicting when that will be. I am so joyful it feels as though life has begun anew, but feelings are incapable of curing viruses, sadly.

This is a rather difficult and turbulent time for us humans and there is no definitive say when the tides will turn. There will hopefully be time, soon that is, which I can lay a tender kiss upon the lips of my new love interest. but it appears that during this viral outbreak, that father time appears to be tired.

“well for all our sake old man, wake up. Speed things up and do us humans all an immense favor right now. I mean it’s the least you owe us since we imagined you into existence.

Yes take a quick moment to reflect on those you love or have loved. They may have been family member or ex-lovers. But while we can lose lovers I’ll say it again, just keep swimming, I promise you it will get better.

At this current moment while writing this I am alone but I am optimistic enough to assume I won’t die that way. We are all travelers on this long and twisted journey. All I can hope to offer is the slightest bit of guidance. I intend to provide help not be a sage or a guru.

What is one of the defining features that set us apart from organisms? I’d say that one of them is certainly our capacity to love and to be loved; be it family or be it a romantic partner, we can all think of someone we love or has loved us. Periodically we may find ourselves alone but there are over seven billion other people on this planet. I’d say that statistically the odds are you won’t be alone forever. Hey take a moment to contact an old friend and let him or her know you love him or her. All we need is love, or so the song by the Beatles goes. So yes, despite all their psychedelic adventures, the hippies of the sixties got one thing right; love. It may have been a tumultuous time in history but look what came from it, wonderful music, needlepoint acid, great vehicles, movies and literature.

Some days are hard others, are easy and beautiful. Take pride in the beauty of nature, or in the beautiful chirping of birds in the morning. As I’ve told a friend who was having a terrified episode on acid, “what do you know will happen tomorrow. “?The sun will rise.”

And let me ask you, “what do we know will happen, tomorrow morning? Yes, the sun will rise and birds will chirp, immune to all our sorrow and struggles. The waters are deep but they are filled with life, even the bottom feeders deserve recognition. You can either sink or you can, fill in the blank. Life and love seem to always find a way.

I take pride in the beauty we’re graced with, despite the terrible thoughts I’ve had in my darkest moments.

Standing on a ledge at the Bierpinsel in Berlin, I was attempting to build up the courage to leap off. The Bierpinsel is translated into English as Beer Brush. It is

a colorful, tree-shaped tower in one of the southern neighborhoods of Berlin, Steglitz. I had sought this tower out while trying to find a high enough structure to ensure death upon arrival. Standing atop this tower would mark one of the lowest points of my existence, but luckily I was unable to find the courage to leap off of it. This tower will forever be burned into my conscious. I was able to, a month or so before standing atop it, to make a photograph of the structure. The architecture of this building still amazes me and the memory it left burnt into my mind is one that mirrors the process of light being captured by a photographic apparatus.

Time stood more than still atop the tower. Even now I am uncertain as to how long I spent up there. I was completely lost in the maze of my mind. I was running through still images of memories I had experienced, while imagining a future where I no longer existed. Truthfully, in this state of mind I was existing as though I had never existed but something was quietly calling me back to reality. I had been standing on this tower watching as cars passed by occasionally on the street below. This place was definitely high enough. It was definitely lonely enough. There were two ways down from the Bierpinsel. I chose to go down the steps from which I had originally climbed up the structure.

I continued on back to the train station, finally passing by other humans, able to calm myself and regain a bit of my sanity, which had almost been completely lost. The train station really grounded me. I returned home to the host family I had been staying with. I reported back to my host brother who had been wondering where I was and if I was ok. I managed to give him a good enough answer to leave me to retire for the night.

The night that I left for the Bierpinsel, I had been eating dinner with my host family. I'm not sure exactly what transpired, but suddenly I was upset at the dinner table. I got up and abruptly left. I was walking around the neighborhood we lived in, next to the S-Bahn station Mexicoplatz. I walked to Schlachtensee, a lake not too far from the apartment we lived in. 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. 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. 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 thoughts 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.

Now it seems appropriate to discuss the details of my injury. It happened this year, in September of 2020. I had met a friend, Diego. At a bar and coffee shop named St.Marks He would go there to study, he was an engineering student. and for a while I was studying too. I was studying for as well. I was studying for a technology certification. I had been a teacher before that and I was fed up with public education administrations.

Diego is an avid mountain biker and so he wanted to go mountain biking with me. We decided to go to some trails on a skiing mountain. Apparently we were going pretty fast. The trail I got injured on was notorious for having people injured on it. I went up a jump, missed the landing, and crashed on the left side of my body. The fall broke my arm. It's lucky I was wearing body armor because when I first got there I rented the armor and took it off because it was too uncomfortable to me. Diego noticed and told me to put it back on.

If it wasn't for Diego looking out for me I would surely be dead. The helmet luckily didn't break but because my face hit the ground so hard I almost choked on my own blood. I was particularly lucky because a man riding the trail behind me was an EMT and he saw me choking to death so he intubated me.

I probably will never go mountain biking again. Well I should really intend to never go mountain biking again because if I had another large crash I would probably die. So even though mountain biking is an active sport that you do out in nature I will need to consider it of limits for the rest of my life.

It's kind of ironic that I skateboarded for 14 years but got my brain injury from mountain biking. When I was getting therapy at Craig I actually met a couple people who had sustained brain injuries from skateboarding.

So I guess since I used to be such a risk taker when it came to physical fitness maybe I needed to have my brain injured to make me be more cautious. It surprises me that I hadn't sustained a brain injury a lot sooner from having skateboarded for so long. I have had numerous falls from skateboarding but none were nowhere near as devastating as the mountain biking crash that led to me sustaining a brain injury.

I mean I can really only recall two horrible injuries I sustained from skateboarding. One involved my rolling over my left hand and tearing out two of my fingernails. The other terrible one happened in my mother's driveway. I was jumping over other skateboards, landed on the rear edge of the board causing it to pop up into my groin. I went inside because the pain was so bad. I stayed inside for about five minutes and pulled my knees up until the pain subsided. I got up and decided to go back out in the driveway to continue skating. I got back outside and realized there was something more wrong. I put my hand down my pants and withdrew it. I saw blood on my fingers. It turned out I needed thirteen stitches in my scrotum. So all things considered I could have sustained my brain injury from skateboarding but I did not.

As it turns out I got lucky in one sense. Having a brain injury, you might think an employer wouldn't want to hire I got a job at App Tier, and the owner, my boss, had a cousin who also has a brain injury, so in other words he understands my plight.

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Other than being injured. The other misfortune is that currently Craig, where I go for therapy, is shut down to prevent the spread of Corona. Which all things considered could severely harm me because I have asthma.

So one side of the isle I have an extreme and debilitating injury and on the other there is a global pandemic, which if I were infected could kill me. Sink or swim. In this case I'd rather choose to swim.

One of the crazy things was That I met Alison from being a teacher. The year I asked her out we were both working at the same school. I was a teacher and she was a school-based therapist.

Now she maintains a private practice, for which, I designed her business cards. Yeah because I'm a rather good at graphic design and I cared about her. Yes, so she dumped me and I, the one with brain injury, or a good reason to forget things, forgot why she did. So despite her ability to deal with those with trauma, she needed space from me, the one with a traumatic brain injury. Hopefully you can appreciate the irony of that one.

Some lovers leave you and some it seems you will marry. This was a case of the former. Despite how much I cared for her, fixed her trunk on her car, and despite how much her dog loves me, she just needs some space and needs to take time before she can tell the forgetful one why she left again. I hope she reads this book and more clearly understand the pain she caused me.

Yet I am confident this virus will go away and that I will fully recover. In the mean time while Craig is closed I mostly play games. A card game called Skipbo, or Scrabble.

There are other hobbies, which I tried to pick up but have been too hard. The main one is the ability to play the electric guitar. I know what to do, I played for 7 years, but my fingers won't cooperate. It's likely that because in my accident I broke my left arm.

Yes I even once lived in a house where we jammed because my roommate had a drum kit, the other a bass, me a guitar, and we bought some microphones. Ah yes the good old days. My roommate with the drums had a girlfriend that I once made out with, but she wouldn't date me. Ah thee irony.

The other skill I had that has become extremely difficult is making electronic music. My artist name is Tobo and I use Ableton to produce/edit/mix. Luckily I didn't lose the ability to write. I used to write poetry, which I actually took poetry classes in college. It was rather an odd progression. I went from poetry, to teaching and then tech support.

Speaking of teaching I am reminded of a teacher that I had in high school. She was named Mrs. Waldo and we connected on movies in particular. We even once went to see a movie in the theatres together. Towards the end of the year she told me that she loved me. She had been having troubles with her husband. I didn't know what to think. That was in essence unsettling for me especially because I had a girlfriend at that time.

Life is of course a journey and there are many paths to take along the way. For me the path I am currently on is recovery. Hopefully one-day marriage, but I possess not the all seeing eye. Yes this is indeed a long and tumultuous journey. But one the guarantee is I'll reach the end of the path.

Likely I'll meet many other travelers along the way and if I get what I want I'll meet a beautiful and strong woman.

There could b gold at the end of the rainbow or a beautiful lass with open arms. What would you choose? Love or wealth? Yes I've had my fair share of heartbreaks, some so crippling they invigorated the demon who tells me to kill myself.

But knowing me and considering this last heartbreak I'd do it all over again. Alison if you ever read this please hear me out, I still love you. It will take a very long time until this love flame burns out. I love you and your cute little pup named Edna. And she loves me too. Mean for Christ's sake she loves me too. That wee pup loved to stand over me and nibble my nose. It was a strange but cute phenomenon. Oh what I would give to kiss Alison and to have Edna nibble my nose.

So strangely enough, even though this woman broke up with me the drama continues to ensue. She broke up with me but I forgot th reason she used for why and so I asked her. To me that is rather ironic because there isn't more space from someone you're in a relationship with than breaking up with him or her.

It brings up the question, space from what? You already chose to separate from the man who had told you he wanted to take your hand in marriage. I mean really if breaking up didn't give her enough space then why not go back to school and become an astronaut? But that would be too much work. She'd rather be a friend at a distance.

Yes, this brings up the baffling question of why the space? She already broke up with me and I forgot why. So do the right thing a therapist should do, she is one ironically, and remind me. What is really going on? I bet even Aristotle couldn't find a reason for that.

So on one hand I'm thinking I love her and I can't be mean to her and on the other I am yelling in my head all the expletives known to mankind. So instead I hold back because I feel it is my duty to be kind, calm, and under standing.

At some point I hope she reads this and understands more clearly the anguish I am in.

Yes it's good to find the beauty in all. It may be a nose nibble or a gorgeous woman, but god dam is it beautiful. Take a moment now to reflect on any cute experiences you've had with an animal. Was it worth it? I hope you're saying yes.

There are more opportunities for love that will come but how about a guarantee for a cute and gentle nose nibble? I'll just have to see but I bet the odds are against me. One day I'll find a new lover and God I hope she has a cute dog. Or worst case I'll buy her one.

Right now I'm supposed to focus on recovering, so why did I download three dating apps. Oh yes because I'm a lover I almost forgot. Brain injury or no brain injury I promise I will live to love again.

It's difficult to choose what to prioritize sometimes. In my case right no it's the thought and pursuit of love. Ah yes maybe I'm too easily distracted. As Dr. Barry told me I should focus on getting better. But hey Dr. Barry you're the lucky one, you're already married.

Sadly I thought I knew the next woman I'd be with and I already dated her but apparently she's currently in a relationship. Carry on, or as I now say, "just keep swimming". It will take more than a mountain bike crash to keep me from the pursuit of love.

I feel as if I'm caught in a torrential storm. I recently lost the love of my life and my brain is injured. Yes it's hard to see the positive in that. But If I just keep swimming I'll eventually escape this abysmal storm. Yes despite my gloomy and suicidal past I'll choose too err on the side of positivity.

The virus will be cured, I'll find another lover and my injury will one day be fully healed. Yes I am in the phase where I must wait, or as my mantra goes, "just keep swimming, or at the very least tread water. Sure I could kill myself and finally end this all but There are those who love me. My sister, my mom, my stepdad and my Grandma. Take pride in those who love you. In fact why not give a loved one a call and wish him or her a beautiful day.

One of the most amazing thins I have witnessed due to this recovery is how such amazingly wonderful people from all walks of life work at Craig. And Craig

While on the topic of love it'd be good to bring up some recent and relevant cases. Currently I am single, which could have probably been inferred from what has already been discussed. Just a couple weeks ago, in my time of course, I hung out with an exgirlfriend of mine and I told her I still like her. Sadly for me she is currently dating another man. We had a good relationship at first but then we

started fighting too often and I took it upon my self to break up. Surprisingly even my most recent ex with the nose nibbler met her because she plays Gamelan, an Indonesian type of ceremonial music.

So basically I am left to wonder, do I wait until her and her boyfriend cut it off or do I hope that despite my injury and due to the lack of social interactions because of the Corona virus will there be no one new I can ask out. So the dilemma ensues: be alone and wait or abandon the notion of romance altogether? Well since I have to pick I guess I'll wait. But due to my impatience this may be slightly difficult.

Well as the song goes, "love hurts. Love stinks." And at this very moment I feel as though I agree. The only counter point to that I can derive is familial love. In my case I am blessed with my mother, my stepfather and my sister and her husband. My father on the other hand I've stopped talking to him because he tried to take me to court. He thought I needed an attorney and ironically he picked my previous employer who goofed up and accidentally filed a court summons. Yes Joe I've got to admit while you may have called me a petulant 13 year old maybe you should go back to law school and pass the bar again. The only nice thing I'll say about Joe is he has a cute poodle. Which makes me wonder, The lawyer my mother hired to represent me also had a poodle. Is there something about poodles that attracts lawyers?

Interestingly, outside of disliking my father my sister is also getting a new degree in college to help her become a speech therapist. Ironically, even though I've taken speech therapy as a therapy used in my recovery, it is my least favorite therapy. And surprisingly although Craig is closed because of the Corona virus, my speech therapist still sends me homework to do, via email. So my sister tries to explain to me what speech is about, but I just can't buy it.

One of the reasons I dislike it so much is I find it difficult to observe why it is necessary in my recovery. One example being my therapist sends me homework but frankly it is far too easy. For example one thing she recommended was to do puzzles on a cereal box; the one I did most recently was a maze. So I just haven't figured exactly how it is aiding in my recovery, so my apologies if you're a speech therapist and find this offensive, but quite frankly it is the least helpful therapy in my opinion. Yes, so my sister is studying how to become a therapist and just like I was, before this she was a public school teacher. I guess education is in my blood, because my stepfather is the assistant principal of a middle school and my mother is a school psychologist. The only thing that would make me go back to teaching is if I was offered a decent salary to instruct German classes. At the last school I taught at I asked if they needed a German teacher but they declined. One thing that is ironic is that due to my hatred of speech, I talked to Dr. Berry, my euro-psychiatrist, and he told my speech therapist, sherry; to make it harder, such as making me read a book. But she has not. She is apparently helping by sending me assignments via email but I have to admit, they have all been too easy. What I dislike the most about them is

they are simple and childish. One example being she said to do one of the puzzles on the back of a cereal box, which happened to be a maze. Alas I could have read a book but instead I did a small child's activity on a box of cereal.

I told Dr. Berry that I disliked Sherry's class because it was too easy so he told her to assign me a book to read. She did not and instead I'm going to recover better if I do the children's puzzles on the back of a box of cereal. I appreciate Dr. Berry for wanting to challenge me and I've got to say that now I'm not particularly fond of cereal boxes. I can vibe with their contents but I loath being told to do the children's puzzles on the boxes. I suppose I should be grateful for Sherry's hard work but I honestly believe that it's better fit for a mentally retarded individual. I believe Dr. Berry had a much more appropriate idea to make Sherry's assignments more challenging for me. I should be more understanding of speech therapists because my sister went back to college to become one. Just like me she became fed up with teaching and wanted to change careers. Even my sister, Amanda, tries to explain the importance of the work Sherry has given me but I just cannot buy it. I've told Amanda that I hope she could get a job at Craig to help out other people with brain injuries. Lucky for me I was not impaired mentally. I am still smart and witty but I do forget some things still pretty frequently. I suppose that is not too terrible because it is a common occurrence that people forget things fairly often.

I wanted to interview Dr. Berry to include in this book but he refused because he said he is often preoccupied. I suppose that is fair and reasonable. If I decide to go back to school to become a neuropsychologist I'm certain I would not have spare time either. Sadly I could not interview him because even when I was suicidal because of Alison He spoke with me and helped to give me a new perspective. That is what reason I really admire Dr. Berry. Not only is he a brilliant neuropsychologist but also he helped to convince me to stop being suicidal. I guess it would be normal to expect a psychologist to convince a person not to take his or her own life.

I think it is rather ironic that I almost died because of my accident but that I wanted to kill myself because I loved another person. I was lucky enough to have an EMT riding behind me when I sustained my injury but I was stupid enough to want to take my own life when a woman said that she wanted to move to another state. Honestly I find it a bit funny that I let someone else have that much psychological power over me. Although I suppose Alison knows a good deal about psychology because she had to study to become a therapist. Despite her psychological knowledge she still managed to handle leaving me poorly. That is why I want to find another woman to love and am confident that I can find one. Good things take time I suppose.

I am still lucky because I have a family that really loves me. I just do not have romantic love. But I prefer to be optimistic and believe that I will find new lover. Life is a long and winding pathway and I firmly believe I will meet another woman that I fall in love with along the way. There are no guarantees in life but I actually

believe that I am attractive enough to attract another woman that will fall in love with me. I mean attractive emotionally and not just physically although I do believe that I am handsome.

I think it is fair to believe that we all need someone to love us romantically and that we all need to learn how to love ourselves. I suppose one is easier to learn have than the other. And if I wasn't making that clear enough I believe it is easier to learn how to love yourself than find someone who will love you romantically. Romantic love is more of a gift than a guarantee. We all have flaws and make mistakes and I am certain that other people observe those facts about us and I know that I have flaws as well.

It is not fair nor is it fair to pass judgment on others. Nor do I believe that there is necessarily a spiritual entity that judges us. I am not trained enough in the practice of law to have a full understanding of judging someone.

You very well could have the same issues that you find someone else exhibiting. I understand that it is difficult to recognize your own misgivings but I believe that on a psychological level it is good to attempt to come face to face with them.

I really appreciate my family for helping me during my recovery. One thing that does irk me though is that my stepfather really like country music and I absolutely loathe country. When he would drive me to therapy sometimes he would play country through the car's stereo. I understand it is the most popular genre of music in America but I absolutely despise it. To each their own I suppose. Another way that my family has been helpful to me during my recovery was that when I was suicidal when I was dating Alison my sister and my brother-in-law talked with me and tried to ground me. I think that it is only natural for a family to look out for its members. Thinking about my family is what made kept me from not jumping off that bridge in Berlin. Without my love for my family I most likely would have committed suicide and you would not be reading this.

It is hard to imagine how hard it must have been for my family when I was first injured. Knowing that a brain injury is terrible from first hand experience I feel as though I would be devastated if I had children and the same thing happened to them. I appreciate their help so much. I mean it had to have been difficult for my family the day I was injured because I almost died.

I believe that family members need to take care of each other. That is particularly true when one member experiences a particularly devastating trauma. Without my family I would not be alive to tell this story I have not always gotten along with my family but they have always helped when I have been in trouble. My family did not have to take care of me after I sustained a brain injury but I am lucky that they did. I think that this would make an interesting thought experiment. What would you do if one of your closest family members had a traumatic brain injury? Hopefully you

would take them to a facility that offers restorative therapy. Family members should take care of one another.

That's another reason why I think it would be cool to be a neuropsychologist because then both my sister and I could work to help others recover from their brain injuries. I think that we would both make a dynamic duo and considering that I have a brain injury I could understand the struggles a patient is going through. Speaking of struggles I experienced a really weird thing after my sister talked me through some yoga pose to help me get better. I was sitting on the floor next to a sliding glass door and I saw the light reflecting off the door and it was hurting my eyes. So instead of shutting the curtain I thought the light was coming from an armchair. I assume that that weird mental lapse must have been a product of my brain injury but luckily I realized pretty quickly that it was not the chair and was just sunlight coming through the glass door.

I don't think a maze on a cereal box would have prevented that strange mental lapse from occurring. Maybe I am wrong though. Maybe cereal box designers are knowledgeable about what can help someone with a brain injury.

In essence those are the reasons I dislike speech therapy so much. Although I am rather proud of my sister moving on from teaching and moving into the therapy world, I still haven't quite understood how speech therapy actually helps me out during the extensive recovery process.

But damn, despite how much I despise speech therapy, I certainly have loved my therapist in general. Some of my favorite therapists have been my physical therapists. Physical therapy makes so much more sense to me and seems far more logical. Oh, Matt, your hips are tight, likely from a lack of use from previously having been in a wheelchair and confined before to a hospital bed. How about this? Do these stretches?

Stretching my tight and previously hospital bed confined body makes far more obvious sense to me than doing the maze on a cereal box. So for my sister's sake I'll give credit where credit is due and recognize that being a speech therapist is helpful, minus assigning cereal box work amidst a deadly and rampant virus outbreak.

With all that having been said, I am proud of my sister studying to become a speech therapist and hope she can procure a job at Craig. Despite my sister working her butt off to become a speech therapist, I still despise it. It is a certainly helpful profession, but in my case I believe the opposite. It's sad but true. Helpful things aren't always helpful in every instance. One example: you use toilet paper right? It's a helpful product. But is having your house toilet papered helpful? I think not.

So despite my educational background and education-oriented family I moved into technology, and to be quite honest, I am extremely glad. And with that, while I am

currently unable to work, my boss said I could return. He understands all too well, seeing that his cousin also has a brain injury. Apparently, it seems, that things happen for a reason. I mean seriously, what are the odds that the employer in my new career of choice would have a family member who also has a brain injury? Slim to none I think.

So yes due to the blunder that the poodle lover made, I have elected not to reach out to my father and wait until he reaches out to me. But alas he has not and well, like you've said father, a relationship is a two way street. Or maybe you've forgotten to do your part.

Families have their happy parts and their sad parts. One example of sad is I never met my maternal grandfather because He died of breast cancer. the year before I was born. And sadly my paternal grandfather is also dead. He died of lung cancer and given that I used to smoke I hope I avoid it.

Familial love is so wonderful and is also so necessary. Without it I wouldn't even be alive so with that when I am allowed to drink again I will toast to family. This brings up another question for me. Will I have the opportunity to create my own family? I guess at this moment I can only hope so. Yes I love my family so much. I can only imagine how difficult it probably has been for them given I have a traumatic brain injury and almost died because of it. The difficulty of caring for a child who sustained a brain injury is impossible for me to imagine. Hope as the years go on I can return the favor.

I care for my family so much I have even told them things the average person would have never told his or her family. One example is that I told my family that I have done meth, acid and a multitude of other drugs. So with that I have to say, never do meth. Like damn it feels good and makes you feel powerful but the comedown is god-awful.

One of the weirdest things that just happened to me and reminded me of my experiences on acid was I that a vision of god. I have also had this vision on acid. I see very round and rotund shapes in a modern, atmospheric light. These images of god are rather womanly, or so I believe because according to modern psychology circles and round shapes are feminine.

So with those visions it begs the question, is god a woman? I guess there is really only one way to find out and that is to wait until I die. Indeed it is a noble question and one that humankind has been unable to answer. Should we pray, should we meditate, and should we go to church? I frankly do not know nor will I pretend to.

Still, spite my visions I believe that god is not real, but as countless philosopher have proved, that is not yet possible to prove. An al loving and omnipotent creator sounds good on paper and for the time being that will remain the only place that god

exists. Yes I don't need a guru to show me the light. I will continue to scour the earth for answers without having a guru to guide me. I believe in love and that is really all I think that matters, god or no god. Yes, the idea of a loving and caring creator is nice but maybe that's just it, an idea. Yes there are many who may disagree but for those who choose to believe I hope you recognize it is a choice. Yes the age-old question is really just as old as time and maybe with that having been said, I am young. Yes rather than engage on a magical mystery tour, I'd rather eat and I don't need a god unless in two seconds he makes me a medium rare filet mignon and well the two seconds have passed and that was all the proof I needed so with that I think my belief is firmly confirmed. yes show me a substantial and irrefutable mathematical proof that demonstrates that god is real and I may change my mind, but to the depths of my mind I cannot find a reason for why it exists. And yes I say it and not he because for all we know god may be a woman. If my father reads this he will have much to say and I will have to turn away so that my ears are turned away so I can't hear his religious tirade.

One thing that is abominable I have found, due to research is because of my brain injury., is I have been sleeping terribly. Just the other night I went to bed at 8 and got up at nine, but didn't sleep one bit. Yes apparently it is not uncommon to be unable to sleep if one has a brain injury. I tried several things to see why, such as not drinking coffee for two days, using the bathroom right before bed, and staying up later. But alas, all my efforts failed. So one thing I recommend you do is be thankful for an unobstructed ability to sleep. And if you ability is obstructed, I wish you my condolences my brother, or sister.

Luckily I was able to talk to a doctor over the phone. We met on the phone because we couldn't meet in person due to the orders of the governor of Colorado to remain socially distant because of the Corona virus outbreak. The doctor luckily prescribed me medicine to help me sleep at night.

The medicine he prescribed is kind of funny to me. The medicine is tryptophan and it's what is in turkey. It is the reason why people take a nap after eating Thanksgiving dinner. So I couldn't sleep so I got prescribed turkey pills.

I used to not be able to drink coffee because it apparently it agitates the brain, which can be dangerous if you have a brain injury. I tried not drinking coffee ever since I was allowed to be allowed to drink coffee again but that didn't help either. The effects of coffee only last for about 4 hours so there's no way it could keep me up the entire night if I drink it at eight in the morning. My friend Sophia who had a brain injury said she just slept all the time until she got better. So according to that anecdote I should be able to sleep better but sadly I am not.

Before I had my accident I used to sleep in until noon or later but now I lie in bed until I think my parents will be wake so that I do not have to be by myself in the morning. I consider sleep a gift. It is a gift that was taken away from me.

Not being able to sleep with a brain injury does seem kind of weird. My one friend that I know that also had a brain injury said she just slept a lot. I tried a number of things such as not drinking coffee to no avail. So not only did I lose the woman I wanted to marry but I also lost the ability to sleep.

Sleeping all the way through the night is a thing that I imagine that most people actually take for granted. All not being able to sleep does is give me unnecessary time to think. So yes on a positive note I must admit that because of my brain injury I have more time to think than most people do.

Because I am troubled by sleep I hope that you will consider being able to sleep a blessing. That is if you regularly have no troubles sleeping. Sleep is a really beautiful thing and because of my condition I think it's extremely beautiful. There are small and simple things like the ability to regularly sleep through the night that I bet most people take for granted.

On that note I will say it's a good idea to be thankful for the small things such as the ability to sleep through the whole night. Sleeping peacefully through the night is not something that most people would be thankful for. There are plenty of things that I wasn't thankful for before I was injured but now that I am injured I'm more aware of the things I should be thankful for. One of those things is the fact that I am still alive because I almost choked to death on my own blood.

I suppose the truth is that a near death experience was necessary to make me truly grateful for little things such as sleeping through the whole night. On that note I would like you to take a moment to think of something small and seemingly insignificant that you are thankful for.

I am thankful for my parents because they have helped me throughout my recovery, which I can only imagine, must have been really hard on them. There are small things like family and the ability to sleep well that are probably all too often taken for granted.

One other, abysmal struggle I've been having is that sometimes when I eat, because of mucus, I have trouble swallowing my food and therefore choke. The only way I have found to help is to go to the toilet and gag myself until I can breathe fully without any issues.

Yes, it is a rather strange phenomenon and one I do not fully understand. For one thing, this mucous choking thing was occurring long before my accident. There were times I was eating barbeque at a restaurant and had to run to the bathroom to gag myself.

So sometimes the thing I believe I enjoy the most, attempts to suffocate me. So along this long and winding path to recovery I would suggest to keep swimming, but wait about 15 minutes, to let your food digest. easy and essential things can at times be difficult so if you have never had this happen, take a moment to relish in the fact that your eating is unimpaired.

Some things are hard and under peculiar circumstances they are even harder. I take immense pleasure in eating, so the choking mucus thing really, really sucks. So right now I feel like I am experiencing one of the worst things imaginable, but choking while eating I feel is almost worse.

And the truth is that this is a terrible injury that I would never wish on anyone, not even Hitler, but I would never wish the mucous thing on anyone else either because, god damn, food is too good to be choking on your own mucous. I prefer to enjoy the small things in life, unimpaired, but I guess I have more difficulty. simple and pleasurable things may become difficult, but I will just keep swimming and who knows, maybe one day the mucous thing may disappear, or at the very least I can count my lucky stars and hope so.

Another outcome of my injury, as far as my research and my own experience prove, is that I cannot sleep very well. I just started drinking coffee again recently, because before I was advised by doctors not to, and I thought maybe it could be the coffee, but I tried not drinking it for a couple days and that didn't help.

I looked it up online and found that this is not an uncommon or odd phenomenon. So luckily I have found it's still all right if I have coffee, but sadly I am incapable of getting a full night of sleep. Whereas before I would sleep in until noon, now I regretfully wake up around 12:00 am. Yes, so I recommend you take pride in your ability to sleep peacefully through the night because I simply cannot, and I envy you if you can. Hopefully one day I will be able to sleep normally but there really is not a sure fire way of knowing that. I have gotten up early in the morning and laid in bed until it seemed more likely that my mother and my stepfather might be awake. So if you do sleep normally, I am highly jealous and advise that you take a moment to be thankful because one tragic slip and fall in the shower and you could be sleeping as well as I has been.

Donald Trump was the president during my recovery and I despise him One week he was planning on having a rally in Colorado Springs, where I am currently staying, and we happened to spot Air force One above our house. So the plane was coming in to land, I was sitting in our car after returning home from therapy, so I stuck both my middle fingers up and hoped that at exactly that moment, he was looking out the cabin window and caught a glimpse of me giving him the bird. Although in real life I would never give him a bird because I doubt he would know how to keep it alive.

Some of you may love him, or may have loved him, but be honest the man is dumb and talks like a grumpy three year old. I mean seriously he sounds almost like he is mentally handicapped when he speaks. To hell with his hair. I mean who thinks it's a good and fashionable idea to rub Cheetos all over ones own head. Apparently he does, or at the very least he does. And with that I shall end my political rant.

Love is not the only thing I have lost while recovering from my injury, I also appear to have lost the ability to play guitar. I had been playing for seven years before my accident. So yes I understand that with practice I can get my skills back, but how much practice does it take to get all those years back. I know I could get it back but that is a huge time commitment. Honestly there is part of me that just wants to quit.

Quitting may be necessary but I have one example of quitting that may be good. As you may recall from my account of being suicidal in Germany, I mentioned that I smoked. So shortly before my accident I decided to start quitting and luckily since my accident I have not smoked since, although I from time to time still get cravings, but having no cigarettes, I do not have a way to fulfill them.

So despite the tragedy of having a severe and traumatic brain injury, I can at the very least pinpoint on positive thing that has been aided from having one. As much as I would like to write this injury off as being entirely bad at the very least I can say, well at least I no longer smoke cigarettes.

So with that I use as evidence to advise. Be grateful, because even severe trauma can help you out in unexpectedly positive ways. Because really, If I had a pack of light Blue Native American Spirits I would almost certainly smoke one down to the butt. On the back of your tragedy you may find a glimmer of hope. Without hope our souls are lost, so with That I'll take pride in having remained positive, despite the severity of my injury. Speaking of which I am proud to say I learned how to say I have a brain injury in German. Yes, using that as an example, small things can truly be pleasant.

One genius that I particularly enjoy his philosophical reasoning is Alan Watts. He is an unfortunately, dead philosopher. Let me take a moment to share this delightful quotation from him:

Everybody should do in their lifetime, sometime, two things. One is to consider death...to observe skulls and skeletons and to wonder what it will be like to go to sleep and never wake up-never. That is a most gloomy thing for contemplation; it's like manure. Just as manure fertilizes the plants and so on, so the contemplation of death and the acceptance of death is very highly generative of creating life. You'll get wonderful things out of that.

Yes that genius, really makes a valid point right there. Death is bitter reality that we will all face and in my darkest times I ventured so far as to bring it upon myself. So

yes contemplating death can be generative, but seeking it out does more harm than good. I'll mention one of the things that has kept me grounded when I've been depressed enough to question my own life: family. If I were to have been brave enough to take my own life I would have devastated my family.

Yes, for multiple reasons I have my mother to thank for my existence. Obviously for having given birth to me, but also for being so kind and caring. For one thing, she is a school psychologist and has a certification in behavioral psychology. One of her focuses is children with autism, but she has worked with children with all sorts of mental deficiencies, notably mental retardation.

Family is like a rock. It's existence helps keep us grounded so much so that I would argue it is vital. Mothers, fathers and step-fathers are all beautiful and amazing caretakers. Yes while I have previously been crippled by self-loathing and despair, my family has always looked out for me. Even during the darkest times. Without my family's love to guide me, I'm sure that I would certainly be dead, but I am luckily alive to breathe the air of another day. Yes, currently times may be hard for all of humanity, considering the looming virus, but if we stand tall and hunker down I know that this too shall pass, as the old saying goes.

Love will never escape me, I constantly seek it out and intend to be married one day. For what would we be without love? Honestly I believe love is one of the defining features of being a human. I mean without love, we would just be numb and afraid, walking, talking apes. Yes we cannot escape from the grip of love. It's beautiful and it's likely the reason you are alive.

Call it a blessing or a gift, but love is in my mind what is the most unique feature of the human race. I mean truly. Show me a moment in the course of human history where love could not have been found.

I moved from teaching to technology even though I studied English. In particular I enrolled in all of the poetry courses I could. So because of that I would like to take a moment to share some old and some new poetry as well as some other pieces of writing if you'll be so kind as to indulge for you to read and compare. Ultimately I think they are similar stylistically.

Old:

There's not enough time,
In this world,
For me,
I need every second I can have,
Because this is so important,
It is so amazing,
Everything else is nothing,

In comparison,
To a moment,
With you...

My little bird,
Perched with me,
In a little tree,
I know that we have had those times,
And those times have been the best of my life,
Please,
My birdie,
Stay with me,
Stay for all eternity,
My wings are spread open wide,
And I've never regretted a moment of it,
You've spent some time with me,
Please stay perched a little longer.

Three years is so little,
But it has felt so long,
Being with you is perfect.
In an Imperfect world that is.
You make bliss.
You create beauty.
You are existence.
Everything that you are and have been,
Is everything that is perfect about you.
Do you realize?
You are more beautiful than any girl,
Smarter than any genius,
Kinder than pacifists,
Radiant, Glowing, Luminescent beauty,
Perforating all that is your being,
And you could have chosen anyone else,
Lived and loved anyone else,
But what is so perfect is that you love me.
And I hope to love you--
I hope I have loved you—
Equally

A Girl in a Room With Flowers
By Matthew Brignola

The lonely girl—she sat in a room with flowers and they were dying. Slowly wrinkling, like the face of an old woman. And this girl was she happy? She often thought not. And she played little games with herself, in her mind, but these were not fun games, and so this girl really was sad, for a time.

A girl, who could skip a rock in a puddle and watch a frog hop in a pond and realize that both were just water. But what she didn't understand was that she had a lot going on in her life and that she had a really good life. Life was so simple anyways. All you had to do was look at a frog or skip a rock and the world would do back flips for you because it was a generous world, you just has to know to ask nicely.

And there was a girl and she put a flower in her hair, but it was black and dead, the petals curled in and falling out like the hair of an old woman. And was she happy? She often thought not. But that world was still so pretty and all she had to do was ask it for something special and maybe something special would happen. But she didn't and life drew its picture for her, winter came and it was bleak, the cold only worsened her depression and chilled her soul. But her soul was so big and her heart so warm, it just needed something to kindle it.

Winter was the season that it happened. A man came to her home. She was sitting, reading a book. And this man walks up to the porch and she is there on the porch with a book in her hand and he says, "Hemingway is supposed to be for boys."

And she just looks at him blankly, then giggled, noticing her novel *The Sun Also Rises*. But she just looked shyly at him and said nothing. He had some letters in his hand. "These were in my mailbox, but they're to your address."

"Oh, thank you."

He walked away. And she looked at him and watched as he walked off. He turned his head slightly and she nudged her nose into the book, pretending that she wasn't looking, and he smiled, a small smile and went away. She went back in her house and sat down on the couch and she was smiling too. He was a nice guy and he brought her mail to her. And so she looked at her letters now, with a new sense of confidence. She looked through it, but there was nothing special. Except here was a letter. It had no return address. She opened it and smelled sweet perfume. Was it a love letter? She had no admirers. And then she immediately was thinking of her neighbor. How exciting. She pulled out the paper, tri-folded.

The letter was exciting. Someone loved her and found her stunningly beautiful, but it took a strange turn in the fourth paragraph. The man had been watching her for some time and had wanted to meet her. He wanted to kiss her. He wanted to see her naked. He said he had almost on a couple of occasions. And the last line was the scariest of all, "I'll have you, my dear—I will get you no matter what."

She just held the letter and looked around the room and then, realizing, she looked out the windows. She shut the blinds. This was not from the man who came to her door. Or was it? She was scared and a little disgusted that someone would write such a letter to her. It did not make her feel any better.

The next morning she woke up and did some things around the house. Nothing special. And then the doorbell rang. She looked through the peephole. It

was the new neighbor, the guy who brought her mail. She waited for a little, the man hesitating and then rang the doorbell again. She opened it this time. He had a welcome basket. "I know this is what everyone on the block is supposed to do for the new neighbor, but I thought I'd give everyone else a basket instead. I just wanted to have an opportunity to get to know you."

She looked at him and this time she was not shy, but scrutinizing, determining if he was genuine or not, but he looked at her so serenely that she could not tell. She took the basket. "May I come in for a second, I just wanted to show you something." But she replied in a frantic slur, "I'm sorry but I'm just a little busy right now, and she shut the door very quickly.

The next few days she did not receive any visitors. She just sat and read and thought about the letter and this scary, mystery stalker. Who was he? Who was this neighbor? She was tempted to ask if any one else had received a welcome basket, but she did not know any one else on the street. And this man, he was too mysterious for her and she grew to dislike him and fear him. A man who had somehow gotten her mail and had tried to enter her house.

Some weeks later, she had been ok. She had gotten a few more letters and she had approached the new neighbor about it and he acted as startled as her after she eventually showed him the letters, which had grown increasingly menacing. She saw concern in his manner and she soon began to like him. The two began to see one another. They would go out on dates. She still received the letters. They were scary, but she was less afraid because of her boyfriend.

One night, the two had been together at her home and he had tried to make a move on her, but she denied him. He did not seem upset, but the night was ruined and he soon went to his home. And she began to feel those feelings of despair and loneliness again. Some hours after he had left, there was a knocking on the window, some scratches at the door. She looked but there was nothing there. Then, a black figure was outside, in the backyard. She couldn't tell who it was. It looked like a man. He stood very ominously and she was so afraid. She crouched down in her house and picked up a phone. She startled to dial her boyfriend's number, but the line was busy. There was the scratching at the door and she ran and hid in her room. She could hear the man pounding at her door. She wanted to go see her boyfriend, but she was far too afraid to leave the house. It was past midnight. She picked up the phone again and dialed 9-1-1. The knocking and pounding had stopped and when the police arrived she just described to them what had happened.

She immediately went over to her boyfriend's house. He let her in and she told him about it. He seemed worried for her, but there was a shine in his eyes that showed some sort of pride or happiness. She got close to him and he held her and she ignored his eyes.

The next day, she received another letter and it was very threatening. The girl was not happy. Her life was becoming too much for her. She was becoming depressed and her boyfriend could no longer comfort her. She often heard sounds at night, but did not look anymore. There were flowers in her room, but they were dying and she no longer could see the beauty in skipping rocks in a puddle, or a frog hopping into a pond.

She just went on, feeling terrible. She just was silent with her friend and rarely called him over. He came a few times, but she denied entrance to him. They no longer talked. One day, a doctor came over and questioned her about a few things. He said he was sent by a friend of hers and had heard that she was feeling bad. She ignored the man and told him she was ok. She was angry with her neighbor. She called him and told him to leave her alone and to not call the doctor ever again.

That night, there was a visitor. She answered the door and a man rushed in, pushing her down. She screamed, but he held her mouth and held her down. She was helpless and alone. She woke up on her floor, her clothes torn and she was numb. She went to the neighbor's house yelling and screaming at him and she began hitting him. He eventually stopped her. She went home.

The doctor came again, this time with the police and they questioned her. She set into a rage and the men took her off. The whole neighborhood was watching, standing outside of their doorsteps, watching this girl being put into a police car with some sort of psychiatrist or something, and she saw the man, her neighbor, smiling, snickering.

And was this girl happy? She often thought not. She could have made it so much better for herself. And she sat in a room wit

9:00 AM

Walter is brushing his teeth. He is using turkey-flavored toothpaste for dogs. He has just finished breakfast. A bowl of cereal. But he did not accidentally use the toothpaste. Turkey is truly delicious. So he uses dog toothpaste because it is delicious. He washes his face and shaves with an electric razor. Electric razors are cheaper considering you don't have to constantly be replacing blades. Besides, he has very thin facial hair. It's 9:00 AM. Walter isn't sleeping but he is dreaming. A police force of kittens is brutalizing a hobo troupe of pug puppies. It's 9:00 AM. Walter is hardly awake but he's not even slightly sleeping. The world is turning slower than it has before. In fact, the world isn't turning at all.

Walter had actually been taking heroin for quite some time. He didn't even like it. He hardly even knew he was doing it. He became so habituated that he couldn't tell the difference between a real police officer and a rogue kitten detective,

capping homeless puppies for no reason. His life was ending. The pills he had been taking for his bipolar disorder were actually carcinogenic. He had cancer of the liver, which his heroin addiction and alcoholism didn't help. He didn't know this. He hardly cared. He was already a walking corpse.

Agent Orange: Herbicide used to clear the forest during the Vietnam War, which not only killed Vietnamese, but caused cancer in Veterans. This was probably the cause of death of a dear family friend who was practically my grandfather.

Bullets: simple enough

Christianity: Most of the time a religion of peace but you can't disregard the Crusades, wars, the Inquisition, abortion clinic bombings, the list goes on

Diarrhea: a lack of clean drinking water in many countries causes diarrhea, which ultimately kills 2.2 million annually (WHO estimate) which would be prevented if clean water sources were provided

E. coli: Accident or not, poor farming practices and sanitary systems lead to deaths, regardless of how few or how many

Farmville: not a joke

Genocide: Holocaust to Cambodia to Armenians, you can deny the numbers, but not the suffering

Hunger: despite grain and other food surpluses in industrialized nations, humans around the world die of starvation

Ignorance: lynchings, stonings, hate crimes, intolerance, etc.

J

K

L

Malnutrition: aside from starvation, people die because of a lack of essential

nutrients

Napalm: jellied gasoline never burned so good

O

Pollution: apparently causes 40% of all human deaths (Cornell study)

Quilts: During Pontiac's war, soldiers gave smallpox contaminated blankets to Native Americans

R

S

Terrorism: Al-Qaida...Osama Bin Laden was CIA trained; the Contras were funded by Reagan's administration

Unprotected Sex: Use protection and get tested: HIV is one the top causes of death in the world

V

War: Humanities greatest invention—for killing. The number of deaths caused by alls war probably can't even be estimated.

Xenophobia: from illegal aliens to completely papered and government approved immigrants, the hatred of outsiders has resulted in countless deaths

Y

Zyklon B (Hydrogen Cyanide): The notorious chemical used in Auschwitz to exterminate Jews and other persons during World War II.

As disturbing and frustrating as this list can be, despite how humans have intentionally or accidentally used these materials and caused these atrocities, there is always the ability and the opportunity to eliminate these sources of pain, suffering, and ultimately death from humanity. Support humanitarianism.

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america's porno-manual

star reflecting mirror
smut spangled smear
steering scars to headlit streets
deer eyes and meat claws
a red blood
bruise blue
white skinned skewer
kitchen sink
grinded indisposable flesh hooks

suckerpunched nipple clamp
silky banner skin flap
sulky naked swing dance
sipping gin and bearmace
loose-leaf noose necktie stockings
smitten overdose over the counter top
blood blister pistil stamen
interlocked wedlock bed frock
wiggle it violent like off

frazzle lips spitting glassy piss
leggy lapel kiss and
looky looky sexy button grip
a lot of a little and a big time town skippers
make it mother American underwear model
frou frou pudding in plastic coating
lingerie baby sexy walking jazzy masturbating
menagerie madam making America yes no maybe
satiated battery ram depleted uranium
barefooted linoleum floor bedlam

Big Pile

Call me a pile
sopping
steam is a misty dancer
my necktie is tangled
left leg is stuck between a door
hold on just one measly minute

big sky
indented pillow head stain
rolling by on a big jet plane
a big adventure
big big things up in the air
cigarette pack
several slender tubes
puffin on by

egg in the ear
insertion in
seven minutes
several seconds
slinking in a pair of underwear
a skewer of neck rolls
a pile of naked rags
sippin on it

Building

Rotten stone drippin down the wires
leadin orderly over to the diner
the express way paved twice over
stone cold as stones erode and slip down
through the river
through the splinters of a shattered spine
until the order's placed
the god that obeys
man and his commands
commanding stone to be sand
condemning himself to be damned.

Ring Dances

Lining up slowly because too much time is enough for ghosts
and this little finger needs every spirit it can muster
every sting and wincing pain that pokes into it
the row's really growing said the small one
maybe one day god will say hello
poke his head down from the clouds
and satan's from below
maybe the lines will straighten as time goes on
and the pain can run down them
like fingers down a spine
a few bumps along the way never hurt too much
just never enough
never a bone broken so much like bread
taste it as it files up and down along the insides
the inside of man and woman
inside of a colossal place
a place so big that the small one feels bigger
the small one holds its own in a big place
because it can't be seen
it feels like a ghost
like a germ
floating around the mouths of strangers
until it's spoken into existence

Desert Soil

He opened the door to the car. He shut it. In a world like this there wasn't much of a world left. They sat in the desert and they were playing poker. Sam, the guy with the aces, he had a buck knife on his belt and he played the harp, drawing on it like a marijuana cigarette. In a world like this they played the game by their rules. Out in the desert, the fuzz had no hold, but just in case, he had a gun, a revolver, loaded up. He would get angry and pump some lead into the air and Sam would yell, "Cut that out!"

They drove there, into the desert about a week ago. An El Camino loaded up with cans of beans and ramen packets. They had a pot and some water. A lot of water. It was just a trip, but they couldn't help thinking it was something more and they were only a couple of kids then.

Sam laid down his hand and it was nothing special. Sam whipped out a brew, the other, just staring him in the face, said, "Why did you bring that? I hate beer."

"I don't care."

"Ok, whatever."

The other wasn't talkative and he was just annoying the hell out of Sam, looking into the sky, the stupid kid, the annoying moron. No, it wasn't that bad, Sam had just lost that round of poker and he drank his beer and said out loud, "God, I hate beer," and the other replied, "Me too."

And the night drove in like an old T-Bird, but the Beach Boys stayed behind. Then they got a fire going and it burnt like the anger in their eyes, for their stinking world and the filth it represented. It would all burn in due time, just fuel to the universe, yet their existence seemed so vital and so tangible, yet they couldn't avoid the fact that it didn't matter, that nothing they said or did would make any difference, that there was no point in making any difference. And the other stood up with his gun in his hand and he let the universe know that there was nothing he cared about.

And Sam put on a pot of water and they cooked up some ramen noodles and ate that and set up some sleeping bags under the stars, but not like some Holly Wood cowboys, but not like it mattered.

And the night was just as hopeless as the day and the other slept with his revolver in his hand, like it mattered or something, and he played with the hammer, cocking and setting it down like some sort of toy. And the desert was cold and the beanie on his head too hot and the brown leather jackets they wore just made them look like a couple of hobos, but they had an El Camino, but that thing was almost out of gas and they were in the middle of the desert and they didn't care.

And the other one woke up. He looked around and stretched like you do when you wake up, that kind of crap. He looked around still. Where was Sam? The El Camino? There. The food? There. Everything? There, except that stupid kid Sam, the kid with the aces. His sleeping bag was there. And everything seemed fine. He looked around and Sam wasn't taking a piss or doing something like that, he just wasn't there.

So the other sat down and he looked at the gray sky and the sky didn't look back or pay any attention and where was a bird when you needed one?

He got up and sat back down and made some coffee and it wasn't good and it didn't matter and he just sipped it and let it get cold and then drank it real quick. The desert was lonely and it was hot and the leather jacket had to come off. He looked at his watch, but that thing had stopped ticking long ago, the aesthetic little prick. And when inanimate objects stopped being fun, it was time for a new game, so he got in the car and turned on the radio. There was an extra battery for the car, so it didn't matter. But how the hell was he ever going to get a signal out there and how often were any stations broadcasting anymore? And so the sky lit up bright like something bright and he dimmed down like a moron in the sand. And it got hot and the heat was stinging his mind.

So where were the birds? Where had they gone? They weren't south. They for sure weren't north and this desert was just empty, dying for some birds or a little mouse, or a plant. And he had a strange idea and he looked at his gun. He fired three shots last night. And he looked in the cylinder and five chambers were empty. And then he could remember a fourth shot, one for the universe, but the fifth was a mystery and then he got this bad feeling and then he got scared.

It had been a while since he woke up and this was getting to be too much for him. He looked around for the shovel. It was in the El Camino, but was it exactly how it was there the day before? And so then he looked around the camp for some sign of where he might have dug a hole. There was no fresh soot, no brown dirt, just sand. So what the hell had happened last night? This was some sort of trick. The kid had to be hiding in the Camino, or in a blanket, or under a rock, but the Camino was empty, the blankets folded up, and there weren't any rocks.

Here it was, the breakthrough in the case, item number one, Sam's knife. It was in the El Camino, on the bench seat. So had they left? There were only the tracks from the car that had they had made on the way in. Just in case, he turned on the engine and looked at the gas level: low as hell, but it looked the same.

And now this was the time for some brave cowboy shit, to go out and find this Sam kid, and milk a cow or something, but he was just a kid in the middle of the desert and his friend didn't seem like he was coming back.

And all of the sudden, when everything was getting creepy, when he thought he might be out of his mind, he came up with the notion to look under the stupid El Camino and then he got scared and thought that maybe this wasn't a good idea. What would he find? He was missing a slug from his gun and Sam had been gone for hours and that was a scary idea and yes, he was scared, and yes he was alone, and yes.

Underneath the car there might be something hiding that would make him more afraid than he's ever been and more afraid of himself than anything else. And so he sat for a bit and just thought about nothing, staring at the sky, alone and afraid.

So he thought about the world and what had happened and why this trip was so strung out and how terrible everything had been for so long and what the hell could he do? He could look under a car and that was just the scariest thing he could imagine doing right now.

He decided that the best thing to do would be to wait until night. Maybe Sam had walked really far away and maybe he was coming back. So if he waited, he wouldn't have to look under the car and that stupid Sam would just show up and maybe he could point his gun at Sam or something like that and then everything would be better.

And night came this time and it wasn't graceful like any old car or any crap like that, but it came and it settled down and the sky got black and he just got up and opened the door to the car and he sat on the black leather seat and he held the keys in his hand and the cold metal didn't comfort him, it just reminded him how lifeless everything really was. And then he decided it was time to turn on the car and whatever he saw, he would just leave and that would be that and hopefully he'd get on with his life.

So he put the key in the ignition, the metal, still metal, and he turned it and the engine erupted in that way it always had and he was so scared. He didn't turn on the headlights. He just backed up. Nothing thumped under the tires. He kept backing up for a few feet and he just sat there, idle, and then drove off in the desert, the sand crunching under the tires, like bones, like teeth in a skull, the engine just racing, and that stupid kid, he just drove off and the world didn't care. And nobody had to forget what he couldn't remember.

Galloping away, he let her go. Somehow he knew but he didn't regret this moment. He didn't regret a single thing except not saying goodbye. When she looked back and told him—he knew...

Under a tree, he was sitting reading some novel or another. He stood up, wiping off some dirt from his pants and he started walking back. His mother had named him Asher. But now he was just walking away from a tree that he had just sat under. The creek and a small meadow, lined with several trees.

Asher met up with a friend and they walked for a while. Discussions were common, relating the various struggles in society to one another, the concepts of mores and freedom. Sometimes these were interesting, but most often it was just existential blabbering. Asher could walk and not pay attention to his feet, just like most people. And he could talk without paying attention to his mouth moving, or his tongue flicking out the words he spoke, or his mind seamlessly controlling all of these actions. Most times he could only focus on one thing.

But walks only last so long until he reached his destination. Wherever that may be. In this case it was his house. Small and mildly suburban. Quaint. Breezes slid by creating a sensuous sphere. Look at his gnomes. He had a yard full of some twenty odd gnomes. But they were all well hidden so that when someone walked up to the house for the first time the yard would seem completely normal, until one gnome become noticeable, and then a second, then four, then possibly ten or twelve.

So he approached his home admiring nothing about it. Maybe sharing a passing glance with this gnome or that one, or admiring the neighbors dog, but most likely not. The front door was keyed open. Knobs can turn in your hands or they can't, but in this instance it turned just enough to let Asher push his way through the door to go sit on his couch. He looked at his phone describing to himself the

possibilities of the rest of the day. To call this odd fellow or that one. Or to return to the tree to read, but that was not really a great idea because the sun was setting, which he had no thought of paying any attention to.

So as the sun set it cast a ray onto his gnomes out front who looked unto the sunset with small ceramic faces, casting their eyes on the mountainous horizon, embalming this scene in their soft and speechless eyes. Countenances gazing at the sun as it went and hid beneath the mountaintops. And Asher was sitting on his couch pushing numbers on his phone and hoping for a friend to answer and not be busy. And the sun descended into the rocks.

"Tonight? Well you could come over and see Tim and his girlfriend and whoever Jack brings along with him to my house."

His phone was put back on the wall and footsteps followed, leading to his bed where he sat and put on a pair of socks and changed his shoes. A small owl figurine watched, its eyes somewhat misplaced, but still glancing at Asher sitting on his bed with his fingers moving laces. He put his hand on the sheets, outlining the pattern of a rhombus and then laying back with his arms spread out his eyes on the ceiling. The alarm clock told him the time and he thanked it by getting up and moving back into the room with the couch, which led to the fridge, where he got some orange juice and read the note on his fridge. In the couch room he got his bike from up against the wall and headed out the door that had a peephole looking onto the world outside and quite possibly the backs of a few gnomes on the right side of the lawn, but it was too dark to tell and Asher instead opened his door and pedaled into the street.

He rode a ways, sometimes being illuminated by passing cars with their headlights pushing past him. He was on the road, just riding, with those cars going by, with passengers sometimes looking on and driving sometimes moving just that little bit to the left to go past him. Generally he kept his eyes forward and his head up. Trees lined the side of the road, darkened by the night, but their needles would shuffle in the wind. There was still snow in small piles on the side of the road.

Asher curved around a turn, leaning into it and pushing on through, the road dug deeper into the forest and fewer cars went by. But one come from in front of Asher, illuminating his entire front side, he was blinded monetarily, until the car veered for a second giving Asher the chance to see a fox running into the left lane with his head down, stopping and looking up into the headlights, until they crashed over the small figure as a wave of sound flooded Asher's ears and the car went by. Asher came to a stop, letting his foot off the bike and moving over to the shoulder where he heard a soft whispering. The moonlight was shed through the obscuring trees just enough for Asher to see the orange sprayed with flicks of black that coated the fox. His white belly could be seen, but the dirty snow he was laying in was sprayed with what Asher determined to be a deep red. He knelt next to the fox with his pants in the snow and he put his hands over the creature as if to touch it but he decided not to. The fox then turned his small dark eyes to Asher's and opened his narrow and long mouth to let out a shrill whimper. Asher rolled up his sleeves and finally rested a hand on the fox's side. It was wet and losing warmth. He could feel the heart telling him so softly that the life was almost gone. He listened a bit longer

with his hand until he decided to stroke the fox whose eyes were still fixed on Asher's. Asher looked back to return his eyes to the fox's who was panting and creating small clouds of breath that disappeared shortly after being exhaled. Asher told the fox it would be ok. And the fox opened his mouth a little wider and said to him, "There are always paths we take over and over but sometimes we forget to really look where we are going." And Asher watched as the fox panted even harder for a while and felt his chest expand a great deal underneath his wet hand and he listened to the fox's heart telling him that it would be very soon. The fox's head was lying down but his eyes looked deeper into Asher. "I was very glad to meet you. If this hadn't happened I don't think I ever would have seen you." Asher had tears form in his eyes and slowly roll out and fall into the red-stained snow. The heart finally said goodbye, but Asher remained speechless and watched the fox's eyes roll away from his own. "Goodbye," he finally said, but the fox was already gone.

He stood up, shaking only slightly and wiping his cold hand on his pants. He stood over the figure in the snow, letting a tear drip onto the creature. He looked back down the road, the car long gone, and then returned his gaze to the shape of the fox in the dark snow. He turned around and walked back to his bike laying out of the snow and he stood it up and put himself on it. Before he pedaled away he gave one more look to the fox and pedaled past.

He rode on shivering, but he didn't really notice. He couldn't help but look into his own mind and stare at the images of the fox in the snow staring back at him. And he pedaled, pushing his legs a little harder, breathing much deeper and faster, until he got to Greg's house.

Greg's driveway was outlined by his incandescent porch light, the orb of light surrounding the front door that Asher approached. He had been sweating and now that he had stopped moving he began to get cold. "What happened? You look like a bit of a wreck." Asher walked in and saw Tim and his girlfriend sitting on a sofa, as well as Jack and two other guys at a round table in the kitchen drinking from some glasses. "Is that blood on your hands and pants? What happened Asher?" Asher avoided the question and asked for a glass of water.

The room had the sofa occupied by Tim and his girlfriend, as well as a trophy buck head eyeing the entire room with its mouth slightly open, making its rubber tongue visible to all the guests, which it kept safely tucked in its mouth in order not to lose it like it lost its first tongue. There was also a woodpecker sitting on a bookshelf, avoiding the stare of the deer by turning its head to the wall. It briefly stole a glance of Asher as he walked past into the kitchen.

Asher took a seat at the table. "So are you ok? What happened Asher?"

"There was a fox. He told me he was glad he met me."

"You saw a fox get hit by a car?"

"Yeah I watched him dying in the snow. He was very cold. It was pretty sad."

"Wow, I'm sorry. So you touched him? Why don't you go wash up man. You've got blood all over you."

Asher was led to the bathroom where he washed his hands in some warm water, watching the blood swirl as it ran off of his hands and down into the darkened hole of the drain. He could see in the mirror Jack and his friends looking

on from the kitchen and he heard the whispers of them as well as Tim and his girlfriend.

He went back out and sat on another sofa next to the one Tim and his girlfriend were sitting on. Trisha gently touched Asher. "The poor fox."

"Yeah it was pretty sad I guess. Although he seemed somewhat happy. I think the fox might have been a bit disillusioned."

"Don't you mean delusional?"

"Maybe."

Trisha tugged on her woolen sweater and let her swollen blue eyes fall into Asher's countenance. She traced the lines in his face to his confusion and shock, which were readily apparent, but the extent of which was hidden in his silence. Greg brought out a marijuana cigarette, which was passed around after Jack and his friends joined the group, bringing in the chairs from the kitchen.

"It was actually a nice day out considering how cold it is tonight." After hearing this Asher realized that Jack's friends were on the same. One man split into two persons, wearing different clothing. "Yes it was. I actually read a book under a tree today. How long have you two been the same person?"

"My brother and I took a hike earlier up the mountain. Which book are you reading Asher?"

"I can't recall the title, but it is about a man traversing the Sierras."

Asher took his first hit, pulling in the smooth smoke through the thin paper hole. A knock at the door was heard and Greg stood up to answer it. He pulled open the door and Asher's view was blocked by the back of Greg's head, but he heard a feminine voice announce herself at Greg's greeting. Greg's arm waved the girl in and Asher then saw her as she walked in through the doorway. The girl walked in and took a seat on the couch next to Asher. Her sweater seemed stitched together to contain her essence—her very being. Asher looked at her. His eyes traced her body in such a delicate way, the image they perceived relaying itself slowly back to Asher while his eyes relished the vision for quite some time.

Sounds became very distant. There was almost this swirling image in Asher's eyes as he gazed at the girl. "Asher, this is Jill. I don't think you have ever met."

"Hi, Asher. It's nice to meet you." The hand approached Asher and he received it gently, feeling the loose grip on his own hand, feeling her cold skin.

"Sorry for my hand. It's a bit chilly outside."

Trisha exchanged greetings with Jill and then the cigarette continued to be passed around the room. Jill was shivering slightly. "Want a blanket?"

"Thanks Asher. That would be really nice."

Asher got one of Greg's blankets from the woven basket on the floor next to the couch. He handed it to Jill who softly swaddled herself with it. He was sitting next to her, slightly mesmerized, but cognizant enough to scoot over. He felt he was crowding her. He could feel her hips pushing into his and he felt embarrassed.

"Asher why don't you tell Jill about the fox story?"

"I saw a fox get hit by a car on the way here."

"What did you do?"

"I went over to him and touched him before he died."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"Yeah."

Jill pulled her legs up onto the couch and tucked them under the blanket. She turned her body back towards Asher and their eyes met once again. They seemed to play with one another. Her knees were touching his thigh just slightly and she wiggled a little bit to readjust herself and in doing so her knees pushed into him just that slight bit more, making him feel so warm inside and so aware of his own presence. He felt scared and awkward—comforted.

"I have never seen an animal die."

"In a way it is very sad but it is also very beautiful."

"That seems a bit morbid." Asher looked at Jack for a moment and returned his eyes to Jill who had also turned to look at Jack. He could see her hair, curling in so many ways behind her head and when she turned around he noticed the curls lining her face and the way they protected her face from the outside world.

"Oh yeah, Asher. These are my friends Ben and Jesse."

"Nice to meet you guys."

"Yeah nice to meet you as well."

"Nice to meet you Asher."

Greg went into the kitchen to make coffee. Things went similarly that night. There was talking and chatting, sometimes influenced by the marijuana, sometimes extremely casual and natural. The walls seemed to encase these souls, only letting parts of themselves out, but there seemed a resonance in personalities existing on the couch where Asher and Jill sat. Jack and his two friends excused themselves and left, which prompted Tim and Trisha to leave as well. Asher looked over to Jill and their eyes met again. "Should we leave as well?"

"Well I biked here, but if you want to leave I would go."

"I drove her if you would like me to take you home Asher."

"No you don't have to."

"Well thanks for coming over guys. I really appreciate it."

Everyone headed out. They left the room, the darkened countenance of the deer head slightly illuminated by the flicking flames in the fireplace and the shadow of the bird against the wall it was staring at. Greg walked everyone to the door and shut it after saying his goodbyes. Jack and his friends took off in one car rather quickly. Jill looked at Asher, her nose turning red and steam escaping from her pursed lips. "Are you sure you don't want me to take you. It's really cold out."

She opened up the back door and Asher put his bike in and then came and sat up front as Jill got into the driver seat. The seats were draped with striped blankets. She looked over at Asher and turned on the car and headlights, showing the gravel driveway in front of them. "You never told me what the fox said."

Asher let his gaze slip from her to his lap. "He said sometimes we don't look where we are going. And then he told me that he was glad to meet me. He said if he hadn't gotten hit by the car he never would have been able to meet me."

He looked back up at Jill, she was looking at the road but her eyes appeared slightly glossy. He rubbed his hands together and let out a steamy breath, observing the air disappear front in front of him. She continued to drive with Asher directing

her towards his home. They arrived and Asher sat for a moment looking in front of himself at his house. "Thank you so much." He reached for the door, pulling the handle out and Jill grabbed his forearm as to stop him. He turned around to her they shared a momentary glance before she pursed lips, releasing a small amount of steam before touching her lips against Asher's. His eyes were still open and then the kiss ended. She had a slight red in her cheeks that was mostly from the cold, but slightly from excitement and possibly embarrassment. Asher just looked in awe. Frozen in the moment. "I'm sorry." Her eyes glistened and her eyelashes waved at Asher.

"No."

He grabbed her by the hand, feeling the warmth the two shared. He looked past her head for a moment out of the car window and saw a dark outline of an animal in his yard. His gnomes were looking at it as well. Jill saw his eyes looking away from her and she turned around. "It's a fox!"

The fox was looking at them both. It stood there for a moment, then turning its head, trotted off into the snowy woods, wagging its tail goodbye at the gnomes. When Jill turned around Asher met her with his lips, this time his eyes closed, Jill's open momentarily, before she gave back her lips.

They broke away and Asher could see her crying. "What did I do?"

"It's not you. I—I hit that fox on the way to Greg's house. I am not from around here and I got lost. I'm sorry Asher." She cried more, whimpering into her hands, which gripped the steering wheel. Asher still looked at her, his hand rested on her leg. He rubbed his palm along her thigh. "I'm really sorry."

He still looked at her and lifted up her chin. "It's ok." She shook her head and was sniffing. Her glasses were fogged up from her crying into her hands. Asher looked at her face, the red outlining her eyes, the tears lightly running down her cheeks, her eyes so deep and melancholy now as she looked away from him. "Tell me a story."

She looked at him now, slightly confused, and the corners of mouth turned up slightly. "A story?"

"Yes. Do you know any stories?"

"One very rich, young boy would go and sit at the beach each day, playing with the frills on his coat. He would collect shells and crabs. All afternoon he would pretend to be a soldier or an artisan, running into the water only to run back out immediately at its icy greeting. The sand was dark, but soft, each granule cuddling his feet. The beach was his one true friend and they would laugh together as the waves swelled in and the beach would wish him goodnight every time the sun began to tuck itself under the golden horizon. The boy grew into a young man, visiting the beach everyday, his knowledge and understanding of his friend growing evermore. One day as the sun began to hide behind the ocean, a girl rode up on a horse, silhouetted, but her hair streaming in the slight breeze. He stared in awe at the girl, sitting on her horse. She called out to him, saying hello. He stood still, startled for a moment, but then he ran over to her. Once her head blocked the sunlight he could see her face. It was the most beautiful face he had ever seen. He stared deeply into her eyes and watched as her hair flashed over them momentarily. He was so

desperately in love. They began talking. They talked for hours. She was a young girl to affluent parents, but her family was negotiating a marriage for her and she would soon leave. The young man was in love and he took her by the hand and he kissed her and she kissed him back. And when the sun began to rise up above the ocean the two were still there talking and kissing, holding one another in their arms. And the two fell asleep for a while there. When the boy awoke he saw the girl sitting on the horse, the mane fluttering in the wind, her hair stroking her delicate face like he had just done the night before. And she got on the horse and he looked at her so curiously and she just told him she had to go and rode off. Galloping away, he let her go. Somehow he knew but he didn't regret this moment. He didn't regret a single thing except not saying goodbye. When she looked back and told him—he knew—she was gone.”

Asher looked at Jill and she came in and kissed him, her tears practically gone now. And he stroked her face like the girl in the story. He threaded his fingers through her side curls and she placed her lips on his cheek and gave him the littlest kiss, so soft and so warm in this cold. And the two went into his home, with the gnomes watching them as they walked up the driveway and entered through the wooden door at the front, holding one another as they stepped inside.

Asher woke up the next day in his bed. He sat up looking at the somber sheets and noticed the wrinkles in the bed and searched for Jill. He got up and went into the kitchen, looking down the hallway at the beige carpet. Feeling the scruffy softness against his feet, observing the off-white walls and the little intricacies of paint texture, speckled all over. He noticed the frames of pictures and the pictures themselves. Often softer colors shaping a portrait of his father and him. He walked into the kitchen, seeing the tile floor, the white walls and an assortment of cooking utensils forming his countertop. He looked around his eyes greeting the different structures and textures, the different colors and shapes. His eyes searched almost everywhere for Jill. The scene was never more lucid. He could see everything except Jill. And he looked outside the kitchen window, to the snow padded ground, some thin blades of grass sticking out, his gnomes playing in the white powder. Jill's car was not there, but he could see the trees loosely coated in the snow.

He looked around with a somber look in his eyes. A melancholy film coating them. He went and sat down on the sofa and saw a number of books on his table. The pages bent and worn. The different covers and the myriad colors—a patchwork of novels lining the wooden platform. And he picked up the book he had been reading and opened it up to the place he had his bookmark and was about to begin reading. He saw on the bookmark a small fox, its tail curled around its legs and he opened up the piece of paper and saw a string of seven numbers written there. He looked around him and saw the walls and the table. He saw his books and the snow outside the kitchen. He looked at the door where Jill and him had been and he looked over to his room where they had spent the night. Outside the window he saw the fox again, dancing in the snow. He looked for a long time at the patterns in its fur. And he dialed the number into his phone and waited for it to ring.

In a sultry room curtains flapped to the rhythm of the arid breeze. The heat unabashed by the openness of the window. A lone figure rested prostrate in a corner of the room. A man. He stood up. The skin around his fingernails was tread with teeth marks. But he paced sedately. The heat extracted beads of dew from his forehead and the underarm's of his shirt revealed gibbous stains each time he brought his fingers to his lips. The skin was soft between his teeth. The nails hard. His feet carried him from one wall to the other. Footsteps could be heard from upstairs. The dampened sound of a television set. The steps he took grew smaller and his gait more poky. Utterances from upstairs clouded the sound of his footsteps, which had grown softer. Small children could be heard giggling and then bounding about, their footsteps much louder than his own. He sat down at his desk, grabbing a pencil and some ledger, his brow furling slightly and his chewing becoming more feverish. He scribbled in a deadpan manner, but his hand did not move frivolously.

He sat for a few minutes. His pencil gracing the paper continuously. The air still sweltering, the curtains blowing above his head. His sweat continued to condense on his crown. The beads occasionally trickling down his nose. He raised his hand to wipe the sweat off, taking a moment to chew his fingers again. "Excuse me. Is anyone here?" The voice emanated from outside the apartment's door.

The pencil fell from the man's hand and greeted the table with the soft clinking of wood on wood. The man rose from his desk and tottered over to the door. "How can I help you?" The man's body was framed between the door and the wall. In front of him stood an old woman, grey with age, carrying a ratty parcel.

"This is for you." Her voice was small but frosted over with an unsettling hoarseness. She offered the package to him, her elbows locked tight, extending her arms to their full length, presenting the package as to some figure of authority. Her bare knuckles bled slightly from her cracked skin and her eyes sunk back into her skull, the color of them hidden in the dim light of the hallway. He took the package from her, gazing down at it. "What is this?" He looked up from the box but the woman had already left. He stepped out of the door but he didn't see her in the hallway. He went back inside.

The parcel was cardboard, wrapped in twine. He scanned the box for any sort of address or label but there was none, so he undid the twine and the box began to open itself. The cardboard unfolded at its harsh creases as he eased it along, exposing a layer of brown paper. It crinkled under his chewed fingers as he gently coaxed the parchment, revealing gray hair. His hand retracted at the feel of the fur and he almost dropped the box out of fear and repulsion. He continued on more cautiously, exposing the contents even further, finding a hoofed foot inside. The disembodied limb was all there was in the box. He set it down on his desk and quickly returned his teeth to his fingertips. Sweat beaded up on his brow as he contemplated the origins of this hoof. The corner of his lip began to twitch.

He walked back over to his desk, eyeing his journal and his recent scribbles. A sketching of a goat occupied the center page, the front left leg unfinished and inexistent. His gaze returned to the box and then back to the

drawing. He took his hand and removed the sweat from his forehead. The wrinkles still moist with perspiration. His mouth sat open, the spittle inside drying. His mood of contemplation now desiccated. His eyes darted about the room. The walls barren save for the door to the bathroom and a lone impressionist painting, the artist unknown to him. His mattress was on the floor, with his baby blue sheets faded and unkempt from his early rising. A phone sitting next to it on the ground. The desk sat by the window, the faded curtains still rustling from the wind. The goat sat idle on the page staring into space and into the room. He stared at the desk awhile.

He ran and opened the door again, lurching as he did so. The woman stood in front of him and he could see her right eye sitting lazily in her skull, white marbled throughout with a pasty blue opaque in the center. "Excuse me, but what did you," The wind rushed in, disturbing his speech and the woman's long gray hair, which now floated about her head like tendrils of lightning. Light flashed in and out from the window as the curtains flailed about. Her one eye glowing each time the light befell it, its gaze latched to his. The light continued to strobe as she reached out her hand, the nails long and grimy with dirt embedded underneath. Her pale yellow skin clutched his own hand, her lips pursed, ready to whisper when the light flashed with such extreme intensity he had to shut his eyes. He felt a rush of the outside air, the grip of the hand loosen and then utter calmness. He opened his eyes again. The woman was gone. In his fist her hand had been replaced by a black feather.

He stared through the empty threshold into the hall once more for what could have been minutes. He turned around after closing the door, a crow now sitting in his window, the curtains barely moving. The crow flapped its wings, tipping over a glass bottle onto the desk. The crow took off and he walked over to the window gazing out as the crow's silhouette disappeared into the luminous sun, now setting on the horizon. The bottle had contained ink. He stared down at the ink bleeding black onto his desk. The sun was shrinking faster, the room growing darker. He stood the bottle back up, setting the feather next to it. The box still sat opened, the hoof nestled inside, staring out into the room, which had darkened significantly. He flipped on a light, its incandescence reflecting the austere living space. He took his shirttail and wiped his forehead, the room had hardly begun to cool despite the sun's remissness. Black fingerprints stained his white shirt where he had pinched it.

He heard the family upstairs return home. He heard their television set turn on and could hear the children giggling, most likely at cartoons. Their giddiness discomfited him, so he lay in bed reminiscing. The children and the television faded out and he drifted into slumber. He dreamed of the ocean and its opaque blueness. The foamy white waves crashing, the sea breeze whispering to him. The beach sands white and bleached like a desert skeleton. The lapping water uncovering a body, soggy and clothed in drenched rags and seaweed. The sea whispered to him in a hoarse voice. "Where is the road? Who is the flame?" The water condensed into a great big blue eye, a violent eddy with a black whole in the center. The body on the shore floated into the center and was consumed by the maelstrom.

He awoke in a sweat, the sun glaring through the idle curtains in the window. He stood up and ran to the bathroom, hunkering down by the toilet, and vomited. He emerged from the bathroom and heard the running footsteps of the children upstairs. His head was clouded and he maintained a slight queasiness. He nibbled at his fingers. The children had stopped running and the television set could be heard now. The disembodied giggles left him estranged. The room's quietness haunted by the muffled distance between the one above. He took notice of his desk. The box, the feather, the inkbottle. Also a bottle of unfinished whiskey. He walked over and took a swig, peering into the box, but the leg was no longer inside. His lip quivered briefly and he doused it with another sip from the bottle. He was compelled to the bathroom where he again vomited in the toilet bowl. His eyes were misty and his throat irritated from the acidity. He looked down into the calm waters of the porcelain receptacle and saw sallow gray hairs swirling with the pulpy spittle. His breath quickened and he shot more whiskey down to clear his throat of the taste. He returned his eyes to the water but the hair remained. The box rested balefully on his desk and he trudged over to it, throwing it on the ground, its emptiness exaggerated by the gentle noise it made as it hit the floor. His foot attempted to make its demise more satisfying, but he was overcome suddenly as his throat began to swell. He ran to the bathroom again and coughed out more of the hair. In his mind's eye he saw the old woman and her legs were hairy and hooved like the goats. She sat caressing an orb and at the base of her was the body he had seen in his dream, still sopping wet and coated with the refuse of the sea.

When he came to his eyes darted around the room. He was prostrate on the bathroom floor. He looked in the toilet, but there was only vomit. No hair. He took another drink from the bottle, which had only a trickle left to tease his burning esophagus. In his stomach he felt an absence. He got up to get food, seeing the empty box on the desk. His notebook open and inside, next to the picture it read, "Where is the road? Where is the flame?" The inkbottle was open and the crow's feather wet at the tip with the black liquid. Scrambling, he searched the room for an intruder. For the old woman. There was no one. The scampering of the children returned upstairs. He left the room.

When he returned the phone was ringing. The curtains had begun to rustle again as the midday breeze settled in. He picked up the phone. "Hey Mom. Things are fine. Yes. Yes. None of my sketches have been bought and no one's hired me to do any for them. No. No I don't need any money. Yes. Thanks mom. Things are a bit strange lately. No I am not still drinking. Yes. Mmmhmm. Yes. Alright I understand." He continually nodded his head before saying goodbye and hanging up the phone.

After hanging up he heard the neighbor across the hall walk up to her door and fumble with the keys. He opened his door and saw the woman, dressed in what appeared to be robes and with a shawl. She had large hoop earrings with topaz stones dangling from them. She dropped her keys and he walked over and bent down to pick them up. "Thank you."

Got a fellow walking in my head. In my eyes dim stars glint and the spaces in between collide. I put feet to motion and the body as a locomotive driven by Lucy rides the night for a short time.

I discover inner demons. A problem of persecution that screams into my eyelids. Calling a close friend and feeling distanced. Feet keep pacin the pavement and my steam keeps jettin. Caboose along the once familiar street now atomized. Now a stranger in a similar city.

These are where the problems of America arise. In the conception of life in a suburb. White skin, milky, yet tasteless. A child with its umbilical cord wrapped tightly round it.

I jog a bit as paranoia fuels the fire. A false victim afraid of nothing. Asking for a cigarette appearing as a beggar. Here's three dollars. But he's never been richer. Come on in little boy. Little cream child. Let the train roll in and spin your head a while. Hold on tight to the rails before you float away. But hey let go before the train comes again.

I hear it rumbling along the night tracks. Each one of a thousand wheels grinds between my ears. A pulsing of voices and spaces and soon a feeling of elation.

Funky rhythmic ecstasy and a walkin beat that puts the feet moving at ease.

The body still steamin and the boiler searing hot as the bubblin perspiration burns up and mists away. Small discs set in motion, travelin miles all the day, and burnin up that steam that clouds my foggy brain.

The rails are slowly bending. The tracks, warped, send the train on a frenzy. A bright mark in the daylight. A small beacon at sunset.

Someone like me that is less afraid. Someone with a tongue so hot it not only rolls, but coasts through night and day, like a train strollin by, pedestrian in the night not afraid of dark shadows keeps walkin.

The feet slow down. The chuggin of the engine sludgin slowly down. The slow down. Down to the time wet kisses fall from the iris. Little green eyed child jaded by gamblers cheatin in high places. Yet livin the lexis, a line of cars stringing by. Livin off the fumes of a city peopled in fabric. Colored in a contradictory way. Stitched together.

The rails they've run to ground. The trains a rollin now. Tumbling down an alleyway until a cat screams Glory! The glass eyebrow furrows for a short distance, then slowly comes down.

Come down. Down and lie a while. Feel the pull of sleep at your feet worming through each tendon until your legs are fully bound. Captured and strung up from the train yard.

Don't let that steam die out.

Honey oh honey. Sweet substance of the comb.
Run it through my curly hair and make it shiny gold.
A viscous set of teeth pour out the mouth of me—child.
A copy of a pattern, called boy, turned white and inside out.
Bleached skin made into a hammock from which a cinnamon bear swings.
Slurpin up the honey in his big banana tongue.
A big baby crawling and slobbering. But beautiful.
Bear face and smiling away all troubles.
Tap his foot to a soft rhythm that vibrates in his head.
A sappy branch to stir the pot and make the whole a liquid.
As honey drizzles on my mind I taste its stinging sweetness.
Through my inaction I make victims, hang them up from buildings
and cut the strings with my distance.
A sharp tooth bear cuts the recording.
The combs now solidified.
The golden syrup hiding safe and sound in the waxy room.
One day it will be spilled. One day
the shiny gold will pour into the hearts of every one who opens it. Opening. Eyes
into the sun. Golden and churning stew of sweetness crusted over. Opened.

He opened his eyes. He tried to be aware of his skull. The two circular holes in the hallow cavern that let his eyes peer out. He kept its existence apparent to himself. Cognizant of his own face without being able to see it. He sat on the edge of his bed but he stood up and looked in the large rectangular mirror mounted on the back of the door. He could see his face and the eyeholes in it. He could see himself but he tried to understand of what was beyond him. He stared until his vision lost its focus. The image imprinted on his eyes was softly blurred, but he ignored his eyesight. His eyes were open but what he was seeing was behind his eyes. He put his fingers together and picked at all the nails on his one hand with his thumbnail.

He turned to look out the window. The streetlights painted the road below. The somber shops reflected the bright lamp bulbs in their windows and shot the beams of incandescence up through his window. A ray of light isn't necessarily linear. It isn't necessarily even a ray. Light bends. It pools like water. He had the door to his room closed but the light flooding in from under it helped to illuminate the entire room and the light from aided it. He didn't have the light turned on in his room, but he could still see. His eyes could glean all the other sources of light together into one lasting image of the room he was seated in. He reclined back on the bed and stared at the ceiling. It appeared only as shades of gray, much like the rest of the room. The light wasn't enough to paint the full colors of the room, and

while he knew he could turn on the lamp in the room, he continued to lay there in the dark, not trying to sleep, not trying to see.

Her high heels clicked down the marble walkway, so she slid them off her feet and continued to walk, turning left into the office at the end of the hall. She went into the filing cabinet next to the large wooden desk in the center of the office. Her head was swirling, but she stayed on task. She flipped through the files, which were poorly organized, but she remembered where the one she was looking for was. She found and put it on the big desk.

Eight minutes later a small boy came into the office. "Where the fuck did you come from?" The boy sat sheepishly on the floor. He started writhing on the tan carpet. Foam started to pour out of his mouth. "What the fuck?" The woman dropped her file. She went over to the boy and knelt down to look at him closer. As she knelt down, a man came in through the door and kicked her in the face. Her lights were knocked out.

He was lying sitting on his bed with his eyes open when the phone call came in. The phone rang twice before he was able to answer it. A swirling sensation came over him from standing up and he had tunnel vision. He was distracted from the first words he heard over the phone call. "What did you say? Ok. Yes. Good news. Call me when you finish." He untied his shoes, slipped them off, removed his socks, his trousers, the rest of his clothes. He crawled into his bed and shut his eyes. He let out a sound before he fell completely asleep. It was a slight, laughing wheeze.

In Ordinance of Do and Do Not
By Matthew Brignola

Smoke crawled up the wall in tendrils, leaking, trickling upward, like blood streaming back into a wound. Snakes slithering away from the flames. He sat there holding the match to the paper, watching those snakes trickle and the paper wither into black.

He put the match out and held the paper loosely between his thumb and index fingers. He read the new message as the paper became flames and the flames became smoke, a different language that man could not speak, that was more pleasing than what the paper had originally toted.

The paper burned close to his fingers and he released it and it drifted to the wood floor where it perished and all that was left was a slow accumulation of ash and a myriad of snakes and streamlets that walked the walls and ceiling.

He sat there for a while, breathing, letting the snakes slither into his nose, releasing them in a deep sigh. He got up slow: his knees and back arching for a long time, until he could balance himself. He walked away from the chair, turning around it, creeping with his back still arched and his knees bent in peculiar angles. There

was a small tear in his eye, perhaps from the smoke, and he shut his eye, devouring the tear, only to spit it out once it was reopened.

The tear ran down his wrinkled cheek falling to the floor, soaking into the wooden boards, his first tear in years.

His beard was the better part of him, hiding his deep wrinkles. His hands shook gently and he lifted one up, playing with the smoke until the shaking caused it to dissipate. His hands floated down to his sides out of loneliness. He walked to the room with his bed and he opened the sheet like a page in a book. The spread was modest and the man wore a nightgown, also modest, without stripes or color. It wasn't pure white though—more gray than white and stale like the spread, like the walls, like the floor, like the man. Stale like the man who lived in a stale house and did stale things. There was no dog. Not even a stale dog. There was a man, if you could call him a man. The man had become shriveled, no longer sentient, tactless, maybe even bitter, but maybe senile, though his mind was still strong: it was his will that was scathed, his purpose in life, maybe his life itself. He no longer was a snake escaping flames; he was smoke climbing a wall, without any purpose but do and do not.

The man was not tired, but he crept under those sheets in ordinance of do and do not, in his gown, which matched the sheets only because they didn't match anything else, because they had no light or life to match anything, like the old man. He once had life and color, but like the sheets, after going through the course of things, he eventually faded into stale old bread of a man who slept in a stale bed, in the stale house, with the stale walls and floor and the modest lights that glowed ever so dimly like the man's will—glowing, but dimly.

He did not fall asleep; it was more like he was in a trance, reliving old memories. These memories were not like dreams or nightmares. They had no color but they released a gray stench that shook the man so who had only to return to his life, which he knew wasn't much of a life, so he inhaled the stench, becoming callous to his past, but deploring his present and presence.

Sometimes he did not get up for days. He kept a jug of water on the floor next to the bed: he had no table to set it on. He did get up though, but without knowledge of when. There were no clocks in the house. It was the only freedom he had—a freedom of time.

In time, the man would die, he knew, he accepted it and wanted it, but he would not make it come any sooner than designed. He actually didn't believe in design and instead understood that he might not die and he was willing to accept that too, in ordinance of do and do not. Do and do not had made him burn that paper and had made him grow his beard. It was not to shield his ugly face, there was no one to see the face, but the beard grew since the man had no razor, since the man had nothing but stale sheets and stale water.

The man sipped the water and it flooded his cracked lips, which were no longer pink, but gray. They were once lush and pink, but so were unicorns, at least that's what the man thought. Actually, unicorns were not even existent. Maybe

unicorns were his only friends, because he could think of them and they could frolic and that maybe made him happy, if he even knew what happy was anymore. But the water entered those pale lips and made wet his dry tongue, which had no purpose since the man no longer spoke. In fact, nothing of the man's had any purpose except do and do not: the tongue did not and the man did not, but his bladder did and the man got up to do and the little, yellow snakes came out of him and played in the water with the unicorns, which were gray. The snakes became gray and the man became gray and time became gray and time stopped, though the man did not know time, and the man heard the crunching of the gray gravel outside his house, as the tires of a gray sedan came to a halt.

The man had seen this coming, though he did not fear it, because fear did not act in ordinance of do and do not, since it was fear and it accomplished nothing, even though, as a whole, the man accomplished nothing. But the sedan was there and there were feet moving in the gravel and a door shutting and a voice saying, "Dad!"

The man's tongue had become dry again and he could not speak. He took a sip of water. The water was stale, but it made wet his dry tongue and he spoke:

"What do you want? What are you doing here?"

"Dad. Did you get my letter, Dad? I'm here about the letter; I have something to tell you."

"Then hurry up and tell it, 'cause I don't have the time to talk with you."

The girl came inside and saw the man sitting in the chair facing the wall, his back to her. He was wearing his colorless gown staring at something black on the floor.

"I burnt your letter. Like I burn all the others. Like I burn my memories while I sleep. Everything burning and little snakes running away into my nose and up my walls."

"What?" the girl said. "Dad, I know you don't care for me anymore, or anyone, but I have something to tell you."

"I got the letter. I don't just burn them; I read them. You've got a husband. Big deal. Why come out here and tell me? Why come and waste my time. I burn them for a reason, because they have no reason. That's all that there is in this world is no reason and if you're going to try to tell me that there is, don't bother. I'll do what I've been doing, nothing. And if that won't keep you away then I'll have to threaten you. So get on now and leave. You've got no place here."

The girl sat there looking at the man's head, thinking of a past when the man had reason and the girl knew there was reason and she remembered her mother:

"Dad I'm pregnant."

He turned in his chair and saw the girl and he saw her belly poking out at him and telling him what words he wouldn't believe:

"You're pregnant?" The belly looked at him and he could see little eyes in it calling him grandfather and he shuddered. "Your mom wanted grandchildren. And you ran away and your mom cried so and she got sick and she didn't get any grandchildren. She loved you more than she loved me. There's no reason in this world. You killed her. And now you send me letters and I burn the letters because you killed her and how can I love you now that you killed her? How can I?" He turned back around in his chair.

"The letters lied. I didn't get married and I never had a boyfriend. I was raped. I needed you the whole time, I needed you and mom both but I was stubborn and then mom died and then this happened and now I'm due in another month. I need someone to talk to dad. I need my dad. You."

The man sat facing the wall watching imaginary smoke slither up the wall. Watching those snakes climb into oblivion like he had wanted to so and he sat there wishing the snakes away and wishing his wife back and wishing everything wasn't so gray and he stood up and turned to his daughter and hugged her and said:

"I am here and I will do for you what your mother wanted to do and more importantly what I want to do. I love you."

"I love you too dad."

So that is some of my older writing. Thank you for indulging.

Here is some brand new poetry to compare:

Sitting solemnly and wistfully thinking about my ex lover. I am sure can procure another opportunity but the bitter reality is that it still stings. I am lying unable to sleep and waiting for the birds of the morning to chirp and wake me up. So I will

continue to wait for a long time and then hopefully one day I can forget about the Love we used to share together. Feelings like these hopefully fade with time so I am not condemned to always feel this pain. Oh no. A storm is coming. I should probably stand vigilant and wait for it to pass because If there's one thing I have learned is that this too shall pass. So until then I bid you farewell.

Beloved and afraid were the remnants of a different age. A bleeding arrow kisses my heart and forgotten children forget how to cry. Perhaps this is the end of an era. Why didn't we have a sage to predict this? The illusion of god is the remnant of a forgotten memory. The only thing I can say for certain is at least we get to die.

Frolicking out here in the meadow; a rather bucolic setting if I must say. Golden and white flowers surround me and in the distance I see purple mountains majesty. Wind is kissing my ears gently and I can smell the scent of blossoms. If only warlords would learn to appreciate beauty like this. We could then live in a much more peaceful place. There is no telling what the future holds but I can only hope that it's a bouquet of beautiful and Peaceful wildflowers. If peace were granted to all the nations of the world it would have to have been right here.

One of the craziest thing happened to me recently. Two of my friends told me that they have had, or have. I don't know what's the proper thing to say once your brain has been injured. One of my friends, Stephen, got a brain injury as well. He went to college with me and we both took poetry classes together. Wee would get into all sorts of antics. One of the things that he loved and frequently partook in was a thing him and some other friends called "moking". "Moking" meant tear of the tip of a cigarette, and pour it into a bong bowl with just a little bit of weed.

I must admit that I tried it, but it was disgusting. One kid, his name was Lucas, would sit in his room and moke out the window. He was extremely addicted and he

was also so depressed that he dropped out of our school and didn't return the next semester.

So yes even my wonderful friend would partake, despite how terrible it was. It was so disgusting; the tobacco turned the bong water brown. And then on top of all of that, Steve got a brain years later. Steve has been in my loop on many things, including my most recent breakup with Alison. I also told him one time when Alison had broken up with me because I was too young. The whole phenomenon was ludicrous because I was 27 and she was 38. Really that is not so far apart, but what can I say, She still would like to remain friend although she refuses to speak with me, even though I forgot why she terminated the relationship and ventured to ask her why.

The craziest thing happened recently. I thought I knew nobody else that had a brain injury but it turns out two of my friends do. One of them happens to be Steve and the other is my friend Sophia. Steve got his by drunkenly walking around a dock on a lake He fell off, most likely because he was intoxicated.

It surprises me because it seems that brain injuries are far more common than I used to think. It's sad but true. One could slip in the shower and hit his or her head. There are a number of different scenarios one could be in that would cause him or her to injure his or her brain.

So just do yourself and those you love a favor and try not to slip in the shower. It's hard to believe that such a tragic thing occurs fairly frequently. Count your stars and hope that they are lucky because this type of injury could afflict anyone. It could even afflict yourself.

So love; it is like an intoxicating substance At times too intoxicating. Maybe it's so intoxicating that it gives you the spins and you pass out. Well hopefully you, the reader, have someone you love and loves you back. But bear in mind that his or her love may fade and yours may not. I mean come on, I was going to ask a woman to marry me and then she broke up with me. Yes, let me repeat. I said I was going to ask for her hand in marriage and she chose to leave me behind.

One of the things I am so grateful for is my family. They take amazing care of me especially considering my injury. They are truly amazing but there is one thing I wish would occur sooner. We used to have an Australian Sheppard but he died. I've asked for a new dog and my parents want one too but we must wait. The other animal I would love to have is an otter. They are adorable and can even be trained how to do tricks. But getting an otter is obviously out of the question. They deserve to be in the wild. But the strange thing is I looked online and someone is selling an otter pup here in Colorado for only \$300. Compare that to some dogs, which are closer to around \$500

Yes people actually purchase them. I've looked online and seen many videos of people with otters as pets. At the very least at least I have a stuffed otter that sleeps with me with every night. So it appears having a real one is out of the question but having a stuffed one and snuggling it every night is just fine.

My love for otters is so apparent that one of the nurses who helped take care of me bought me a stuffed otter as well. The nurse at Craig got to recognize me. One nurse named Mike would mock me for always laughing. Laughter was a thing I took pride in so I would make an effort to make random patients laugh. I mean seriously: laughter is the best medicine.

That's the way it remained until the campus shut down to help prevent the spread of Corona. I loved to laugh and make other patients laugh. I believe it's important to stay positive even if extremely injured so in my mind laughter is one of the main ingredients to positivity.

I would take a moment to ask how a random patient's day was because it feels good to know that someone is asking about your day even if you have never seen that person before. So it's my opinion that small but kind things like asking how someone's day is can ultimately have a powerfully positive effect.

Yes I am a champion of love and laughter. So much so that I don't know if I would be able to live without either. Maybe I should refer to those things as the two I-s. It's important to live a life with love and that one guy over there has his hair parted funny so why not laugh and appreciate the humor of the situation?

Some days you may be sad to laugh but if you're not do your best to make yourself chuckle you silly little reader. We really are a unique species. There is no other species that I know about that is capable of laughter.

It's too easy to fantasize about a dog sitting on my feet while I pet him as I'm writing this novel. Now may not be the right moment but the time will come when I will open a new animal into my life and arms. Life is so full of things that bring one joy it can be easy to overlook even the small things. We cannot get everything that we ask for but I do believe that we receive what's important.

Writing this novel makes me notice another product of my accident and that would be double vision. It's an extremely confusing and weird phenomenon. One potential cause of it was also caused by my accident. And that is double vision. It's confusing and hard to explain what I'm experiencing. Apparently the impact from my accident made my eyes uneven which might help explain the cause of the double vision. Seriously. The only way I can try to explain it is to look at your finger. Now imagine you see two of your finger next to each other but one of them is slightly raised and to the right.

A few other weird products of my affliction is that my eyes are that my eyes are no longer even. And my speech is slower. So not only is this injury difficult because I used to be in a wheelchair but also because simply reading is difficult. And I used to love to read.

Little things such as reading is far too often taken for granted. I highly recommend that you take pride in even seemingly simple thing such as reading because if you were injured in an accident like I was, even the small things could become difficult. Life is a struggle and at times it can be painful so I also recommend that you be thankful for the simple things, like reading.

I used to be a smoker. The other strange way that my brain injury has helped me is that it has made quitting cigarettes easier. Shortly before I was injured I decided to quit and so I haven't had any cigarettes and I was hospitalized for a while which probably also prevented me from trying to smoke.

So it seems that even the worst thing that has ever happened to me was also a small blessing. In other words, I was at greater risk of contracting lung cancer before my injury but now I likely at far less of a risk. Clouds seem to have silver linings. Even dark and gloomy storm clouds.

As I would say to my friends when we were tripping on acid (lsd) and they were felling paranoid, "What's one thing you know will happen tomorrow?" And I would wait for a response and no matter how dark or depressing it was I would say, "The sun will come up."

So yes we can choose to lie to ourselves and we can pretend that we live in the darkness, or we can take pride in the consistency with which the sun rises. Some days are longer than other or if you're in Alaska some may be really short but the one guarantee is that the sun will rise.

And no I don't mean the book by Ernest Hemmingway. I mean the actual sun. Although that is a rather good book I must add. So be it in literature or in real life there are always things that we can count on. One of them is the simple fact that the sun will rise. If you think that it doesn't you're probably on a different planet than I am.

So I may have even lost the woman who I wanted to propose to but at least the sun came up. Large bright and warm the sun is here to protect us and to guide us. So if you're felling lost I recommend that you look in the sky for guidance. There were some extremely dark times of my own imagination, but that was because I didn't have the courage to acknowledge the Earth's personal illuminating or, the sun.

Yes I have contemplated some rather gloomy outcomes but the sun had other things to prioritize such as circling the globe again and again. Small consistencies such as

the sun rising every morning help keep me balanced. Even in a drug influenced daze, the consistency of the sun is inspiring. Without the heat and the light that the sun offers we wouldn't even be alive.

It may be too bright to look at directly but that is because it is so powerful. A power that some cultures chose to revere and worship. While I do not believe in god I do believe in the power of the sun and believe in it's unconscious ability to guide us. It's completely logical why some ancient humans chose to worship the sun.

Family is extremely important to me although for a while I was not talking to my father because he went to a lawyer and tried to get a guardianship ad litem which meant he felt like he wasn't being updated enough about my condition. I told him to knock it off because we had received a message from his lawyer who was my previous employer. So I told him to stop and then I got a court summons because his attorney filed the paperwork incorrectly.

My dad also used to be in the Air Force, which is probably partly responsible for the fact that he is really conservative. I on the other hand am fairly liberal when it comes to political beliefs. Not only do we disagree on politics but I dislike the fact that my father an enthusiastic Christian. I on the other hand am actually an atheist. If I did believe in a higher power I would pray to recover quicker. My father asked what I wanted for Easter and I asked him if he could pay my medical bills and he refused. My mother and stepfather have both born the brunt of paying for my medical expenses. All the praying my father has done for me has not made my medical debt go away. Family is indeed complicated at times but I am certainly lucky for all of my families help throughout my recovery.

So despite that ordeal I called him and cleared the air for me. So everything is good now between us. So finally now my familial bond has been resealed. Family is extremely important and just as one could have an unfortunate accident and get a brain injury; one could also loose the connection with his or her family.

While I made the decision for my father to be allowed to talk to me; my sister Does not talk to my father. I even tried to get her to talk to him but she would not listen. Apparently there is only so much you can try to do to mend a broken relationship. and considering the terrible break ups I've had I should know.

For a while I really disliked speaking with the man but I finally eased up. There are immense differences between my sister, my father and I. For example he is extremely Christian while my sister and I are relatively agnostic. Despite our lack of faith, when we would visit our father he would wake us up early on force us to go to church with him.

Despite how much I dislike him, I have spoken with my sister to try to convince her to speak with my father as well. Despite my good intentions and efforts my sister

has continued to refuse to speak with my father. Well I tried to help but I guess I failed. I believe in the power and love a family should have for each of its members but it appears that my intentions to have everyone get along have failed.

I have tried to fix broken relationships, Especially my own. They have all seemed to come back and bite me in the butt though. Family, in my mind, should contain immensely powerful and strong relationships. I would like to believe that I have done my best to keep mine intact; yet keeping everyone else onboard seems elusive. My sister has no issues with my mother or my stepfather but when it comes to our actual flesh and blood father she retreats.

Having a family is a blessing that my sister and me are graced with. When things do not seem quite right I attempt to make an effort to help but it appears that my efforts have recently failed. It really disappoints me because my sister has always helped me. She even helped calm me down when I was suicidal.

The gift of family is something that not every person has the luck of having. Family is a gift and one that has been stripped away from some people so I do my best to strengthen it. At times though it appears that my best is not enough. I guess that the hard reality is that a relationship is like a street in that it goes both ways

One extremely weird thing that I have come to realize is that I can't remember any of the reasons why my ex girlfriends have broken up with me. I guess I should consider myself lucky for that being the case because I bet that most men feel the same way.

It's really a peculiar phenomenon. I even forgot why my old girlfriend Rebecca broke up with me and I even dated her for four years. Not only is the day of my accident completely absent from my memory but also apparently so are all my heartbreaks.

Oddly enough I forgot why Alison broke up with me so I asked her. She said she needed to take space and refused to answer me even though she had promised me that she wanted to remain friends. I managed to get in touch with her again so I can only hope she answers me in order to help give me closure.

I have even already found a new woman that I want to be my girlfriend luckily but there is a part of me that tells me I would give up my new girlfriend for Alison. I mean afterall I had wanted to marry Alison. That means that I really loved her. Maybe I am just impatient because it hasn't been long enough for me to fall in love with Carly yet. I am fairly certain I will fall in love with Carly but as all love is formed it will naturally take time. Carly is also worried that she would be a rebound.

All the hippies of the 60s were into love for a good reason. It is a pure and enjoyable human emotion. But there is something about romantic love that can make it psychologically damaging. I mean come on I tried to move to Eastern Europe to marry a girl that I loved.

Here is another philosophical question to ponder. What is it about romantic love that makes it so psychologically dangerous? Is it because we are forced by nature to want to reproduce? Seriously. It seems as though even the world's best philosophers would struggle to answer the question of why we fall in love. There is something much larger than the desire to reproduce at play. Love is much more complex than two bodies grinding up against one another. I honestly feel that human society would fall into rapid decay if romantic love went the way of the dodo. What wouldn't you do for love? I mean I've apparently even gone so far as to consider suicide because I was so in love.

There are always small things to take pleasure in. Some are extremely small and simple for people to perform such as jumping. For about 6 months I was in a wheelchair but I recently attempted to jump and was able to without falling. That made me extremely happy because even things like walking down a stairset without a rail seem really daunting to me. Because stairs my parents installed a second one in their house. That is a prime example of how considerate, caring, and important family is to me.

While the struggle of having a brain injury is readily apparent to me; I can't even begin to fathom how difficult my condition has been to my parents. Throughout my recovery my parents have been there whether that was driving me to therapy or buying my medical bills and paying for me to go to the hospital and to go to Craig.

Some people have the misfortune of having dead parents, abusive parents, or not knowing their parents at all. So for that very reason I should consider myself blessed. Things may not always be exactly how I would like them to be but overall I must admit that I am rather fortunate for that reason despite my affliction.

I have a kind, caring and loving sister who has helped me calm down even when I was suicidal. Both her and her husband helped by talking with me when I wanted to take my own life. For that reason I consider myself to be indebted to my sister. I find it impossible to imagine what life would like without my family. Of course despite me touting my love for my family I have cursed them out, been in fights with them, and called them derogatory names. Even with that being taken into consideration I have to say that my family is the best part of my whole entire life. Because of my family I must admit that the universe has granted me a gift.

One day I hope to create my own family and I know that when I do my parents will make amazing grandparents. Without my parents it is obvious that I wouldn't exist but I also believe that my life would probably be without a purpose or that I would

be dead. I believe family is a bond. It is a bond that is stronger than titanium and supports the weight of the entire solar system.

Things could be far worse for me than just having a brain injury. My parents could be dead, I could have been adopted, or they could have neglected to pay for the care I received because of my injury. For those very reasons I have to admit that I am undoubtedly lucky. And to think that I have been compelled to take my own life despite how lucky I am is ludicrous.

It seems fairly obvious that when it comes to family I have been dealt a good hand. Yes I should definitely count my blessings and I encourage you to do the same. Maybe you have a problem with your family and if so I encourage you to call them up, tell them you love them and I am certain that if you act out of the kindness of your heart your problem will disappear.

One of the other struggles that I've been having is That I can not sleep very well. There even were a few nights where I was completely unable to sleep. I looked this up on the Internet and found that it is not uncommon for a person with a brain injury to lose sleep. I've tried a number of things to help me sleep better and they were all to no avail.

Even for a while I was not allowed to drink coffee. Then I was cleared to be permitted to have one cup a day so then I started having coffee again. My mother and I wondered if maybe the coffee was keeping me up at night. I tried going some days without drinking any coffee but even then I was still having trouble sleeping. It really is terrible not to be able to sleep well because before my accident I remember that I could easily sleep in until 1 pm.

There are small things such as being able to sleep 8 hours that make me recommend that you count yourself lucky. That is unless of course you cannot sleep well at night. In which case I have to say that I understand all too well. For me I lie in bed until what I consider a reasonable a reasonable hour to be awake. Then I get dressed or look at things on my phone.

Sleep is too precious of an activity to take for granted. I know from having been a child that went to public school that waking up early in the morning is unpleasant. And that is putting it lightly. Waking up far before most other people that are alive on this planet do frankly sucks.

When I first started going to therapy at Craig Hospital I was suffering from posttraumatic amnesia. During that Time I was apparently talking about physics and focusing on dimensions. Another person I got along with really well at Craig was studying biology and apparently I schooled him and discussed biology with him because he had homework to do that I could help with.

It's pretty interesting that I was able to recollect scientific knowledge even though I was suffering from a traumatic brain injury. I have to say I am pretty proud of baffling the nurses with my scientific knowledge. I didn't lose my ability to speak or read German, which is also remarkable.

It's also a good thing that I didn't lose the ability to write. Otherwise you wouldn't be reading this. So on that note, there are a number of things I am considerably lucky for not forgetting because my memory is still fragile. Luckily I was able to help out somebody with his biology homework.

With my memory even when I had posttraumatic amnesia as an example I would like to encourage you to be thankful again. Be thankful for what you have learned and for the ability to learn new things. Never before my injury did I really realize how fragile the gift of memory could truly be. There are moments in my life that I will never remember, such as the day of my accident, so it astounded me when my mother told me that I was spilling advanced scientific knowledge despite my amnesia at the time.

Memory is an extremely interesting aspect of human consciousness. It is a frail but vital construct of the universe. In a philosophical sense it is somewhat difficult to surmise what a memory really is. At the very least it's the ability to recall a series of events. But truly there must be more to it than that.

Having a brain injury has made me forget how to do a number of things. One that I luckily figured out how to do again was how to make electronic music in Ableton. I looked up some tutorials online to refresh my memory and it worked. One of the other odd abilities I lost was the ability to shuffle cards. I also lost the ability to play backgammon, which I used to be extremely good at and play quite often. I've played it after my accident and luckily got back my ability to play. The other thing I have lost the ability to do is play the guitar. Before my accident I had played for seven years but after I was injured I know in my head what I should do but my hands will not cooperate. I understand that all it should take to get it back is practice but I practiced for seven years before I lost the ability with being injured.

In my accident I was injured on the left side of my body and because of that I have slight inattention on the left. An example is that when I play scrabble with my family I can think of good words but will forget to lay down the left most letters in a word. For example when you put down "word" you put down "w","o","r" and "d" but I might forget to put down the "w" even though I remember how "word" is spelled.

It's weird that normally fun activities like playing games have become difficult. I prefer playing games to watching television, which is ironic because I was a film major in college. It's weird the things I have forgotten. It's weird too the things that I haven't forgotten. One prime example is that I haven't forgotten German. I read

the news in German every day. Another random but odd ability I used to have before my accident but have lost is the ability to juggle. I used to be so good at juggling that I even used to be able to do advanced tricks. I even used to be able to ride my unicycle and juggle but it's likely that I can no longer do that as well. It's also probable that I can't even ride my unicycle. I'm too hesitant to even try because my balance is impaired due to my injury. I guess it's fairly logical that someone who used to be in a wheelchair cannot ride a unicycle. I used to ride mine to my classes in college even.

Being able to unicycle is obviously a skill that I need to regain. It is sad though to know that I may have lost one of my unique abilities. A unique ability that I lost was the ability to play pool. Before my accident I would go to bars and keep control of the table for hours because I was so good. But then when I would go to Craig I found that they have a recreation room with different games and a pool table. I knew where I should hit the ball to make a shot but I would miss.

There is a possibility that you have abilities you have that you may take for granted. The bitter reality is that you could be injured and lose some of them so being thankful may be something that we know we should be but I still highly encourage you to be thankful for what you can do because a traumatic event could occur and you could lose some of your abilities.

Even your talents could be stripped away from you. Life frankly is not fair nor does it have to be. There are struggles for all of us that we must overcome. I don't believe that there is some force that chooses to make things easy for us. Apparently we have to fight really hard and the reality is that we do not always win. All we really have the choice to do is to fight until we get what we believe that we deserve.

My neuropsychologist told me that a full recovery might take three years. That is not something that I had the fortune to take lightly. I suppose it is lucky that I can recover but three years is a rather long time. As much as I am lucky for being alive three years is a rather long time to recover. I suppose things could be worse though. The tragedy of getting a brain injury is tragic. The name of my condition describes my misfortune all too well. I have a traumatic brain injury. And the irony is a therapist that I wanted to marry broke up with me and she works with people with trauma for a living. I do find it rather comical. It's better to laugh than cry in my opinion.

Three years to recover. I wish that Dr. Berry had given me the luxury of why my recovery would take three years. At the time I wasn't bold enough to ask. Why it would take three years. The fact that I can recover should be good enough. I guess I am just impatient. Not only do I wish that this had never happened to me but I also wish that despite the fact that I have experienced trauma that it could be dealt with more quickly.

There are times when I psychologically struggle with the reality of my injury. Sometimes I've just thought that it would have been more fortunate had I died. There's a part of me that doesn't count myself lucky for having an EMT ride right behind me who knew how to intubate me and prevent me from choking to death on my own blood. Yes without that man having ridden behind me I would probably be dead. So because of that man choosing to go riding on the same trail and day as me I should count myself as lucky. I wish that I could recover quicker but I am also glad that I didn't die that day. I suppose there's a bit of irony saying that when I've wanted to kill myself before. Maybe it makes more sense to consider myself an idiot. I am happy that I did not die although one day I certainly will.

Death is inescapable. You will die and I will die so I should do my best to enjoy life while I can. I like simple things such as playing cards and plying backgammon more than I enjoy watching television. I like to interact with my family and I dislike drooling at a television screen. I suppose that is also ironic because I majored in film in college and taught film to middle school students.

I have been blessed with my family. I used to drive a Honda Civic and then on a snowy day I ran into some ice on the freeway and totaled the car. My uncle worked for Autonation at the time and found me a deal on a BMW, which I ended up getting. So thanks to my uncle I got a good deal on a high-end vehicle. I used to talk about comic books with my uncle when I used to be into them. I lost my interest in comics but I didn't lose my love for my uncle.

My uncle helped me get a great and luxury vehicle and my mother has taken me to receive therapy for my brain injury. I really believe that I am incredibly lucky to have such a helpful family. Maybe one day I will create my own family to take care of. There is no telling what the future holds. The only thing I know for certain that will happen in the future is that I will die. As Alan Watts would say that is a rather gloomy perspective but the history of the human race confirms that it is a valid perspective. I think I truly understand that reality because I have had the misfortune of having a near death experience.

Having a brain injury has changed my life in a multitude of ways. One way is that before my accident I was really fit but I guess after lying in a hospital bed for a couple months I am kind of pudgy. I used to run but it's not even possible for me to anymore probably because I was in a wheelchair. I did try to jump because I hadn't done so in so long and I succeeded. I also should mention that I was in a coma for six weeks. Having been in a coma I was forced to sleep but now that I have recovered from my coma I can barely sleep at all. Some nights I've just laid in bed until I think my parents will be up so that I don't have to be alone.

Yes it does seem that there are some non-obvious consequences of my injury. It is rather unfortunate because I used to sleep in past one on the weekends. I used to go

to work at seven so maybe my inability to sleep is helping to retrain me to reenter the work force.

As there are many things that can be taken for granted my injury has taught me that most people probably also take sleep for granted. I suppose that I could consider the ability to sleep well a blessing. I know it's likely that most people have slept poorly before so you probably understand the discomfort of not being able to sleep. There were some rather unfortunate and unexpected consequences of having a brain injury. I lost the woman I wanted to marry and the ability to sleep after I incurred a brain injury. Life can be cruel and misunderstanding I suppose. But hey we are all still lucky to be alive. I choose to focus on the positive despite my misfortune.

One other positive aspect of my illness was that it helped me quit smoking. I had smoked from when I was twenty-one until I was twenty-seven. I occasionally still get cravings but because of my accident I haven't been able to drive and go to a store to buy cigarettes to fulfill those cravings

I am truly glad that I do not smoke anymore. I can only hope that I did not smoke long enough to contract lung cancer at some point in my life. Smoking is hazardous to one's health and quite honestly disgusting. I guess I started in college because this one girl I was attracted to would go smoke and I came to like the scent of the smoke. That girl also really caused one more interesting thing to occur with me. We moved in together and she chose to buy a cat. The ironic thing about that fact is that I am allergic to cats. But I grew to love that cat and he grew to love me. I convinced his owner to start letting him outside and she did, then one day she let him out and he followed me to class having to avoid cars on a busy street.

It is pretty funny to me that even though I am allergic to cats I love them. I during my recovery I have been staying at my mother's house and her next-door neighbor has cats that she takes outside on a leash. I've had the fortune to pet those cats when they were outside before and I loved it. My mother is also allergic to felines but unlike me she is extremely allergic to the point where her eyes will swell shut

I love animals but sadly the Australian Sheppard that we had died. We plan to get a labradoodle to fulfill my and my mother's desire to have another dog. I think that it will be really good for my recovery to have a loving animal to pet and hopefully relax me. It is funny because my good friend Carly has two labradoodles. She says that she is going to need to get a new one soon because one is fourteen years old. I happened to meet her two dogs before my injury. I am hoping that when we get one I can take it over to her place and mine will play with hers. Some people absolutely abhor dogs and I believe that those people are insane. A dog is man's best friend as the saying goes.

I intend to let our two labradoodles play together when my family finally gets one. I have wished that I had a furry friend to give love to throughout my recovery. Snuggling a soft and furry animal has to be therapeutic. Another deficit that my injury has caused is that my ability to play chess has been impaired. I used to play all the time so I got an application on my phone that I would win against other player on. But now that I have a brain injury I have not been able to win even once.

I used to also be really good at backgammon but I have been getting that skill back. Luckily I can still play Scrabble pretty well because it seems that I don't have many mental deficits. For some reason I cannot win a game of chess on that app though which is unfortunately because I used to be so good.

It seems that due to my injury I have lost a few abilities unfortunately. I used to make electronic music in the program Ableton pretty easily and luckily after exploring the program I released a new track under the pseudonym Tobo. I chose that name because my friend in New Mexico gave me a patch that had 'tobo' sewed into it that a child had made.

I know that it is a goofy name but it has emotional significance to me so I chose it as my electronic musician's name. I am particularly fond of electronic music and have been to music festivals that bring out electronic music artists. I love music. It is a unique form of art. One thing I used to do before my injury that was also artistic was that I painted pretty often but since I got my injury it is somewhat difficult for me to draw. I got to paint at Craig a couple of times but it was not quite the same as before my accident. I guess that just goes to show how detrimental my injury has been to my abilities.

My injury has taught me that abilities and skills should not be taken for granted. I only hope that with patience and practice that I can paint like I used to but I don't know if I am willing to put in the patience and practice to be able to play the guitar again. It appears that my injury has produced a number of deficits and something tells me that there are more than I am aware of. I understand that it is normal for some people to lose abilities and skills so I guess I should not feel that unfortunate. After incurring a brain injury I believe it is safe to say that my life will never be the same as it was before my accident.

My brain injury has cost me love and skills it seems. If life were a game of chess I would say that my brain injury has rendered me mated. Since I did not die I would like to say that I was not checkmated though. It honestly helps me to focus on the positive side of things because in a different space-time-continuum I could be dead. As I firmly believe, the only guarantee in life is that I will die. As Alan Watts said in the quote I shared from him that could be considered a rather gloomy perspective but points to a reality that we will all have to confront at some point I think it would be hard to argue that we are not destined to die at on point but I suppose that is

what has is a statement that is up for philosophical debate. I believe firmly that one should make the most of this life because I don't think that anyone has the opportunity to live forever.

One other miraculous thing that my therapists did to help me recover while Craig shut down due to the pandemic was to send me work to do via email. I received worksheets to do from my speech therapist Sherry and I received physical exercises and stretches from my physical therapists to help loosen up my body. I may no longer be wheelchair bound but my legs are still extremely stiff. It is unfortunate because I used to run for exercise and now even walking is more difficult than it was before I sustained my injury. I used to be active and go to the gym and lift weights but I probably will not be able to do those activities for a while.

Some people do not go to the gym because they are lazy but I cannot go because of my injury. Now I consider physical fitness a gift. Not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to work toward becoming physically fit. I now that I am no longer wheelchair bound I often take a walk everyday, which is still, considered a form of physical activity. Walking makes me feel tired after a walk but I still cannot sleep very well due to my brain injury. Some people likely sleep too much but I cannot sleep very well on the other hand. I guess it is safe to say that feeling tired is not exactly the same thing as being sleepy. When I explain to my mother that I did not sleep she does not believe me. I do not know what to do to have her believe me. Maybe I could find a doctor who can perform a sleep study. I have heard the saying that sleep is for the weak so according to that saying I take it that I must be incredibly strong. I honestly wonder what that saying is actually supposed to mean.

I read that that is a saying that Marine Corps drill sergeants used to rally their cadets. I honestly do not believe that sleep is for the weak but instead that it is for the fortunate. I think when people accidentally wake up late for work they need to at least be thankful for the fact that they were able to sleep for that long. I have shifted my perspective to think that sleep is for the fortunate. I used to sleep in and stay up late but due to my injury I go to bed at a reasonable hour but now I go lay down really early and get up very early. I am not cleared to even return to work yet but I consistently wake far earlier than I did before I had my injury and had to be at my job at seven in the morning. Maybe the day I was injured in my accident a gypsy cursed me so that I could no longer sleep well. If I believed in the supernatural I think it would be fair to assume that I was cursed. Maybe it was because my hair is curly and if I could not sleep my hair would straighten.

One day we must lay down to sleep forever but I do not see that as a consolation to my current condition. I used to get wasted and go to sleep pretty early but now because of my injury my doctors have advised me not to drink until I fully recover. No one warned me that I might not be able to sleep because of my injury though. I imagine that most people would see the fact that I have a brain injury as being unfortunate but I think the fact that now that I cannot sleep is the most unfortunate

aspect of my condition. I would gladly go back in time and still have my brain injured if I could have the ability to sleep better.

One rather unique ability that I have lost because of my accident is the ability to whistle. I used to be able to warble but now I can only make a slight whistle sound come out of my lips. Medically I have not been told why I lost that ability nor was I told that that could be a potential consequence of my injury. I cannot sleep very well so I wake up early and hear birds chirping but I sadly can no longer mimic them. I am glad I did not lose the ability to write though. Fortune is still existent in the most serious conditions it appears. I love writing so I would have felt extremely devastated if I had lost the ability to write due to my condition. I guess if I want to look on the bright side I should say that I am lucky with all things considered.

I would like to ask you dear reader to ask yourself if you would consider yourself lucky if you were in my shoes. But do not worry my shoes do not really stink. So feel free to try them on. I would hope that you try to exist on the positive side of the spectrum of philosophies. Because remember my catchphrase; the sun will come up. I prefer to be optimistic which I know sounds ironic coming from a person who used to be suicidal. There are really no guarantees in life except that the sun will rise every morning and that it would be sad if one had a traumatic brain injury. Now I am just referring to myself I guess. I hope you do not feel sad for me. Consider the fact that T almost died but I did not. I would consider that lucky and I would hope that you would as well. Maybe I have an angel looking out for something or me. But I do not even believe in god so I hope you will understand that I do not believe in angels either. Nor do I believe in miracles although it is fairly miraculous that I did not die in my mountain biking accident.

Be it god be it an angel or be it some unheard of cosmic force I think that something may have been looking out for me the day of my accident. Having just communicated one might think that I believe in god after I almost died but I still do not. I do believe that from the visions I have had that if there is in fact an all-powerful deity that it is a woman rather than the Christian image of an old white and bearded man.

Perception is fragile. Philosophically I would consider perception to be on a shifting and eschewed spectrum. One day something might make you happy and another day the same thing very well might make you sad. That is the core of perception. Human emotions are not like a book. They cannot be simply read and remembered. I think they are honestly more like waves on a beach. Some are small and some are big. But all waves have a beginning and an ending. Waves are dependent on wind to create just as emotions are dependant on our surroundings to be formed.

I think that is one of the reasons why I enjoy psychedelics. Psychedelics show you how fragile perception is. When I dated Jade she told me one time when she was on acid she looked at her arm and it turned into water. I took acid that same night but I was freaked out because we were watching a television show where a man had his

throat slit with a box cutter. I find movies or television shows that show a throat being slit to be particularly terrifying.

One annoying and confusing aspect of my recovery has been that I live with my parents until I finish recovering and we got in an argument about how much I have actually recovered. I was talking about that I've recovered enough to go back to work or if there was not a job available to me to be able to me I would go back to school to get a graduate degree in neuropsychology but my stepfather said that I would not be accepted because of my injury. We fought and it made my mother and me cry. I felt like how much I have recovered was being discredited and that I was subhuman. I love my family but I could not understand their perspectives in that argument.

I understand that my injury is not easy to handle for my family but is it fair for your family to underestimate your abilities? I think not. I suppose that is why we had the felling to argue with one another. I did not understand. Families are supposed to understand and listen rather than deject. What is the take away from that anecdote? I suppose it could be to forgive and forget it is only a wee bit difficult because I am so head strong.

My neuropsychologist told me that my recovery would be hard for me and my family but not that my family would doubt my abilities that I worked hard to recover. I suppose it would take far more time and potentially a second degree to understand all the potential struggles a person with a brain injury. Life is neither fair nor necessarily easy. Human history has resulted in a thorough documenting of the human struggle. Things could always be worse than they actually are.

My injury has taught me a lot about the limitations of being a human. We may be limited but we have the ability to experience love and joy and I do not know if there is conclusive evidence to prove that any other non-human species can experience those emotions, especially at the same time. If you know of one and have conclusive evidence please write a book about it.

My friend told me that she thinks dogs and orca whales are capable of experiencing both love and joy but I do not know if she is right. She says it is because they release a lot of oxytocin. I will accept that as a good response because it has a scientific backing. This world is ridiculously complex and biological life is so complex that it is perplexing. Apparently she did her research and it states that they are incapable of loving romantically they just form a mother to baby bond and a male orca will leave its father and a female orca to return to its mother. I said that maybe dolphins have read too much Sigmund Freud. I suppose that would be a reasonable explanation of the phenomenon.

So from that anecdote it seems clear to me that there is not a reasonable explanation why humans experience romantic love because there is no other species we can

compare the phenomenon with. I consider myself a lover not a fighter and believe that I personally need romantic love. It is supposedly better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all. I hope that is a true philosophy because I have definitely lost. I am sure that many adults have lost love as well. Without love where would the human species be? I think that we would likely have gone extinct a long time ago.

I wonder if any philosophers or scientists ever wrote their philosophies and discoveries down while they had a brain injury. If I had to bet I would say that that is probably unlikely. Newton got hit in the head with an apple but I know from my studies that that did not cause him to have his brain injured. If he had his brain injured then that would have had to be a huge apple. "Not only does gravity exist but there are mutant apples. Imagine the world we would live in if we had not discovered gravity. It is strange to wonder what people must have thought before Newton published those findings.

Knowledge is power. At this point in history there is a large foundation of knowledge for humans to take advantage of. I suppose then if the saying is true then humans are extremely powerful. There is a lot of science fiction that shows aliens defeating humans but I think that we are knowledgeable enough to overtake any alien race that found Earth. The source of our knowledge stems from the biological ability of humans to grow a brain. The sad thing is that my brain has been damaged. Does that make less of a human? I think not and hopefully you do to.

I will recover fully one day but I do not know if it would be technically correct to say that I would no longer have a brain injury or if medically I would have one for the rest of my life. Any doctor never explained the concept to me. I may not recover fully for three years but even after will I still have a brain injury. That makes me think of the Pink Floyd song called Brain Damage. I suppose that at the very least that my injury could potentially provide a rock group with an interesting title for a song that they eventually write.

I believe it is good to remain positive even when you have experienced trauma. The sun will rise after all and you can always count on that. Sure things always could be worse but if there is any respite from potential pain and suffering it is that things get better with time. Some situations we wind up in may not resolve fully based on your standards but a positive outlook should help guide you threw to a reasonable conclusion. I do not think you need a guru to teach you that the key to happiness is inside yourself. That is how I choose to think about my injured brain. It could always be considered injured but it will constantly get better. Maybe that is already a mantra or should be. Things will always get better so stay positive.

Everyone has the possibility to be fortunate. I believe it mostly depends on your mental outlook. I do not believe in god even though I have had visions and I think the keys to happiness are in your heart and mind. That reminds me of another band.

The Head and the Heart. Those who become inspired create Art. I love art. I love both painting and drawing although my brain injury has made me worse at both. Art is a gateway to the human soul. It can be beautiful and it can be brutally honest. Where does inspiration truly come from? I bid you to ask yourself that question. I think it very well may take an advanced degree in philosophy to truly be able to answer that question.

Beauty abounds us. I find it in paintings, sculptures, philosophical debate, and of course women. I believe that beauty is at the core of nature. All living creatures exhibit beauty in some fashion. I believe that your perception of beauty of beauty should not be limited to people of the opposite sex. I understand that if it were not for sex our species could not procreate but there is more when it comes to beauty than sexual attraction. Affection requires more than an erection. Does love require sex? I hope you love you parents and would not have sexual intercourse with them.

What is the gateway to the human soul? I firmly believe that the gateway is love. I may have lost the ability to walk at one point because of my injury but I did not lose the ability to love. Of course it is better to fall in love than it is to fall off a cliff. Positivity is purely a matter of perception. I have met people who are particularly negative but I do not let their mental states get me down. Instead I focus on a different narrative. Sure you could be having a bad day but at least there is a day to have.

The ability to perceive is a gift and one that we should not squander. Mind altering substances can help one see that perception is fragile. In Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave" there are humans who are unable to observe their environment because it is obscured by the cave walls. The story focuses on the philosophical ability to perceive. One of the prisoners in the cave goes on a journey and shifts his perception and realizes that there is beauty and meaning to life. I think that that allegory is a perfect example that perception is fragile. We ultimately choose how we feel and what we believe. Aldous Huxley wrote a book called *the Doors of Perception*. Huxley thought that the psychedelic substance mescaline was capable of showing that our perception is fragile. I also believe that psychedelics show us humans that our perception is fragile and can be warped. Although I believe that there is far more to understanding the power of your perception than just consuming psychedelic substances.

I had a near death experience and I believe that that experience truly helped me to realize how perception is a gateway to the universe. The ability to perceive is philosophically complex and our perceptions can shift depending on what we experience. Our lives are always subject to change and so is our perception. Both have really changed for me after I was injured.

I think when we are in love we often have a profound understanding of reality. Love could be the glue that binds our perception to us. When we feel fragile and afraid.

Perception is the strongest weapon we have to protect ourselves with. As I said in telling my story of wanting to commit suicide in Berlin I used to be afraid of heights. To counter that fear and shift my perception I chose to defy my fear by climbing trees and the roofs of buildings. What we perceive in reality is a choice. Some things we choose to see, while we choose to ignore other things. Sometimes when we make choices we make mistakes. What I mean is that negative emotions and feelings are a choice. Things do not have to be perfect how things truly are a matter of perception. That is why I choose to focus on beauty and love. I truly believe that those things help to guide us through life and that we would be lost without them.

Now that I have covered philosophy I would like to discuss psychology. My mother is actually a school psychologist who has worked with people who have brain injuries. I am rather lucky that she understands my injury. I cannot imagine that people that get brain injuries are so lucky to have a mother who has worked with people with. Psychology is a rather interested field of science. I appreciate my mother's perspective.

I have taken it upon myself to diagnose one of my good friends. Some of his behaviors and some things that he has posted online serve as evidence to me that he has a narcissistic personality disorder. Another way of putting what I think is that I believe he has megalomania. I say that because he says weird and narcissistic things online like asking for tips on starting a religion. To control and me you have to be narcissistic to believe that you should dictate what other people believe in. I can only imagine that people with narcissistic personality disorders may have founded some of the world's religions.

The only guarantees that we have in life are supposedly death and taxes but I take it that my friend believes that we should all be guaranteed a leader to dictate our thoughts and control what we believe. Honestly I think the cause of his potential megalomania may have resulted from the fact that he has taken to many psychedelic substances. After all he likes to go by the name "Myco" which he came up with because the word mycological means the study of mushrooms and he used to take psychedelic mushrooms, which contain psilocybin even though they had the tendency to make him sick to his stomach.

I have to admit that I like psychedelics too but I do not believe that I should be the founder of a religion. That just screams to me narcissistic personality disorder. To want to control what people believe and think has to stem from a disorder. People do not deserve to have that much power. The only places I know of in the world where one can be controlled so much is in dictatorships.

To think that if you want to start a religion probably means that you want to control what people think and believe which to me screams megalomania. Self-admitting that you might have a psychological disorder and then refusing to take psychological help when your parents offer to take you to a therapist are not traits that I think that

a leader should have. If your ego is inflated how do you deflate it? I think that being willing to see a therapist would help. But after all I am neither a therapist nor a psychologist and I only took one class on psychology in college but it did mention personality disorders. If he wants to control other peoples' lives then why does he not just have children? It might be because he is to psychologically unstable to attract a mate. I love that man as a friend but his psychological state honestly worries me and I believe that a psychologist should evaluate and treat him him.

I assume that it is fair to believe that we all may meet and make friends that we consider strange in our lives. A friend is still a friend. I love my friend "Myco" but I do want him to get some outside help. Limitations do not always define the totality of a person though. And I do believe a psychological disorder would be considered a limitation. Because of the limitations I have from my injury I do not think that my brain injury is the most defining aspect of who I am. The human mind is a complicated mess at times but there are people trained to others clean up those messes. I guess though that some people prefer to leave those things messy. I like to tie up my loose ends and I suppose that other people do not mind if they create a knot.

I do believe it is better to make friends and not enemies, but it is also fair to inform a friend of their flaws. We deserve to learn from one another and we do not need to force our beliefs on anyone else. That is what worries me about someone who believes that he or she should start a religion. Religions tell their constituents what to believe. I honestly do not believe that humans should be allowed to control what others believe or think.

I suppose there are some extenuating circumstances where that is ok. For example I live in America and our president is given the power to tell us what to do and the president often tries to inform citizens with what to think and believe. So if my friend wants that kind of power he should run for a political office. You do not control what people do. They get to decide. Freedom of choice is important and power to the people rather than the individual. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." I believe that we all have the potential to be winners rather than losers. Freedom begets the freedom of choice. We all deserve to be who we want to be and I think that means that we should not attempt to control what others believe.

You ask someone to go on a date or marry you. You do not club someone you are attracted to and force them into sexual slavery. I believe in freedom as long as when you take advantage of your freedom you do not infringe on anyone else's. Life is like a puzzle. Some pieces may not seem to fit right away but you should not force them. Life is a mystery and is full of many choices so it is best to choose wisely. One wrong choice and you may never have the opportunity to choose again. Because of my injury I have lost many things I used to have but I did not loose the ability to do what I believe is right. I do not believe it is right to tell others how to act or feel.

My injury may have limited some of my physical abilities but it did not limit my emotional capacity. I still love my family, my friends, and I am confident that I will fall in love with another woman. No one decides for me who I can love. I honestly do not even decide whom I fall in love with. Like a cougar hunting its prey love just sneaks up on me. Love is not a game. I do not believe there are any rules except that you should also love yourself before you can truly love anyone else.

Love is a gateway. It is not a trap because you are not stuck in love but I do not believe that as a human you have to love. Love is a product of emotions. No one is forced to fall in love. I do not think it is possible to force someone to do that. The possibility love potentially stems from a mystical source. Is love binding? Can it be? I think that it definitely can be and that love is a necessary component of what it means to be human. Love is a sensation that we have been lucky enough to feel. Were we meant to fall in love? Do we have to? I honestly cannot speculate on the answer for everyone but I believe the answer is yes for both of the questions for me.

Love swims in the ocean of emotions and if you just keep swimming love will catch up to you. Romance is tangential to the soul because it must come before love. I am a quest for love and I will not give up until I find romantic love again. I think that the human heart was built for love. Be love just a natural consequence of biology or be it a creation of a divine origin, we need love as humans if we want our species to continue to exist.

Love is like an incurable illness. I cannot escape it and I feel it physically inside of my heart. How can biology explain why my heart palpitates when I am in love? In other words, love is physical for me. I have been speaking with Carly who I have been falling in love with and I can tell I am falling in love because when I speak with her I physically feel it in my heart. I believe we were born to meet and fall in love with one another. Patience is necessary but I will wait for her. My heart has been trampled on before but I am not afraid to fall in love again. Be it a blessing or be it a curse, but love does not have to be ephemeral and it is ridiculously beautiful. In the Buddhist train of thought love is immaterial. Love is a feeling therefore it really cannot be quantified. That would just be silly. "I love her three times more than I did yesterday." Sure you can love someone more than you did before but could it be possible to love someone a mathematical amount.

Human emotion cannot be simplified. Someone is always more than just happy or sad. There are no limits to what one can feel. At least there are not limits that I am aware of. I feel therefore I am. I love therefore I am. I just want to spread love to the entire world. Everyone deserves to feel love and to be hugged. I hope there is more love than hate in this world. I do not hate anyone. Love is a gift of the heart and perhaps one of the most essential emotions.

You will find it or it will find you. I believe everyone is destined to fall in love. Sadly there are no guarantees that someone will love you in return. I cannot imagine if I had never been in romantic love. It feels far too natural for me to avoid. Is love a consequence of being alive? It very well may be but I cannot escape the reality that I want to fall in love. The human heart is a vessel. I think it cannot only carry blood but it can contain the emotion of love. I can always count on the fact that the sun will rise every morning and that I will always end up falling in love. Some things are unavoidable.

Truth accompanies honesty. It gives earnestness some verisimilitude. Birth may be the beginning of your life but you cannot escape death. That is why I emphasize love so much. We can live a lie or we can live with honest intentions. People are more likely to believe you if you are being honest. Being a liar is a dangerous thing. Honesty wins you friends and love an lying can earn you things as well but if you had to lie to get them I do not think that you deserved them and should give them back. Of course I have lied before to get what I want but I have shifted my behavior to resist the urge to do so.

Do you normally believe someone that you know lies frequently to get what he or she wants? I hope that you do not. Truth is not guaranteed. You have to earn someone's trust first. People can often do things to deceive you. We have to be vigilant and steer clear of deception. Being truthful negates deception. You cannot lie to make yourself happy. Although there might be some extenuating circumstances where lying could help protect you, it normally lying makes people lose trust in you and avoid you.

Lying may make you feel more confident at times but then your confidence is a sham. Truth is ultimately more powerful and productive to propagate. Cheaters and liars are at the bottom of the totem. Humanity is built on lies and neither should your life be. I feel accomplished when I tell the truth and not when I lie about what I did.

The way you grow is by learning from your mistakes and not by lying about what you have done. One day you will die and would you rather be remembered for your honesty or for the lies you have told? Lying might help to get you out of a pickle but I would prefer to eat a pickle. Take something that you see is bad or harmful and apply a positive twist. I wish my brain was not injured but It has helped me realize some of the limitations of being a human. You are responsible for your outlook on life. Take care of it. Do not let people tell you what to believe. I recommend you decide for yourself. Decision-making is a process. It should not be something that anyone else forces you to do. Being truthful proves to others that you are fair and patient. Rewards come to those who earn them with the truth.

To err is to be human and to forgive is to forget. Some people may think that by lying they can earn power but just as George Washington never told a lie, neither should you. The irony is that whoever said that George Washington never lied made up that fact. In other words he lied about George Washington. Lying hopefully does not make you feel confident whereas hopefully earning respect by telling the truth hopefully does. Honesty is both meritorious and an acquired skill. There is a reason why parents scold their children for lying. I would rather be remembered for telling the truth even when the truth may be hurtful. You are whom you are and hopefully you do not feel that you need to lie to yourself to make yourself feel better.

I can only anticipate the day when I am fully recovered. As I mentioned my neuropsychologist told I that that could take up to three years. Although I do not like the sound of that reality, I just keep swimming. Things will get better. I do not control everything in my whole life but I do control my own outlook. I told my friend Carly that she is the reason that I want to be alive. She said that is a lot of responsibility and that she really appreciates me as well. I told her that is how much she means to me. I have fallen in love with her already and sadly I cannot see her because of the pandemic. Lucky stars need to be counted but I think I lost my mine because of my injury and this atrocious pandemic.

Hope and inspiration can come from many places. There are no limits. That is why I believe it is important to take time to inspire others. You can choose to just coast effortlessly through this life or you can choose to work hard to help others. I think one of those options seems more obviously fulfilling. Choose wisely. Being alone can be restorative and generative but connecting with others can help you lift yourself up and feel empowered. Inspiration can come from many places but it feels good when someone you know gives it to you. Love is inspiring so that is probably one of the reasons that I always seek love out.

What would life be like without love? I riddle you this: would it even be worth living at all? I have certainly questioned living because of love but I still continue to seek it out. As the saying goes it is better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all. Life is like a puzzle. Some pieces do not seem to fit anywhere so you move on to the next one until you find one that fits. The power of romantic love is immense. My injury has made me forget many things but it did not make me forget how to love. The Beatles seemed to have understood. "Love is All You Need." I must ask the question. Was that just too much drug use talking or were they really on to something? I know where I stand on that one and I bet that you can guess where I stand too. Love seems to have existed since the dawn of humankind. Am I just inspired to love because of the biological need to procreate? I think not. Love is a complex emotional feeling and one that I believe we will never truly understand

The human capacity to love is immense. Is there such a thing as loving too much? There certainly is not. Love is like the glue that binds our race to existing. Without the capacity to love we would be lost. Would you rather live this life alone or live it

with someone you love. Biologically speaking we are more likely to procreate if we are in love. That means that without love our species might be extinct. Love is immaterial. Does it have a spiritual origin? Is it sacred? Love is more than just an emotion. It is a tool to sustain life. Sure love may be the topic of trite love songs but it is and was the motivation for many artists. Love is more than just the chemical release of dopamine, norepinephrin, and serotonin. It is believed that scientifically love mirrors Coulomb's law. Opposites attract. That statement does not seem to be true when it comes to character and personality. I am a firm believer in science and love but it appears that love might be more complex.

Does love need to be fully understood to want it in your life. Once again, I do not think so. I want it and I really do not understand it. Love is an infinitely complex emotion. Love comes in many shapes and forms. Love does not discriminate based on race or nationality. Love can be romantic or it can be platonic. Any type of love is wonderful to feel. We are not empty husks without a purpose. Instead were emotional and contemplative organisms. Emotions are a language that we all need to learn how to speak.

Huge scientists have tried to speculate on why love exists. One particular scientist was the biologist Charles Darwin who speculated that the ability for humans to love led to the expansion of our species. In other words, if it were not for love our species might be extinct. I understand more clearly after doing this research why I constantly look for someone to love romantically. Romantic love is like a magnetic that attracts me. I cannot escape it.

Love is more than just an emotion that we experience. It is a force helps keep our species alive. To me a life without love would not be worth living. I suppose it makes sense that I would believe in that philosophy because love has made me suicidal before. I need romantic love. I am not a fortuneteller but I see it in my future for the rest of my life.

I think of love like a patch of flowers growing in a barren wasteland. Love brings us emotional peace even in the grimmest of situations. The flowers make the wasteland more appealing to look at. Without love the wasteland would be barren and depressing. Love is not irreverent. It is an emotion built on a foundation of respect. If you love someone romantically I bet that you are committed to that person and show him or her respect. Love forces us to be considerate. Therefore love makes the human species more aware of its surroundings.

Would you rather stumble in the dark or have the light of love help guide you? I would hope that the answer to that question is obvious. Love is conjectured to have a physiological effect on humans. Two examples are shortness of breath and increased heart rate. I know this to be true because I love Carly and when I speak her I feel like my heart palpitates. So romantic love is not just an emotional feeling but it is also physical in my own experience. I do not believe that there are

emotional limitations to how much we can love another person or that there should be limitations. I believe in the philosophy of live and let live but I also think that we should love and let love. There were times in American history where people did not approve of love based on racial reasons. What dark and depressing times. Again we are lucky for the sixties and the clarity those times brought to loving one another, especially romantically and disregarding race or creed. We cannot escape history but we can and should learn from it. Times have and will always have the potential to be tough. So if we support one another and stick things out, we will endure through any calamity.

I realize that I have not delved into the details of my brain injury. Specifically I was injured in my frontal and temporal lobes. Craig Hospital gave my family literature on my brain injury. In the *traumatic Brain Injury* book that Craig gave me the author mentions that your memory, Alertness and orientation can be affected. The book mentions that when you come out of a coma the equipment and other aspects of the setting you are in may confuse you. My mother told me that when I first came out of my coma in the hospital that I thought I was on a plane and going on a trip. I assume that was probably because I perceived the waiting chairs as being similar to plane passenger seats. They mention that note taking may be helpful because short-term memory can be impaired. The guide also mentions that a brain injury may be rather hard for family members to deal with. I assume that last statement is fairly obvious.

One thing I asked my mother and she confirmed because she has worked with people with traumatic brain injuries was whether I will be considered to have a brain injury for life. No matter how much therapy and additional care I get I will have brain injury until I die. That is a difficult reality to let sink in. Some components of my condition make me feel like a freak. I get a symptom of a brain injury called clonus, which is a series of repetitive and involuntary movements. My feet will tap frequently without me doing it on purpose. Worst of all is that sometimes my right hand flaps involuntarily as well. I am lucky to be alive but I am unlucky in so many other ways. The Craig guide also mentions that someone with a brain injury may have difficulty following complex directions.

The reality of my condition has really sunk in. I will never be fully the same as I was before I was injured. Things are supposed to change but not necessarily as they changed for me. I need to be confident and understanding of myself but there are days where I feel like a burden. I used to live on my own, cook all my own meals, and drive on twelve-hour trips by myself. Now I do not even know if I can still ride a bike and I used to even know how to ride a bicycle. Sometimes I feel like life is a gas. That means that sometimes it causes me displeasure. Which I imagine is a normal phenomenon.

There have been times where I felt as if I was in a downward spiral. Now that I have a brain injury I feel the same but that I am slowly spinning out of control. I am not the same man that I was before and I will never be again. I can recover and make

progress in my recovery but that does not negate the reality that I am a changed man. Change can be good and sometimes necessary but it can also be unwanted and unavoidable. You're supposed to be the change that you want to see in the world but I do not want to see the change that I am. Maybe I should go see a mystic and they could help me understand more deeply the reality that I must now live in. In my state of post-traumatic amnesia I thought I was at an airport so I guess I should have gotten on a flight to India and found a guru to consult with. There are many mysteries in life and I think that I must be one of them. Not only do I need to see a guru but it might also help to solve my mystery if I see a detective.

May I have forgotten who I was because of my injury, like I forgot many other things? I did not. I am a twenty-seven year old male with a goatee and brown curly hair. I still like to write luckily. I still intend to write at least a second book in my life that focuses on the story of my Bulgarian grandfather who I never met before he died. I did not forget that I never met him. A man named Ilia Stoil Georgiev. he escaped from the communist government that took over Bulgaria. Our identities are an important thing to not forget. You are partially comprised of those who came before you. Ancestry is inherited. We are products of the choices our ancestors made. We normally cannot change what was done before us. Life seems to always find a way. We cannot escape or biological propensity to procreate. Therefore family is a product of nature, just as we all are.

Our legacies usually outlive us all. I believe that nature helps mold us and that we are all given the choice to build our own legacies. I think it is important to leave behind things that you will be remembered by before you die. To forgive is to forget but while I want people to be forgiven I do not want to be forgotten. I will grow old and die but I will be remembered for many things rather than just having gotten old and dying. It is up to all of us to leave behind things that we can each be remembered by. We may not choose who we are entirely but we make whom we are whether we want to or we do not. To live in the moment means that you have to be present. The more present that you are the more likely you are to be remembered. My injury has taught me that memory is a gift and one that you can lose whether you want to or not. We are bound by nature. In other words we are not fully in control no matter how much you want to be. I have made mistakes that I wish that I could forget but I guess that my injury was not that considerate of what I would still be able to remember.

Some things are circumstantial and some things are purposefully designed. Maybe there is a greater purpose to my injury. Maybe there is a larger purpose and reason for me having been born at all. Did I have a near death experience to learn a lesson about what it means to be alive? I certainly learned that by not dying I am lucky enough to still be alive but something tells me there is a greater lesson. Our lives are just a speck of dust in the totality of life in the universe. The human will is not a fabrication of nature, nor is it a joke. It is instead a powerful and deterministic effect of being alive. Will is a corollary to purpose and design. You act according to nature

and according to your own will. I suppose there are some extenuating circumstances that can prove the opposite of that statement.

Let's hope that you are not regularly controlled in such a way and that you are free to do what you want and are free to be true to yourself. To be ruthless is a necessary component to being who we really are. You are who you are and hopefully not who someone else wants you to be. Live with a purpose rather than just acting according to circumstance. You are strong and you are meaningful. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise. People may try to walk all over you but they will only get to do so successfully if you allow them to. Your wish is your command. You are hopefully not a servant and if you are I would like to encourage you to rebel.

Time is uncontrollable. If there was a dial that could roll back time I would go back to the day I was injured and give my car flat tires and leave a note saying that I am from the future and that I would get injured if I went to winter Park. I never read *The Time Machine* by Hg Wells and I assume that it does not include instruction on how to build a time machine that actually works. I would imagine that we need a team of Nobel prize winning physicists to discover a unified field theory first. I can only guess that one will not be discovered in my lifetime and that it is highly improbable that one is ever going to be discovered.

Maybe I needed to be injured to realize my true purpose in life. Or maybe there is a god and it was extremely angry with me. If there is a god it apparently did not want me to die that day because I came ridiculously close. Me being the sap that I am I think it was to make another woman fall in love with me. I do not need to get married. I just need a woman to love me romantically. I personally feel that I do not have to procreate just that I need romantic love. Am I defying my biological purpose by admitting that? If I knew a biologist I would ask him or her. I think I am a sap. Not sap from a tree but a person who cannot focus on anything other than being in love again. Do you think it is absurd to be so focused on my desire for romantic love? It very well may be but I would not change that fact about me, even for one million dollars. Biological love serves a purpose and I believe it is more than just the biological drive to procreate.

Emotional understanding seems to be a natural consequence of being a human. What is the purpose of emotions in the first place? Humans have them and we cannot escape them. Feelings are not physical although they can have physical consequences, just as love can. Emotions are thought to impair judgment at times. For example, sometimes people fight physically because of their significant others cheat on them. Negative emotions can result in causing negative physical consequences. My injury did not impair me emotionally, or at least I do not believe that it did.

Life will not necessarily forgive you for mistakes that you make due to your emotions. There are a number of chemicals that are released as a result of

emotions. Serotonin and dopamine are probably the two most well known brain chemicals but oxytocin is a very important neurotransmitter that we release when we are in love. Maybe my brain releases an abnormally large amount of oxytocin because I am constantly falling in love. Our bodies have to obey their chemistry and mine must obey mine. The fact that I am constantly falling in love makes me wonder why love seems like such an integral component of our biology. I will say it again, I highly doubt that it is just the biological drive to procreate. Love is more than just a biological consequence of the need to produce other humans. I think that it is more than a series of neurotransmitters and hormones being released in our brains. I do not choose to fall in love, instead it just happens to me.

I am a lover and not a fighter. I think that the first person I loved was when I was in middle school. Other kids would fight with one another in the halls and I would kiss girls even in front of teachers. Is love an act of rebellion? Under some regimes it certainly was if you loved the wrong group of people. Geopolitics cannot explain the human propensity to fall in love. Both strict communists and strict anarchists have fallen in love. Love knows no boundaries. I know that I was biologically constructed to be able to love but was there a gene that I was born with that makes me fall in love so often? Maybe I should meet a biologist so that he or she could try explaining that to me. I love love. Love is all I need. I would burn a briefcase full of a million dollars that was given to me just to fall in love again.

The sun goes up and the sun goes down. I fall in love with a woman and she breaks up with me but I fall in love again. Just like the natural cycle of day and night, the frequency with which I fall in love has been cyclical. Love is like a mountain. I am from Colorado so I adore mountains. Mountains can be cold and frequently are harsh places for animals to live in, but there are some species of animals, like pikas, that only live on mountains. Just like the fact that love can be painful but I constantly fall in love time after time, certain animals continue to live in the harsh terrain of a mountain and procreate even though there are many more habitats to dwell in.

Maybe now my comparison of love and a mountain is a little clearer after that explanation. Humans feel accomplished when they climb mountains. I feel accomplished when a woman falls in love with me. Women are more than just physically beautiful to me. I love women that I find to be emotionally beautiful as well. I have tripped and fallen when I was hiking up a mountain, but I have always continued and made it to the summit anyway. I bet you can guess what the corollary in my mountain analogy is. Climbing a mountain can be difficult and maintaining a relationship can be as well. Convincing someone to love you can be difficult, but just like climbing a mountain, it can feel accomplishing. Sometimes you may want to give up but other times you find you strength rather than giving up.

Does that analogy make more sense now? I have been burnt by love before but I continue to seek it out. I have also been the burner before. I am guilty of inflicting

emotional pain. I will never give up on love though. I have hurt others so I assume that it is only fair that I have been hurt as well. Do I deserve another opportunity to have another woman love me? That is a rather difficult question to answer. I am not perfect and I have caused women pain. But I literally will not give up. I will love again. A woman will love me again. I will be loved again. Sometimes I need to push and it feels like I have been pulling. I just need to reevaluate the situation and revise my tactic until it works. I will find another woman to love. And I know she knows who she is. I just have to convince her to love me in return. She will love me. Maybe I perceive persistence to be the key so if I am not making myself clear enough, I will not give up.

Currently because I love Carly I feel that I have a case of unrequited love. I almost choked on my own blood but was lucky enough to have a licensed EMT ride behind me who intubated me on site. Without him I would have probably died or had apoxia and been severely brain damaged. I believe that I survived for a reason. My father thinks it was god but I think it was just to simply love another woman and I believe that woman is Carly. I think it was destiny that we met and maybe I did not want to date Carly when she wanted to date me, but ironically our roles are reversed. I am too stubborn to give up. I did not die for a reason and the reason is Carly. Maybe we met because we had to. I know that some believe that everything happens for a reason.

I probably had a near death experience for a reason. I believe it gave me some clarity and that I have a perspective unlike most people have because I came face to face with death. Carly probably used to like me and I did not like her for a reason, and I probably fell in love with her for a reason. Destiny is unexplainable but I think it is destiny that her and I end up together. Patience is a virtue and I need only wait until she is interested in me again. Life finds a way. That is evident to me now because if it didn't I would be deceased. Almost having died I think gave me a unique perspective that an average person is incapable of having.

I did not have to survive my accident but I did. I was given the gift of getting to continue to keep living. How does one always realize his or her own purpose? I am confident that mine is love. Maybe I should become a scientist and study the neurological and chemical reasons for falling in love. There is so much that humanity still needs to discover. Whether our race does discover the true purpose of love is unknowable. Some questions are temporarily unanswerable. I may not actually understand why I fall in love, but it happens to me anyway. It is not easy when you have unrequited love. What is the appropriate way to deal with it. I make many mistakes and because of my injury the literature says that my executive functioning might be impaired. When you try to convince someone to love you back they may reciprocate. So I just keep swimming until they do. I am a very emotionally driven man so I feel things very deeply.

I believe that the two most important parts of the human body are the head and the heart. The ironic thing is that I severely injured my head but at least my heart still pumps blood and it continues to work in the emotional sense. I am a sensitive soul. I like to make people feel good, loved, and I like to make others laugh. To me emotions are the vehicle to get to another person's heart. It would be nice if there was an emotional roadmap but I suppose you just have to navigate emotions with your own judgment. Without the heart the head would be misguided. You have to learn to trust your own emotions. If you cannot do that I would think that you are lost. When you are lost you can always wait until someone else passes by and ask him or her for directions. Persistence will lead you to your destination. It maybe be tempting to give up if you are tired but it is better to see things out until they are over.

Time stops for no one. You must learn to wait. My injury has taught me that all too well because I have to wait until I am fully recovered. Your perception of time changes drastically when you get older. There is rarely anything exciting about having to wait. Tick tock tick tock and then your wait is over. I am incredibly impatient but the old adage goes that a watched pot never boils. And I sure do love tea. Maybe tea teaches a valuable lesson in patience. Wait for the water to boil, wait for the tea to steep, and wait until your tea is cool enough to sip on. Kung fu is one of the fastest martial arts but Kung Fu masters are frequently pictured drinking or making tea. You would think that my love of tea would have helped teach me to be more patient. Things may not happen when you want them to happen, so just wait and the time will come when they do. If you are patient it will pay itself off.

Good things come to those who wait. Patience and persistence can be virtuous friends. It is frustrating when you want something sooner than it can happen though. I wish that life had a fast forward button but in my experience the closest thing to achieving that effect is going into a coma. There are far more strategies to help one be patient than inducing a coma. I suppose that is one positive twist to my injury; I got to skip six weeks of my life. Back when I was younger and still in school I would have loved that. I think it is important to focus on the positives of a situation. I got out of having to work, I learned about what it truly means to be human, and I finally fulfilled my dream of writing a novel. Maybe they should teach that in high school English classes; you have to write a ten-page paper; get a brain injury and you will become inspired.

I suppose one just needs to look on the bright side and see the good despite focusing on the bad. Things could always be worse than they are. I think it should be easy to imagine at this point in my story how my injury could have been much worse. Carry on, they say. This too shall pass. Endurance is a skill that is essential for more than just runners and body builders. The longer you stick things out, the more you learn and see along the way. It is not all about the end game. Sometimes it is worth to enjoy the entire journey. You walk down two divergent paths. One leads to a swamp and another leads to a beach but a swamp must be crossed first. The swamp

by itself is easier to make it to. In this instance would you pick the harder path or the easier one? I would travel on the harder path because I think the end result would pay off more. That is the beauty of focusing on the positive things in life. My brain may be injured but hey I am not brain dead. I was in a wheelchair for a while but I learned how to walk again. The women I have wanted to marry all left me but I can meet another woman who will be with me. Maybe I do not need to be married but I do think I need to be with another woman who will love me. My heart has been broken but I have always put it back together. All wounds can heal. My brain injury has taught me that it could take years to heal mine but I have been told that I can fully recover. So unless my doctors and psychologists were lying I am pretty sure that I will get better. It is better for me to focus on the fact that I can recover than only looking at the issues that my injury has caused me.

My dad wrote a blog about my injury and documented some of my recovery. Here are his posts:

September 2, 2019

September 4, 2019

You have to know Matt well to get this but he has always been a radical, daring, and adventurous person. Taking some risk just comes along with his adventures.

Memorial

Day, Matt was mountain bike riding with friends in Winter Park located in Colorado where

he lives. It is known to have some of most spectacular mountain biking around. No one

actually saw what happened to Matt that day, but during one of the "gravity fed hills"

Matt crashed and was found unconscious by one of his friends who was accompanying

him on the trails. Another person who happened by saw that Matt needed immediate

medical care due to being unconscious. He took 10-20 seconds and prayed for Matt.

Another cyclist appeared at the accident and they asked the cyclist if a medic was available and the cyclist responded that he was an EMT. The EMT had taken a wrong turn and lost track of his friend, so it was "happenstance" that he ended up on the same

part of the trail as Matt at that moment. While the EMT tended to Matt, his friends and

the first responder blocked off the road and called 911. They were able to bring Matt down the hill and he was air flighted to a Denver hospital.

Matt sustained a broken ulnar bone in his left arm, and dislocated finger(s) with multiple

facial fractures and swelling of the brain. He is in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) listed in critical condition. Brain swelling has stabilized. When we spoke to the nurse that

evening, she told us that Matt wore a full face helmet and body armor and if he had not,
she would likely be having a different conversation with us.
Please join us in praying for Matt's recovery,
Mike and Rose Brignola

September 3, 2019

September 4, 2019

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We spoke to the nurse this morning. He is still in a coma. He has facial fractures on his
left side orbital lobe. They will have to do surgery but they're not worried about
doing
that right now. Brain swelling has gone down and remains stable. He is still
unconscious
but responsive to physical stimuli, music and cues from the medical staff. His right
side
is alright but left side is weak. His lungs aspirated so they are watching for signs of
infection or pneumonia. We are expecting an update from the neuro team. Since
each
person is different, they won't be able to give us a prognosis until he is conscious.

September 4, 2019

September 4, 2019

We spoke to his ICU nurse this morning. He is progressing. They are trying to ween
him
off of sedation. He failed being taken off the ventilator. He will most likely be in the
ICU
for a while. He continues to respond to stimuli but cannot directly respond to
instructions. Each day shows a little progress. They haven't set a date/time to speak
with the neuro team but continue to evaluate.

September 4, 2019

September 4, 2019

He is weaning off sedation now. The medical team is discussing taking the ICP
monitor
out of his head when the brain pressure becomes stable. He is coughing on his own
from
time to time and they've been suctioning out some of the blood that he aspirated in
the
accident. He seems more responsive today and is able to grip back when holding his
hand. It seems like a big improvement from yesterday.

So I am obviously lucky to have a family that was/is concerned about me. It is hard
for me to imagine how devastating it must be to have your child come face to face

with death. If I ever wind up having children I guess I should not let them go mountain biking. I am still mostly just upset that I missed the landing. Like being the ironic fool that I am I would rather go back and still get a brain injury if I would have made that jump. I guess that is a natural and fair thing for a thrill seeker like me to think. I almost died by choking on my own blood but at least it was because I was doing something cool. "Hang loose man." I do not think that I deserved to get a brain injury, but I do believe that I was meant to survive. Maybe I live so I could fulfill a greater purpose. Everything seems to happen for a reason. If that statement that I just made is true though, how do I learn what my purpose is? I suppose it would only make sense if I defined it for myself. I made a mistake the day I was injured and I am paying the price for it. I did not have to get a brain injury and almost die, but maybe I was supposed to. There may have been a purpose to my near death experience but I have to define it for myself. We are responsible for being who we are.

I have wanted to write a book since I was in high school. Maybe I needed to have a brain injury to finally commit myself to actualizing my dream. Dreams are fodder for the brilliant. Now that I do not sleep too much because of my injury, I do not even remember any dreams. That is terrible because I used to have wonderful dreams. I would have lucid dreams where I could control things and create objects on my command. Dreams can be much more than they first appear. Dreams do not necessitate sleep. Dreams very well may be products of the heart and not just the mind. You can and probably do have dreams in waking life

Dreams take us forward into our futures. Without our dreams we would likely be emotionless husks. Dreams require a complex imagination and are made from blood, sweat, and tears. I have known many people who have struggled with achieving their dreams. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs he postulates that self-actualization is one of the hardest things for a person to do. Of course Maslow wrote about my favorite thing, love, and specified that was a human need as well. We are products of the relationships that we have. I think that is only logical to assume that my near death experience has altered my ability to self-actualize. The idea of self-actualization is the ability to reach your full potential. Maybe I did not die so that I could reach mine. I still have dreams of becoming a stronger person. My brain injury did not impair my ability to imagine my future. Neither do I believe that my injury limited my ability to improve myself intellectually and emotionally. I have lost many abilities due to my injury but maybe I even gained some. I think that I have gained a greater understanding of what it means to truly be alive and that the human spirit is not capable of being limited by a traumatic injury. Honestly I do not believe that the individual human spirit can be limited by much outside of death.

I could have lost far more than I did and I do not think I could have learned what I have about myself if I did not almost die. I have heard from many people the belief that Things happen a reason. According to that philosophy, there is a reason that I

injured my brain. There is a reason that I almost died. There is a reason that I wanted to take off my body armor and my friends did not let me. There is a reason that the EMT chose to go riding on the same trail and the same day that I did. Maybe there is a reason that a pandemic broke out during my recovery. It is hard to actually know why things happen. You do not have to why, but they happen everyday. There is an endless realm of possibilities. It was possible for me to die but I managed to escape death. It was possible for Alison to not break up with me but she did. It was possible for me to jump off the bridge in Berlin, but I did not. Based on my history of suicidal thoughts and my love for dangerous activities, like climbing cranes and building maybe I was meant to almost die so that I could focus on really actualizing myself. Some things are understandable. Like I do not understand why I had to live the day I almost died, but I almost did. I probably will never understand why I did not die and maybe I am not supposed to. Why do I constantly fall in love? Why do I need a woman in my life to feel happy? Maybe Freud had a point when he said that men only fall in love because of their mothers.

Life is a puzzle and often is a mystery. Some things are unexplainable, but their existence cannot be denied. I get tired of puzzles and will give up putting them together, but I will not give up on life. Mysteries are normally solvable. What is the solution to life? The pessimistic but realist's answer is death. Although I think that that question necessitates a more philosophical rather than a purely biological answer. The solution to truly living may just lie in the fact that you need to strive hard to be yourself. If you let others decide who you really are you are being dishonest to yourself. This mystery does not require that you hire a detective to solve it. It requires that you look deeply inside of yourself for the answer. You are responsible for actualizing yourself. I cannot surmise how someone else could do something that difficult for you.

We write our own histories. Every morning you wake up you choose for yourself an outfit to wear, you decide what you want to eat for breakfast, you decide whether or not you should go to work, you decide when to go to bed, and you decide, if you will make the most out of everyday. Looking within yourself cannot be done if you are emotionally closed off. Everyday you find more pieces to help solve the puzzle of life with. You first must learn how to rely on yourself. It is not possible to have everything done for you. That is not possible no matter how many butlers and maids you hire. Reality can be difficult to understand fully but you are the master of your own reality. If you would prefer that someone else is you could send him or her a letter and ask for of yourself to do it all by yourself though. The keys to your own freedom are inside of you. We are in control of our own lives. No one else should be. When you feel a lack of power, take a step back, meditate and regroup.

Not only do we write our own histories, but we are also the masters of our own realities. Are you having a bad day? Do something you think will make it better. Are you felling alone and afraid? Ask a friend to be nice and comfort you. Do you not have any friends? Go out to a crowded place and meet someone new. There are

countless solutions to all of our problems in life. You likely just need to be persistent in your search and you will find them. Take advantage of the opportunities you are given him or her to be the master instead of you. I hope that you can find the power inside of yourself. Be brave and do not let others get you down. Stand up for yourself. You are powerful. You are alive for a reason. You are capable of many things. Probably even things that you do not think you are capable of. That is the power of the human spirit. I almost died but I have not given up on life. I survived for a reason. It could have been because of some random things. It could have been because a higher power was protecting me, or it maybe was it was because the universe has intended for me to make another women fall in love with me, but even if there was not a reason, it happened anyway. One day I am certain I will day. I am just lucky that that was not in September of the year 2020. I was fortunate. I did not die yet. I did not ask a woman to marry me who probably would have divorced me if I had. I have not given up my hope that another woman will fall in love with me.

Do things actually happen for a reason? I suppose you could call that a logical proof. I know that I have said that they do but there is no definitive proof. Does there need to be to believe that? I go injured for a reason. I went too fast on a mountain biking trail. I lost the woman I wanted to marry for a reason. Everyone who has died died for a reason. If life follows that pattern then everything must happen for a reason. So survived an accident and got a brain injury for a reason. I have always tried to help other people. Be it emotionally or financially. I must do that for a reason. And it is probably not just because my parents told me to be nice to other people. I am certainly a product of how I was raised by my parents but I do not think that is the only thing that defines me. I believe that the experiences that we have help to define us all individually.

Your life is too short to just flip a coin to make all your decisions for you. Make decisions by taking into consideration your mind, your body, and your soul. Acting with good intentions will help free your mind and make it easier for others to tolerate you. Relax and take things slowly. Meditate and clear your mind. Do not let anger and frustration dominate your feelings. No one should have to tell you how to act, who to be, or why you are alive. Those are all things that it is up to you to decide for yourself. You are the main character of your own story. Learn to treat others well and you will know how to treat other people better. Being a good person is not a competition. If you think you are better than someone else offer to give that person guidance. The more people you help, the more that other people will help you in return.

I think that it is important to act with good and wholesome intentions. If you want to be treated well it would help if you set an example. I have been treated like garbage before but I still make an effort to ask a stranger how his or her day is going and I believe that kind actions return kind actions. In other words when you do something helpful for someone else, then someone will do something nice for you.

Listen to others and they will listen in return. There are billions of other humans on this planet. Do not always try to do everything by yourself. It is good for you to help others.

I may have forgotten a lot because of my injury, but I have not forgotten what it means to be kind to and to help others. Other people helped me when I was close to dying so it is only fair that I help others in return. I would have helped someone who I thought was dying. Humans are meant to take care of one another. I believe it is not only for the continuation of our species, but that it is an obligation we have because we are alive. There are and have been cruel, vile, and wicked people on this earth but you do not need to be one. The more intention you are when you interact with others, the less likely it will be for you to manage to do cruel and vile things to another person.

I do not believe that there is enough good in the world. That is why I choose to help others. The laws are simple. Help and receive help in return. Maybe that is why I was lucky enough to have an EMT behind me when I almost died.

I never used to believe in destiny until I almost died. Maybe it was in my destiny not to die that day. How does one fulfill his or her destiny? Is there a guidebook on fulfilling your destiny that I forgot to read in high school? Maybe it is destiny that I already fell in love with another woman. I hope that I have been doing things right. I really hope so because I almost died from doing that jump incorrectly, or wrong. Do the right thing. It is more than just the title of a Spike Lee movie. It is a way of life. You do not need to pay a bunch of Hollywood producers to make decisions for you. You just need to feel things in your heart and decide for yourself. You are in control of your destiny. Accidents will happen. Trust me. I learned the hard way. Maybe by almost dying I was just being taught a complex and unexplainable lesson.

Destiny is dependent on human understanding and the power of the human will. You are the keeper of your own destiny. You will fulfill it alone. No one else can do that for you. Although there are people you will meet on your journey through life that will help you. You hold the keys to your own kingdom. Again that is unless you are a slave. Then I hope you kick your master in the shins and steal the key to release yourself. If you perceive your destiny is that you must serve others and not yourself, you are a fool. Lysergic acid taught me that perception is fragile. You may think you understand what your destiny is supposed to be but maybe you just confusing your reality with a fantastical movie you watched. It is your destiny to think for yourself. Freedom is a human right. You choose your own destiny. I would advise that you not let anyone else choose it for you. I suppose you might be lazy and do not want to take the time to choose it and figure it out for yourself. Well wake up! You are worth more than that. You are priceless.

We must conform to reality. The sun comes up, birds chirp, we wake up, and we go to work or do whatever you need to get done. There are simple consistencies in

nature that can be particularly grounding. You think you are unsure about something? Why not think about something that you are sure of? Are you lost? Well find someone and ask for directions. You do not have to do everything by yourself. It is definitely good to procure some alone time, but when you need some help then be brave enough to ask for it. I am only alive because other people helped me. I accept the reality that I will never be the same exact person that I used to be. Reality is often unpredictable. The simplest thing you can do is just to take each day one at a time. Sometimes persistence is futile. Just sit back and go with the flow. You will get what you are looking for. Sometimes it just takes time. Reality does not need to conform to human standards.

I would only recommend that you conform to reality. Otherwise I think that it pays to be unique. Be strange. Be weird. People will take notice of you. You do not have to conform to reality if you force it to conform to you. Be fierce. Be strong. Never give up. You are in control of your own power. Harness it at will. I learned to defy conformity when I dressed like a punk rocker in middle school. It feels good to be different.

I need music and art in my life. I love to paint as well. One summer I designed and sold concert posters illegally until a sheriff caught me. If I had not been busted I estimated in a spreadsheet that I could make \$40,000 Based on the numbers a I was selling and the average amount per night I was making per night. That was a risky but fun hustle. I would bring different hats to switch off wearing and use them as disguises. I would bring a friend with to help me sell and if he or she got caught, I would always take the fall. Sometimes it literally pays to be a criminal. Maybe I got injured because my illegal poster endeavor gave me bad karma. Maybe I should go see a Tibetan, Buddhist monk and get my karma straightened out. That would be comical if that were true. I helped some friends and myself make money so I had to have my brain injured. I was using hard working musical groups' names without their permission. They do say that karma is a bitch.

Maybe I am a criminal. I have rung up food at the grocery store using bananas for their weight and low price. I have stolen small inexpensive items before. The poor store owners! I bought their bananas for too low of a price so I deserved to get a brain injury. If that was honestly the way thing worked we would all end up having brain injuries. I am not assuming that most people have rung up their groceries as bananas, but we all have probably done something that is illegal. I do not think everyone is a saint. Do all criminals deserve to get brain injuries? I hope that the answer for you is no. I do not believe that anyone deserves to have his or her brain injured. When life gives you lemons, make lemonade. Do not give someone a brain injury.

I assume that probably at least one criminal has beaten someone so terribly that he or she did not die and instead got a brain injury. That is a terrible possibility to accept. Some humans are truly vile and do disgusting and terrible things to other

people. I find it hard to understand why people do horrible things like rape and murder. I understand theft can result in money, which can help one pay his or her bills, but rape and murder? I cannot think of a logical reason that would make a person do either of those things. I am horny and I cannot get laid. I should rape someone. That person will not have sex with me but they had sex with my cousin. I should kill that person. People are obsessed with crime. Hence all the crime shows on television. Do people prefer to see criminals being caught and tried in a court of law, or do they prefer seeing them in the act of committing crimes? Based on the television shows I have seen, I think that the consensus is that people enjoy crime more than they enjoy justice. Humans seem to enjoy crime far too much. It seems pornographic. What is with the obsession? People are too afraid to actually be criminals I guess. When is it appropriate to pass judgment? Well if you are in a court of law of course. But it is fairly common that people pass judgment on other people. It is far better to do good deeds and be rewarded, rather than to do wrongful deeds and be punished. There is a reason that in every country there are laws. Anarchy makes more sense as a philosophical concept, rather than an actual political application.

Life can be dangerous. Life can sometimes be unfair. But life always seems to find a way. It certainly did in my case it found a way, but it was also unfair too. Still I choose to look on the bright side. When bad things happen to you it helps to be positive. The only respite from the darkness of reality is your mood. Find techniques that make yourself feel happier and use them when you are feeling down. Do things that boost your confidence. Sometimes I play chess online and lose, so I play a different game with my family that I am more likely to win at.

There are many techniques you can use to boost your confidence. It helps to tackle small things at first and then work your way up to bigger things. A step-by-step approach usually gets the job done. I did not relearn to walk by just going outside and trying to run each day. I had to do stretches to loosen up my muscles that had gotten too stiff from being stuck in a hospital bed. My physical therapists would encourage me to push a little harder each day and make me break a sweat. They would often try to get my blood's oxygen levels up by making me just walk in circles. Some days were very tiring and difficult but at least they helped me to no longer be in a wheelchair. Success cannot always be easily measured. They would observe my heart rate, temperature, and have me do difficult stretches to loosen up my hips. I owe many of my regained abilities to therapists.

With Craig closed down because of the pandemic, I still do exercises at home. I should not give up. My muscles in my legs and my hips are still extremely tight. I think it makes sense that learning how to walk again after being in a hospital bed and a wheelchair would be difficult. Now I only occasionally trip when going up the stairs but the more times I keep trying to walk up, the less I will fall. I really prefer stairs with handrails. It is funny the things that I used to take for granted like

handrails. I really appreciate that simple piece of technology now. I am only 27 now but I probably will become an old man and struggle to walk again one day.

Simple things like taking a quick walk in my parent's neighborhood are now far more meaningful to me than they had ever been before my accident. I hope that if you can learn anything from me, that you learn to appreciate the smallest things in your life, and that simple abilities like walking can be taken away from you. You do not have to be a senior citizen to be confined to a wheelchair. Things you probably think are easy and simple are difficult for people in a similar condition as me. I have also come to realize that the ability to heal can take much longer than you are prepared for.

Some things have remained relatively easy for me and some things are extremely difficult. Take each day as a new opportunity to better you, to learn, to grow, to be kind to others, and to focus on loving yourself. You always have the power to love yourself. Be proud. Be resilient. Focus on what you can do. Do something for someone else and they will do something for you in return.

38 days 1 month, 7 days

There are days where I really feel that I am being viewed as half a human. I was talking about how I wanted to work again and I feel that I am able, but my mother said that I needed to be cleared by a doctor until I can work again. I then thought about wanting to become a neuropsychologist, which would require me to go back to college, but my stepfather said that a school would not admit me. I honestly do not think that he was correct. It was terrible though, having my family doubt my abilities. Most people do not even want to go to work and I did, but because of my injury I apparently cannot work until a doctor clears me. It hurts to be stripped of your humanity, and be treated like a patient in an insane asylum.

It really makes me feel like I am only half of a human. Where did the other half go? It seems that it got spent with all of my state's tax dollars. The irony is that I saved too much money to qualify for government aid, so my bank account was drained to pay my medical bills. Before my accident I had saved ten thousand dollars that I earned by working hard. I was not rich enough to be all right, or poor enough to qualify for government assistance. Not only does the government doubt my abilities, but my parents do also. Maybe that makes it clearer why I feel like a subhuman. There are days when I feel depressed because of my injury and I wish that the EMT had gone riding somewhere else the day he saved my life. If I did not make myself clear enough, that means there are days that I wish I had died.

I am a good person. I deserve to live and so does everyone that was born on this planet and has not already died. I wish that people with a similar condition to mine were treated a little more like a human. Anyone could end up getting a brain injury. All I wish was that American society and government could be a little more understanding. Some people need to be taken care of. I was a hard worker and I

earned every cent I made from working hard, but it all got taken away without even the chance of qualifying for government assistance.

I looked at some census data for the United States and roughly 25,000 people get a traumatic brain injury. By looking at that data it makes me angry that my state's government chooses to limit my rights and makes it difficult for me to qualify for benefits that would help reduce my medical costs. That census data I pointed to has been being gathered since 1997. It is 2020 right now. That is twenty-three years. You would think that that is more than enough time for government to be able to save money and provide a little more government assistance. There are only two advocacy groups that I have seen online. I have volunteered to help migrants and I made a documentary to teach people of the struggles of being an undocumented. The research I did for my documentary taught me that the government cares very little about underrepresented groups.

When I used to feel like things were hard, I would just go to sleep and let my bed be a comfort to me while I slept. Now I cannot sleep very well. What is the proper way to cope with having a traumatic brain injury? Maybe there is not one. Life is fragile. Life is frail. So since I kissed death on the lips, why can I not be given a little more grace and understanding?

Things can and will seem unfair. There may be times where you think you are being taken advantage of. My injury has shown me that people may doubt your abilities even though you know that you actually have them. Who truly has the right to pass judgment? Should you pass the bar? Should you get a law degree? I used to go do homework at my universities law library. Does that make me qualified? I believe I should honestly only judge myself. Hopefully you do the same thing. No amount of law degrees would make it fair to pass judgment unto others. I suppose it might be fair if you should chose to judge someone else if you let the defendant stand trial and he or she had a jury of his or her peers. Even then I would advise against it.

I think that you probably get by now that I feel underrepresented because of my injury and that I feel like I am seen as less of a human then I used to be by others. I cannot control what others think. I can only try to influence their thoughts. People have every right not to listen to you. I do not wish to take that away from anyone. It is hard to wake up each morning knowing that even my family sees me differently. Society sees me differently, my friends see me differently, and even I see myself somewhat differently. I get it. I am different. Being different is good right? But what are the limits of those differences? How different is too different to the point where people discredit you and what you have done? Everyone has his or her limits. I definitely have mine, but I still like to be patient, listen, and understand. I hope others will learn to have the same respect for me despite my injury. ZI am more than a fellow with a brain injury. I am a lover, a friend, and somebody to ask for help when you need it. My identity is different. I am now that guy who has a brain injury, but that is not all that I am.

I will never be able to change the fact that I have a brain injury. I can go see many doctors and therapists, but I will still have to face the reality that I will never be the same as who I was before my accident. I must come to terms with that reality and question who I have become because of my injury. I will never be the same. But is that a bad thing? Change can be beautiful. Although I do not assume it to be fair the way that my injury has changed me. I do believe that my life is still valuable. I was given a second chance. Maybe I was not supposed to die. Again this brings up the point and concept of destiny.

Will I ever know why I did not die that day? Well I suppose the simple answer is that an EMT was cycling behind me and called in Flight For Life. But maybe there is a much deeper and more philosophical reason. I could still be alive but be a vegetable. Maybe I am meant to inspire others and did not die for that reason. Maybe I did not die so another woman could learn to love me. Maybe I did not die so I could illegally sell posters again. Well if that is the reason it is too bad because I never plan to do that again. Maybe there was an alien playing a cosmic joke on me. Maybe it was truly an accident. I think that that last reason I just stated is far more obvious. But who knows? Maybe the joke is on me and aliens were involved. They could have been upset because I do not believe in them. That would honestly be hilarious if that was the actual reason. I could not live because I upset some aliens!

I think that being comedic is one of the best ways to handle my predicament. Laughter is good for the soul. I think everyone can admit that they prefer to laugh rather than to cry. At least I can hope that that is the reality. Maybe that is actually a false assumption. For all I know there could be a country that celebrates a national cry and do not laugh day. I do not know for certain, but I would bet a lot on the fact that there probably is not.

Apparently it is very common that a baby laughs before it learns how to speak. Laughter is a universal language. We understand that usually someone is happy when he or she laughs. When I was in the hospital at Craig I would make an effort to make patients and doctors laugh. I would keep plants in my room because they cheered me and other people up. Comedy and plants. Those were what I became known for at Craig. I also was recognized for the fact that I slept with a stuffed animal otter. Simple and cute things can make you well known. Make someone laugh today. Why not? It is good to do things that help others feel happy. Why is it good? It is because everyone wants to feel happy. Do small things that help others feel happy and it is far more likely that someone will return the favor.

There are simple ingredients to happiness. Say nice things, compliments, offering help, meeting new people, and there are many more. Do your part and help spread joy. Some days can make you sadder than others. The same happens to other people. So say high to strangers, tell them to have a good day, hold a door open for

people, help someone carry something out to his or her car, compliment a stranger on his or her appearance.

There are many more ways but those were just a few that first come to my mind. We are all powerful. We all deserve to feel happiness. Everyone makes mistakes but they do not have to define you. That is why I do not want me to just be considered the guy with a brain injury. I am a writer, a painter, a music producer, a lover, and a friend. We are all many beautiful things. You are beautiful. Go look in the mirror. Smile. Giggle. Stop and smell the roses. Make someone happy for Christ's sake. Spread the joy. It pays to be nice and it gets returned when you are.

Be the change that you would like to see in the world. That is a very simple philosophy. You are not alone. There are over seven billion people on planet earth. Try not to feel alone. Phone a friend. Phone your family. Go meet someone at a park. I am happy that I am alive. That is all I need. I do not need a new brain. I need to be happy that I did not die. There are of course other things that make me happy too. I am pretty simple. I like to make music, eat, write, go on walks, and play games. Not video games though. Card games and board games. Simple pleasures make life more bearable. It pays to keep things simple. It is more likely that people will share your interests if you do.

Earth is more than just a sphere. It is magical home to humans and many other creatures. Just like when you become an adult, there comes a time when you need to move out and leave home. Too bad there is not a death college. Yes I majored in a asphyxiation. I would like to get my graduates degree from I Choked On a Chicken Leg Bone University. But enough about death. This is the "Life" section of the book. Now back to the concept of a magical home to humans and creatures.

Earth is beautiful. Animals are beautiful. Earth is a cosmic paradise. Pluto is a nasty bathroom at a cosmic truck stop. My apologies if Pluto is your favorite planet but I prefer Neptune and of course I prefer Earth overall. We are fortunate to exist. Life took billions of years to come into existence. That is a remarkably long time. That is, unless of course you believe in creationism. Then you probably believe that it did not take that long. I pity the fool that firmly believes that a white bearded man created earth and all the life forms that live on it. To put things simply, we are lucky to even exist. Life is not perfect but from my experience of being alive, I think it is better than being dead.

Luckily I am no longer in a wheelchair so I can go on walks. I like to go on walks and see birds. I wake up really early because of my injury, and I luckily get to hear birds chirping. Nature is unarguably beautiful. I used to love hiking. But because I was in a wheelchair for a while it is less safe for me to go hiking because I am still technically a fall risk. I was supposed to go hiking with a therapist from Craig, but then they closed down because of the Carona virus. Maybe now that I mentioned

hiking it makes sense that I liked mountain biking as well. I love being out in nature. I love flowers, cactus, butterflies, and even some moths.

The creatures of planet earth are all beautiful in their own way. You are beautiful too. Say that to yourself right now. Go tell someone else too. Be proud of what you already are. No one can fully take that away from you. Sure someone could pour battery acid on your face, but your true beauty lies deep within you. Luckily my accident did not affect my physical attributes, but it definitely did not deprive me of my inner beauty. My injury has certainly made me less attractive in some regards, but there are still aspects of me, like my inner beauty, that were not altered.

Beauty is not limited to one's perception of sexual attraction. It starts in your heart and goes deep into your soul. Beauty is timeless. Beauty knows no bounds. Is beauty a natural consequence of human biology or is there something more to it? It is helpful to be beautiful and attract a mate, but what about the beauty of a helpful school child. That is highly unlikely to be a product of your biological need to procreate, unless it is because you are a pedophile. Humans are often beautiful, but there are some aspects of humanity, like pedophilia, that are vile and disgusting. Does everyone deserve to be forgiven? If a man rapes a little girl should he be forgiven? Luckily humans have created judicial systems to decide where a person will be forgiven or not. Even if the person standing trial raped a child. So is it truly possible for everyone that is alive on this earth to be considered beautiful? Based on the examples I have given I hope that you will consider it possible. We live in a beautiful world. Sure, there are disgusting things, but that is not all there is. You are a product of nature. You owe your life to it. Some people would prefer harm nature in order to get rich, but I would rather become poor from protecting our environment. I used to be vegan and vegetarian because research I had done told me that meat production is not good for the environment. I do eat meat now though.

I am not sure if I made a mistake by stopping being vegan or not. There are many ways to better the planet. We are all responsible for protecting the beauty of the natural world. Nature deserves it. Without it you would not exist. To some people it pays to be cruel. I would frankly rather be poor.

We have the power to protect our environment, just as we have the power to protect one another. It is our responsibility to do both; that is, to protect ourselves and to protect nature. You have the power. Embrace it and be proud. You are a product of nature. Do your part. You are beautiful. Butterflies are beautiful. Mountains are beautiful. Nature is unarguably beautiful.

What is the human spirit? Is it seven billion people coexisting together on this planet? Is it seven billion heartbeats? Does there have to be a physical entity? It is called a spirit for a reason. It is not physical. The human spirit is an immaterial force. It is the product of love, kindness, greatness, hard work, diligence and far too

much more to explain in writing. We are seven billion strong. The human spirit is a product of nature. Therefore, nature is beautiful.

We all are just atoms vibrating in unison. You are the world. You are important. No matter if you have a brain injury. You are beautiful too. No matter which color your skin is, no matter how tall or short you are, no matter how long or straight your hair is, and no matter how much or how little money you have. Respect yourself. Be kind to yourself. Be fair to yourself. Things can be bad but keep in mind that they could always be worse. Be optimistic rather than pessimistic. I have reasons to believe that I am unlucky, but instead I choose to think that I am lucky that I am still alive.

Vibrate in unison with the symphony of existence. Take pride in your abilities and others will take pride in you. You can control how others perceive you. I would rather be seen as strong and resilient, rather than the just a guy with a brain injury. You are in control of how people perceive you. You are a complex series of atoms that work together. You are more than what anyone thinks you are. You are worth more than what anyone says you are. There do not have to be limits to your potential. Release your inner spirit. Relinquish control. Let nature control your every move. Nature intends for you to be happy. Some things may get you down but you can always find other things instead. Love and you will earn love. Be kind and people will be kind to you. Forgive and be forgiven. You are more than just a sum of the mistakes that you have made. I am a writer and a poet. I am not just a person who should have been better at mountain biking. You can put a positive spin on anything. Why not do it?

Sometimes other than just messing up and hurting yourself, you can be disappointed that you did not do something better. I mean better in the sense that I could have landed the jump and the fact that I incorrectly landed makes me more upset than the fact that I got a brain injury. I may sound crazy for thinking that, but I prefer to excel at things. If I could turn back time and land the jump and get a brain injury some other way I would.

I suppose that is probably just my pride commenting there. Obviously my injury is horrible, but I still would rather I got a brain injury after landing the jump. It would be cool to say "I got a brain injury after landing a sick jump, dude." It probably sounds dumb that I actually think that, but that is probably because I am a daredevil. I used to climb up roofs of buildings and jump across them. Considering that reality, I suppose I was going to get a brain injury some way if I had landed the jump.

I am a silly lover boy and a thrill seeker, so maybe I deserved to have a girlfriend break up with me partially because I have a brain injury. I was a risk taker. Would most people want to marry someone who is that? I wanted to have children with Alison. What would my children have thought if they knew I got a brain injury from riding a bicycle? Would a man who gets a brain injury likely be a good father?

Would the kind of man who gets a brain injury from bicycling make a good husband? I would like to believe a man could be both those things even if he had a brain injury.

So the silly lover boy crashes, gets a brain injury, and wants to marry me. I should dump him. But Mr. brain injury guy and me can still be friends. What a joke. And I suppose that I am the punch line. Do you think you would leave your partner if he or she had a brain injury? I can tell you it is not easy having one. It is probably difficult for those who love me knowing that I have a brain injury, but I am far more than that. Why did she once love me and then leave me after I got a brain injury. I guess I am fortunate though because I did not lose a friend on top of losing a chance to propose to a woman that I loved.

Making mistakes is sometimes far too difficult to avoid. And trust me, my brain injury is evidence that I learned that lesson in a very hard way. Maybe Alison and I did not get married so that I could fall in love with Carly. I have wanted to marry multiple women before. Carly has told me that she does not ever plan on getting married. That does not dissuade me from wanting to be with her though. Maybe I have wanted to marry multiple women, but I do not require a woman to love me who wants to be married one day. I just require that I have someone to love who loves me in return. I do not think that that concept is too difficult to understand. I am designed to love. I can feel it physically inside of my heart. That is a big enough indicator to me that I was designed biologically to love. I actually feel feelings. I am particularly sensitive for a man, so I suppose that that makes sense. I am quite emotional.

We are all individually comprised of emotions. The conglomerate of human society is a whole slew of emotions. Happy, happy, sad, happy, annoyed, enthralled, and there is so much more, but you know. How do you distinguish emotions from feelings? An emotion is a transitory state of being and feelings are an accumulation of physical and immaterial sensations. Human emotions exist for some reason. I am honestly uncertain as to why they exist, but I cannot deny their existence. You can be more than happy or sad. You can actually be both at the same time. Emotions can exist paradoxically. They are not reliant on the laws of physics. Maybe biology, but I honestly doubt that any branch of science can truly explain the depths of human emotions and what any one emotion truly is. I suppose happiness is a feeling of elation and pleasantness, but definitions can need definitions too.

The human heart is one aspect, or component of the human soul. The human spirit is also dependant on emotions. The human spirit has made it through terrifying circumstances like the Holocaust and the human spirit is exactly that. A spirit. It cannot be confined, except here on earth. The soul, the human spirit, the ghost, and the spirit, are all concepts that describe the same immaterial and difficult to define reality. That is why I like the concept of a human spirit. It is immaterial. It is comprehensive. It leaves room for different interpretations. Is the human spirit

ephemeral? I suppose that depends from which perspective and which timeline you are observing it within. I believe that no perspective is invalid. They are all unique, complex, and ultimately ephemeral when you take into consideration how quickly things change. The human spirit is also a mixture of every single human's individual emotions, perspectives, perceptions, and feelings. You have the ability to see the spirit. Not physically, but rather by absorbing human emotions and experiences. The spirit is linguistically a word with a definition and an article, but the article "the" makes the human spirit seem like it is one thing. It is actually the totality of every soul that has ever existed and will exist.

I am proud to be human. Although I do enjoy most life forms, except maybe mosquitoes, I think that humans are by far the most interesting living organism that has been discovered so far in this universe. We are biologically complex, emotionally impossible to fully understand, and capable of loving, hating, killing, eating, and befriending one another. We have lived on this earth for an estimated seven million years. Earth is roughly 4.5 billion years old according to estimates by earth human scientists. That is frankly impossibly difficult for me to fully imagine and understand. We are constricted and constrained by time. In the course of billions of years does it make sense that we deserve to be alive at this point? We deserve it. I am a survivor. I am proud to be alive. Your soul joins with mine in the human spirit. In the cosmic sense we are basically siblings. I would take care of you and I just hope that you would do the same. Humanity. You are a part of the human spirit. Thank you for existing. I love you. And no, I do not mean romantically. We are family. Let us celebrate the fact that we can be alive. Well that is that I am still alive when you read this. If that is not the case I am thankful to have lived. You should be thankful too.

Putting things in perspective does not have to be easy. Because of my injury, I have had to shift mine. Nothing is the same for me. My parents have been affected, I am legally not able to work until a team of doctors clears me, and lost a girlfriend partially due to my injury. I am a relatively young man, with many more years to live. I suppose that is a positive spin. It is difficult to put things into perspective because I am not the same man I used to be. I guess a good perspective I could put it in is that I am still alive. I am still alive but with pain and suffering. There, does that count as putting things into perspective? I am at least not dead. There definitely have been times in my life that I wished I were though.

Perspective. Perception. Perspective can be like a kaleidoscope, twisting and shifting. My injury has definitely given me a new perspective. Things that I used to consider as easy, like walking up and down stairs, are now difficult. Nobody ever told me that life is supposed to be easy and my perspective has shifted to fully acknowledge that life is indeed not easy.

My life will never be like it once was. I will never be fully like I was. That is a perspective that I am forced to have. I had to come to terms with the fact that things

will and must change. And you are not always in control of why and how they change. That is what sometimes makes me feel like a shell of a human. I am aware of the fact that I am different and I will always be different than who I was. That is normal though. You are not who you were yesterday or even an hour ago.

Some people get by living on cloud nine, but I have lost that privilege. I know all too well what pain is, both physical and emotional. Life will go on without you. Life does not need to obey your wishes and desires. Life is like an untamable beast. Life is a journey. It could be long. It could be short. Life goes on without your consent. Do you ultimately have control? That is a rather difficult question to answer. Life is like snow. It can be beautiful but then it just melts away. We are transitory. Maybe that is a good thing. Coming face to face with death is not enjoyable. I have brought myself close to there before, both voluntarily and involuntarily. Ask yourself. What does it mean to truly be alive? Are you honestly "living?" Life implies death. That is a reality we will all become all too aware of.

There is more than gloom and doom, but it certainly helps to confront both of those things. You were born and you will die. That is a law of nature. Whether you want to or not you will die. You do not choose to be born and you do not choose to die. You do have the choice to decide most of what will happen in between. So make good choices. Your life is important. If you are good to others you will likely be remembered after you die. Understand that that is a beautiful thing and a thing not to be taken for granted. I know all too well about the limitations of memory. So do what you can to force yourself to be remembered. You do not have to be forgotten. There are many different ways to preserve memories. Take advantage of that fact. I hope you do not find my story to be a sad one. Despite some of the terrible circumstances I have been put in or put myself in, I am happy. I do feel good. I am glad now that I am alive. You should be too. Meditate, love yourself, help other people, and do new things. You are a flower. Do what you can to make yourself blossom. You can spread positivity and the more you do it the more others will do it in return.

When you are feeling down find a shoulder to lean on. You do not need to be alone. Go out and meet someone and get his or her number. There are many little tricks to meeting more people. You do not have to be alone, unless you really need some alone time. You do not always need to be by yourself. Be brave. Go to parties. Meet people at the park. Loneliness is temporary. Loneliness does not have to be the dominant feeling you have in your life.

Taking care of others paves the way for you to be able to take better care of yourself. Do nice things. Say, "Hello, I hope you are having a good day" to strangers. It pays to be kind. It pays to be helpful. You are not alone, although you may feel lonely sometimes. I mean honestly. There are over seven billion other people on this planet. Acknowledge the fact that you will truly never be completely alone. Let go of the past and live in the present. There are more people alive on this planet now

then there were in the past. Living in the present necessitates a heightened sense of awareness. You must be aware of how you feel, how you act, how you behave, and that you are in control of your life.

You are the only one with the keys to release yourself from the prison of your own mind. Be intentional. Be grateful. Be unafraid. You will not always feel good. That it not only natural, but also you should expect to feel the opposite sometimes. Some days you will feel worse then others. Become used to the fact that you cannot always be happy. That is why it pays to learn to focus on the positive. "Things do not feel good right now. What can I do to make myself feel better?" By trying to make others feel better it will help you feel better in return. That is another beautiful aspect of the human spirit. We are all her for one another.

Your mind does not have to be a prison or a cage. Choose what you think about. Follow the Buddhist practice of focusing on intention. You are in control. Unless you live in a terrible situation where you do not have the freedom to truly be who you are. Tides turn. Waves will come crashing down on you. But just keep swimming and free you mind. You might have more control then you let yourself think that you have. Be not afraid. Be who you truly are. Let the brightness inside you shine. Life is not an equation. There is not a solution to everything. So just take things as they come. Live in the now. Escape from the past and the prison of your mind. Set yourself free. You cannot escape from the present. Be present. Be here. Truly be here. One day we will all die. But you are alive right now. That is you are alive this present moment. Your sol could live on forever. Gather energy from the universal human spirit to help guide you. You do not need to feel lost. Well at least spiritually and emotionally. If you are actually physically lost, then it is only natural to feel lost.

My brain was physically altered in a negative way, but spiritually I feel as though I have become enlightened. I know now the importance of my life and I had to learn that by almost dying. Siddhartha gave up material riches to reach enlightenment and I almost died to reach it. Which would be more difficult for you? Honestly which would you prefer? Would you like to be enlightened? What really is enlightenment? Enlightenment necessitates that you are in a state of understanding and have knowledge of a subject or situation. I am injured. I am human.

I will recover. Another woman will love me romantically. My near death experience has given me spiritual enlightenment. My mind was not just physically altered, but it was also spiritually altered. Yours can be too. Learn to really love yourself and the doors to enlightenment will open. Love others, such as strangers deeply and you will become enlightened. Love is not just a word. It is more then a feeling. It is a state of being. It does not just have to be inside you. When you become enlightened, you are love.

You choose to be who you want to be. You actualize yourself. No one else can do it for you. You can reap benefits from loving yourself. It feels good to be loved by another human, but if you love yourself first, being loved by someone else will feel a million times better. Your heart is the gateway to your soul. I think I really understand that because I almost literally lost my mind. Inside of me is a spirit and inside of you is a spirit too. The spirit is dependent on existing through religious thought. The spirit encompasses your mind, your mentality, your feelings, and your true identity.

You will reveal to yourself the true reason why you are alive. It is not simply just because two humans copulated and a woman gave birth to you. You gain a greater understanding of why you are alive by becoming enlightened. I am still alive to tell a story, to love, to another woman, to inspire, and to spread love and joy to more than just a romantic interest. I most likely do not know you, but I do love you. You deserve to be loved by more than just your parents. You are who you are for many reasons.

Some of those reasons may not be too appealing, but I love you anyway. You can do the same for strangers too. Love a neighbor, love a friend, and love someone you will never meet and I do not just mean a television personality. Your heart does not have a size limit. Well it does physically, but not emotionally. Take advantage of that fact. Other people deserve to see how big your heart could be. So grow it and show it. I almost died. I have forgotten a lot of things because of my injury, but I have not forgotten how to love. Have a heart. Show it. Brandish it. Be proud of it. It is not the totality of who you are or can be, but it perhaps the largest part of you. You are alive for a reason. I believe the reason is love most of all.

I am proud to be alive and lucky that I have not died yet. Well the year is 2020 and I will probably live close to 85 years. Maybe more if I am lucky. I am 27 so that means I have about 58 more years. So if you are reading this in 2078 I am probably already dead. One day we will all die but I encourage you to not dwell on that fact and focus on joy, love, and happiness at the very least. You. Yes, you. Are here for a reason. A reason that is far more complex than just being a product of your parents copulating. You will die but there is more you can do until then. You should do what makes you feel accomplished. Life may be too short but at least you are living. Look deep inside yourself and you will realize you are meant to be here and to be alive. You did not have to be born per se, but you were. Take joy in that fact.

I am proud of the human race. There are blemishes. Look at the history of Germany in the 1940s for example. Nothing can truly be perfect. Find solace in your imperfections. They may help in setting you apart from others, which is a good thing. Honestly. Would you rather that every single person was the same? Well I hope that you do not. I do not let life pass me by and neither should anyone else. Well I guess that when I was in a coma six weeks of my life did pass me by in that instance, but I came out of it. I woke up. I am still alive. I am still a living member of the human race. Reality is complicated. Life is not a cakewalk.

What do you think it truly means to be alive? What do you think it means to be human? Is it really simple and am I wasting space on a piece of paper? I do not believe that these are easy questions to answer or that anyone ever truly has or will. "I think therefore I am." Said Rene Descartes. If you follow that logic, if you think you are truly alive then you really are. I enjoy being alive even though there were times that I did not.

I have made mistakes. I believe that we all have. It is ok when you do. I do believe it is good to do things that will make up for them though. You are going to make more mistakes. I can almost guarantee you that. You are much more than your mistakes. You are not a failure. Listen to what is in your heart and be all that you could ever be every day. Again, I will say this. I love you. You deserve to be alive right now.

Are you fully aware of that fact? Well it is true. You are one of a kind. Even if you have a twin you are not the same. Differences are important. Feel free to be different. Stand apart. You make earth a better place. You do. Keep being yourself and others will let you into their hearts. I do my part to make others lives better, even if it is just for a moment. You should as well.

Stop reading this for a moment and say "High." to a stranger. Do not underestimate the joy you can bring to others and bring it. Be proud of who you are. You are who you are for a reason. You can and will be remembered. Just take care of yourself. Do not be afraid to leave your mark on the world. And I not mean graffiti, unless that is what you are into. If so I understand. I used to do it once.

We all forget things. That is normal. But I sometimes forget things in a few minutes now. Some people just want to forget. I want to remember more. My memory has gotten better with therapy, but there are still occasional lapses. Luckily I remember my own birthday. 'Remember remember the fifth of November.' That is a line from the film *v for Vendetta*, which is easy for me to remember because I was born on the fifth of November. If we were friends and hung out yesterday though, I might not remember what we were talking about. "Did I call that girl fat? Oops." That is just a joke. I do not call people fat, especially females. it is not nice to call anyone fat. I prefer the word "chubby."

Everyone forgets things. That is not abnormal. It is to be expected of people. Maybe I forget more then the average person does, but hey some people have Alzheimer's. At the very least I am lucky that I have not contracted that disease. Although I suppose I could in the future. Things are not that bad. I forget some things but I do not have a memory affecting disease. See that is the power of the positive spin. Everything is better in your mind if you desire to think that it is.

“Oh no I am having a terrible day.” Why not, “I will have better days than today”? You get to be the purveyor of your own contention. Are you happy or are you sad? Use the power of your mind to decide for yourself. You are in control of the way you are. So work on controlling your mood when you can. I say mean things and so I apologize. I feel bad sometimes, so I try to call myself down and I tell myself that things *will* be better. So let me ask you again. Are you happy?

We are more than our emotions, although your emotions can be limiting. In return you can limit them. I am very emotional. I feel things very deeply. But when I am experiencing a negative emotion I think about a positive thing, or talk to someone and become distracted. Choose how you want to feel. Others should not do that for you. We get hurt, so we get back up. You feel bad, so do things that make you feel better. Do something that you enjoy that will distract you. You can be in control of your emotion. You do not have to let them control you. Believe in yourself. Harness your own internal power. Some days will be worse than others. You have the power to change that for yourself. Just believe you can. Be like the little engine that could. “Think I can.” You can. So do it.

Positivity is contagious like a disease. But unlike a disease, you *should* spread it. Lead the way with your positivity. I should and you should too. Unlike in a magnet, in humans, positivity attracts positivity. Go out and spread it and if you do that, someone will do it to you. You are more than your ego. Harness too the power of the id. The id is said to operate on the pleasure principle. Just like when you are hungry, the id motivates you to eat. When you are thirsty the id motivates you to drink. When you are sad you will be drawn to things that make you happy. Be aware of this fact and do things to make others happy. It is one of the keys to self-actualization. Love and be loved. You can be sad at times, but if you just keep swimming you will find happiness once again.

I am disappointed in the fact that I have a brain injury, but I am still happy. I am more than my injury. I have to say that my injury is terrible. Again, I would not wish it on any one. My injury is terrible but my whole life does not have to be because of that. It is all just a matter of perspective. I am responsible for my own happiness. No one else needs to be, or can be. Although it is possible for others to make me happy, they do not control my happiness. Another way to explain that is, think about a cake. A baker can bake me a cake, but he or she does not control whether I eat that cake or not.

The key to happiness is in you. Put your hand on your heart. It lives right there. If you are a little more technical then put your hand on your head. Your mind or your heart. You control them. Well at least emotionally speaking you do. After all you could be a strange lab experiment and both your heart and your brain are being physically experimented on. I highly doubt that though. It is an interesting thought experiment. If people were experimenting with your mind would you be worried

about what they might find? Your hopes, your dreams, and your desires all live inside there.

Happiness is a complex emotion and it is true that it can be fleeting, but there are mental tricks you can use to make yourself happy again. You can do it by yourself, although having a friend around really helps. You can channel your energy. Maybe you need to meditate to do it, but you can still do it. Maybe you are not into Eastern philosophy or yoga. It does not matter. You still have emotional energy. And if you are familiar with physics, you should understand that energy could be transformed. That is the power of meditation. I understand you may not just want to sit and clear your mind or focus on a mantra, but it really helps you bring about inner peace within yourself.

Here is a meditation I came up with. Close your eyes. Imagine nothing. True nothing, meaning no thing. I have done this with people and asked them how they conceive of nothing. Most people imagine just a white space or a black space. But that is still something. Really try to imagine what nothing is. Now imagine the smallest thing you can think of. It could be a blade of grass, a fly, or my go to an atom. Then build from there until you can imagine the largest thing you can think of. I imagine planets, then stars, and then galaxies until I picture my own conception of the totality of the universe. Ok now think for a moment. The universe is more than just immense. And finish off the meditation by realizing that it was just all likely that there could be nothing.

The mind is insanely powerful. Now harness that power while you still can. You could be nothing but you are not. You are here. And you are supposed to be here. You have done many things and you will do many more. I hope you just make sure those things that you do are good. You do not have to be bad. Maybe you want to be. Well if you are I would not understand why you have been reading this book up until this point. There are plenty of good books to read. You did not have to read mine.

The sun will rise every morning. That is always something that you can count on. After you drill that fact into your head, begin to understand that you could and should always count on yourself. There are not only laws of nature. There are laws of reality. Black Sabbath had it right when they named one of their albums *Master of Reality*. Be the master of yours. I am not jesting nor am I only speaking of power dynamics. You truly control yourself. You can and should control your emotions when possible. You have and are the power. You are your own master.

I know. I am probably saying “master” too much. I just want to drill into your hand that you can and should count on things. If you really do not believe me, then wait. You can count on the sun rising tomorrow. I keep reiterating that because it should help elucidate the fact that you can learn to count on yourself. Again the idea is to understand that you are powerful.

We are meant to be here. You are not just physical matter. You matter. You really do. I do. We do. Are we meant to? That is a deep and potentially unanswerable question. Maybe if I had multiple degrees in philosophy I could actually answer that. But I do not. I have read Immanuel Kant in German though. That has to count for something. And no I am not attempting to brag. It took me more than four years to become fluent in German. I am sure that it would also take me a similar amount of time to become fluent in philosophy.

You are who you are. I am I. We are most likely different. As far as I have heard, humans have never been cloned yet. I am powerful. You are powerful. You are in control of your own life. You are meant to be. Become aware of who you truly are. It is difficult. My brain injury gave me a profound awareness of myself. Now I am not saying that you need a brain injury to have that too.

Self-actualize. Become self-aware. You owe that to yourself. No one can do it for you. You are who you are meant to be. You may be asking yourself, "How do I know who I am meant to be?" Well you simply just have to decide that for yourself. Is that understandable? You can be in control. You just have to want to be. Again, I do not mean that in reference to power dynamics. I just truly believe in freedom of will and just freedom in general.

Grab life by the horns and do not let it buck you off. Again I want to emphasize that you are powerful. Strong like bull. And no I do not necessarily mean physically strong. Your strength comes from within you. You have emotional and mental strength. Utilize it. You have the power. Feel it coursing through your veins. You are more than just bone and sinew. You are a masterpiece of emotions, feelings, and ideas. Other people can see that too. I am not just a crazy brain injured fool. I care about you. You are special. You are unique. You were born for a more complex reason other than your parents just had sex and your mother gave birth to you. I will say it again. You are here for a reason. You are meant to be here. If you were not, you would not be alive.

The human body is a vessel. Find out what floats your boat and just keep swimming. What do I mean by the human body being a vessel? I mean that it is like a vessel in that it carries us living humans through space and time. Mine has carried me to some dark places before and now it carried me to somewhere dangerous. One of my favorite artists is Alex Gray because he often portrays the human body as a series of fractals. The human body is mystical. We are the creators of gods, science, mythologies and religions. Does it make more sense now when I say the human body is a vessel? It is the perfect shape and size for the human spirit to fit in.

Call it the human body or the human form. Call it what you will but it is undoubtedly beautiful. You are beautiful. The Christian religion thinks god made man in his image. And no I do not mean literally "men." I mean *Hu"Man" kind*. We are all beautiful. If you believe god "created" us, then we were most likely designed

to be beautiful. Not only are you beautiful physically, but also you are beautiful on the inside. No I do not mean you are pretty because of your organs. I mean your spirit is gorgeous. Ok now back to the human form. I have gained a new appreciation for the human body since I was injured. My body saved me from death. If it were not so beautifully powerful, my brain would have certainly been turned into mush. And no, not mush like a delicious bowl of cereal. Mush more like the innards of a smashed pumpkin.

You are a human being. Unless you are reading this in the future and an intelligent dog-like creature has evolved. You did not choose to be beautiful per se. You have to accept that you were born that way. And no, I am not just referencing that Lady Gaga song. I mean that you are truly beautiful. You are, for a lack of better terms, gorgeous. Human beauty does not just have to be seen as external. You are beautiful. Acknowledge that fact.

You are more than meat on a skeletal frame. There is a whole entire world of beauty inside of you. Be proud of what you are unless you would rather be a cat. I hope that you do not, although I do love cats though. I do love you as well. I do not have to know you to love you. That is the power of the human heart. You can and honestly should love strangers. I am proud of who you are. Do not doubt yourself. Ok well maybe if you want to win *Jeopardy* it would be fair to doubt yourself. It is really difficult to win that show. Or at least it appears that way.

I like the fractals that Alex gray paints inside the human form because they emphasize that we are all complex. We are more than just made of a complex of organic matter. We are also spiritually complex. Another artist that I particularly enjoy that is similar to Alex Gray is Mati Klatwein. You might have seen his a artwork. He did the album artwork for the cover of *Bitches Brew* by Miles Davis. Both their wonderful, psychedelic art focuses on the spiritual nature of the human form. What is better to capture human beauty than art? You may prefer certain mediums, but you cannot deny that art does an incredible job. Human body. Human form. Do not conform but, release who you are truly meant to be. Be strong. Be courageous. Be fearless. But I understand if you might be afraid of spiders or snakes. That is not what I mean.

Life can be like a haiku. It can be short but sweet. My life was almost cut short so I almost lived a haiku-like existence. Luckily I can use more than five and seven syllables. My injury did not cause me any restrictions when it comes to my speech. Well that is not completely true. A doctor told me that my speech was seeming a little bit slow and that that was due to my injury. It may be slow but I can speak using more syllables than five, seven, and five. I have written haikus but I prefer to write free verse poems, although, a friend and I used to write sonnets and exchange them with one another once a week. Despite that I stand by my analogy of life being like a haiku.

Poetry is a beautiful way to describe life. Things may not always be what they seem. Just like how in some poems you might use a metaphor or use multiple metaphors. Your life's purpose might be encoded like the meaning of a poem. You have to discover it for yourself. You cannot just hire a detective to do it for you. If you want to try that out, I would advise you to spend your money on something else. You just need to learn how to look deep inside yourself. That is where you will find it. If you are struggling to find it, I encourage you to practice yoga or meditation. The real you is deep inside yourself. You just have to be willing to look for it. You can find the real you. You may just need to look hard to find him or her.

Life is what you make of it. It could just be a fancy Italian dinner if that is what you wanted to make yours into. I do really like Italian food. That may be because I have Italian in my blood. Although if I were going to be a realist I would suppose that you would likely make your life into something completely different. Or at least I hope that you would. Do not get me wrong, I do love food, but there is just more to life than that. "But I am a chef, Matt. Food is life to me." Well to each their own. I would just recommend that you focus on what you are on the inside and I do not mean the inside of your stomach after you eat. Chefs serve other people and bring joy to people's lives.

You are complex. That means you are complicated. That is ok. Everyone does not have to understand who you really are except for yourself. If you have to learn that you will. It may just take some time. I hope it is obvious that the keys to happiness are inside your mind and your heart. Feelings, emotions, and a positive life perspective will help guide you. The secret of life is different for everybody. It is inside of you. Deep inside. Just learn to channel it and you will begin to see and understand who you really are and what you are really meant to be, or become. You are not living in a fantasy world. If that is what you think, then you need to come back to reality. Your life is not a dream. If you think that it is I am telling you that you need to wake up. Now welcome back to reality. You can achieve your dreams. You are important. Everyone does not have to like you and if it feels like everyone does, well then congratulations. We all have internal power. You may be physically weak, but you can be strong on the inside. Tap into your internal energy and you can become stronger. There really are no limits to how strong that you can be. You just have to truly believe in yourself. Yeah, it is that easy. I believe in you. And you can to.

The end of the road may be barren. Be respectful and you may be shown around hospitably. We are all venturing on this journey called life. There are many, many travelers that you will meet along the way. If you take care of them, they will return the favor. Sometimes life is like a math equation. You need to balance both sides before you can find the solution. And do not worry. If you flunked algebra in high school, that was just a metaphor. The point being that you should achieve balance. Hopefully there are no complex multi-variable calculus problems that you need to

do before you die. For some of you that might not be too bad. "Here Jane. Solve this equation and will open the Pearly Gats.

Enough of the math talk, But if life were an equation,, just know that *YOU* are the solution. I bet you that you high school math teacher did not teach you that. I say high school math teacher because I got enough credits of math in high school to not need to take any in college. Yeah that is a little bit of a gloat. I may not be a genius but I sure am smart. Gloat alert #2. Do not worry, I think that you are smart too. "But Matt, you do not know me. I flunked out of sophomore year math and did not even graduate." Hey, look. You can fuck up and that is not what you are in totality. Well at least I hope that is true. "Oh look, there's Mr. Brain Injury." I know I am more then that, and believe me you are too. Well I mean I hope you do not have a brain injury, but what I really mean is that you complex like a god damn calculus equation. I man the good kind of complex though.

I hope that you get the point. Life is not easy. Believe me, I know. I almost died. I had to learn the hard way. I was telling a friend that I believe that my near-death-experience has given me clairvoyance. And no I do not mean that I can actually see the future, but that I have an over-heightened sense of awareness. Man that is a mouthful. Who the hell really knows? Maybe an angel saved me and she gave me the gift of sight. No I am not blind. Sight like the kind where I can see what things really are. Or maybe smacking my head on the ground just made me delusional. I have known some pretty delusional people. Once I had a roommate who saw Venus in the sky one night and thought it was an alien spaceship. Sorry sir, that is not an unidentifiable flying object. That is a not a flying object at all. That is a planet. It will be in the exact same spot tomorrow and at the same time. I feel things deeply. So deep that I feel like I know extra things. That is what I mean by clairvoyance.

For all I know I am just delirious. I think I am now somehow able to feel has little impact on reality. Well so far at least. I have had romantic visions that I believe will come true. And no, they were not just wet dreams. It is weird to feel something that has not happened yet. People call those premonitions. And no, not the terrible movie that Sandra Bullock was in. My apologies if you really like that movie. I am not a fan of Sandra.

What have I become? Did I really change? Well at least internally? Those are difficult questions to answer. I really do believe that I did change. Not all of me, but certain things. Like I feel that I have a much greater appreciation for life then I ever had before. I was born to do far more than die. And you were too, maybe more than me. What is the answer to this mystery? Again, look at your chest. It is inside of you. Feel the truth. You are it. How does it feel? Hopefully it feels good. I know. Some days you might feel bad. I get it. That is completely normal. But that does not need to inhibit you from channeling your inner strength. Channel it. Channel it every day.

There are a number of different ways to channel your inner energy. Meditate and contemplate what it really means to be a human. And no I do not mean that you are just 21 chromosomes and in a bag of bones. Being human means that you long the attention of other humans, you have feelings and emotions, and you have complex internal energy. That is too complex of a concept for me to really explain fully. Do you know who you really are on the inside? Well if not, then learn to channel him or her.

Who is in control of your life? Well duh, *you* are. I hope that that is obvious. Be like the humans in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Come out into the light. Be not afraid. That is what I mean by inner energy. It is your thoughts and emotions that clue you in to how to make substantial decisions. You think. You feel. That is what you are: a complex web of emotion, feeling, and thought. I do not think that life is supposed to be easy to understand. I also believe that it is not merely just a potential way for you to pass on your genetic material. Life is beautiful. Be it short, or be it long, it is beautiful. Again, you are beautiful. Channel that inner beauty and learn to reflect it around yourself.

If you act happy, then it might make someone else start to feel happy. That is the power of your emotions to influence others. We all have things that we will see in one another. You might not want to see some things but you will see them anyways. Pretend for a moment that happiness is like the flu. You go around someone else with the flu and then you might get it in return. Spread happiness. Unlike the flu it does not mean that you are sick. Spread it freely. That is an order. Just kidding. Maybe you prefer to spread sadness, although I highly doubt that, I do not intend to tell you what you should do. I just would prefer to recommend that you spread it.

Maybe you actually would prefer to go around spreading the flu. Well I think then you should return this book and get your money back. I highly doubt that anyone actually would make an effort to go about his or her day coughing on others in order to get them sick. Hey, who knows? There are some pretty twisted people in this world who need to learn how to really love themselves and to love others. The sun comes up every morning. You keep swimming. I think you get the picture. You are alive for a reason. You are my friend. Please be mine. We are both on the team of humanity. The world needs our unique perspectives and us. Be what you want others to be.

This is a tale of love, life, and death. I certainly prefer the concepts of love and life to death but I just figured the luck of me surviving my accident necessitated the explanation of my suicidal past. I have come face to face with death, both on purpose and on accident. Not every understands that I am an escape artist of death. I once tried to see if I could tie a belt to the top of my dorm room door in college and that did not work luckily. After the fact I now say I love life, but it is ironic and silly that I used to be so interested in taking my own life.

I want this book to inspire you. Do not think like I did the day I talked myself into wanting to jump off of a building. Convince others to love and you will be loved in return. You really do deserve it. I believe that I do to. And I will not kill myself. I have learned from the darkness of my past. Shine a light. The future is bright. I am sure that we all have had and will have dark moments. I will say it once more. The future is bright so spread the light.

That is a little saying I came up with and drew a picture for before I injured my brain. Spread it. You have the power. And do not worry because the light will not blind you. Shine it. I dare you. I will do it to. Let us do it together. We are on the same team. That is humanity. Or to put more cleverly, "humani-team." Not to be confused with the pun hu-manatee. I do love manatees though, although I have sadly never seen a wild one. You and I are in this together. Huddle up. Let us go in for the win. Human-iteam! Break.

Keeping swimming is meant to be a philosophy. As Dr. Berry told me, it is better to just tread water rather than to sink and drown. That is the concept. It is pretty simple. Some days are going to be worse than others, but just do not give up. Do not do it. I really believe that we are all powerful. No, not all-power like a god. All-powerful as in we, all of us are powerful. Your power is inside of you. The sooner that you can recognize that, then the happier you will be. And who does not want that. I have been depressed so trust me, I understand being sad. It does not have to be a mode of living.

Spread joy. Spread the light. Just keep swimming. Love yourself. Yes do it. It is harder than it seems but it is so worth it. Life is not simple. If it were I would write a guidebook on how to navigate it. But it is not. I will have to write a different book I suppose. Oh hey, I wrote this one. At least I wrote a book, which has been a dream of mine for a while. Actualize your dreams. What do you want to do? Sit down, plan and then do it. You have the power to achieve your dreams.

It will help to believe in yourself. Just believe. A little bit of faith in yourself will go a long way. Long like around the globe long. Long like a trip to another galaxy long. I am just using that to make a point. I do not actually know if faith in yourself could actually take you 5,000 light years. Yes that is how far that humans have calculated that the next galaxy is from earth. Unless you really are the genius who discovers interstellar space travel like that. If so, then I should say congratulations.

Life can be short. Life can be sweet. Others might be left to think that life is mostly just pain. Your attitude and feelings will not control whether nor that how you perceive things. There is an entire realm of possibilities. I mean really. You could be choosing to go on a nice, athletic mountain ride and then end up almost choking on your own blood. Good intentions do not seem to always yield good results. I cannot even remember the day or even the week I was injured. From what I was told by doctors, I will probably never ever be able to remember those things.

Forgetting is normal, but forgetting why all of you and your girlfriends broke up is kind of strange. Maybe you have never had a girlfriend or have only had boyfriends. Well I think you probably get the point. Memory is temporary for everyone. Be proud of what you can remember because I will literally forget to eat breakfast some days and I love eating. Memory. Is it a blessing or a curse? Well I would take either if mine would just work like it used to.

I hope that my story is one of inspiration. I hope that you will intend to inspire as well. Just know that you do have the power to influence others. Maybe it is just to influence your friend to keep on his helmet and body armor. Be that friend. You may save his or her life. I think that example just goes to show how little decisions that you make can be extremely important. That is why it is good to be present, aware, and self-reflective. Learn from yourself and then help to teach others. That is one benefit I see of the world being over-populated. You are never going to be truly alone. Follow your heart. And if you do feel lost, do not be afraid to ask for guidance. We did not choose to be born into a population of over seven billion other humans. Take advantage of that fact. We are seven billion strong. Well actually there are almost eight billion people at the time of writing this.

My will to live has never been stronger. I really wonder if that is the product of my near death experience, or if this feeling would have come about anyways. Maybe you have to almost die to learn what it really means to be alive. I like to believe that my injury taught me what I am really alive to do and that is to inspire. To show people that life is more than a gift. It is something to truly be cherished. You *will* lose it. I am sure you know that already, but do you really understand what it means to be alive? Why did you have to be born? I mean, after all, you could have been aborted. You are here for a reason. You are supposed to be alive. That is probably a difficult concept to truly understand. You are *meant* to be alive. What is the meaning of life? That is up to you to decide for yourself. If I have to offer my opinion, I think that you are the meaning of life. You may take a while to truly actualize that reality, but I can pretty much guarantee that you will.

It may take time for you to realize, but you are fully in control of your own life. You wake up, you get dressed, maybe you go to work, and then you go to sleep. What you do in between is all up to you. You are the light so spread it. Give others the motivation to learn how to really see as well. Seeing is believing, or so the saying goes. You do not have to be mentally blind. You can and should learn from everyone around you. Trust me. I was a teacher in public schools four years so I think I know a thing or two about learning. Some days you may not want to learn. Well open your mind and you will start to see the truth. It is inside you.

If I have not already made it clear, then I should say this. The keys to the mystery of life are inside you. Do not feel trapped or stuck. Be like Harry Houdini and free yourself so that you can escape. Life is not a Public Enemy song. Do not fight the power. Well at least not the power inside of you. Feel free to rebel though. I believe

in freedom most of all: personal freedom, sexual freedom, political freedom, and psychological freedom. Maybe you prefer being hypnotized and being told what to do. I highly doubt that though. Maybe some people like barking like a dog when a particular person snaps his or her fingers. Hopefully you are not one of those people, but if you are just keep being you. Everyone should do that. Be your goddamn self. Even if you are a professional actor or actress you have to be yourself at least some of the time.

Love yourself, be yourself. If you are not seeing what I am getting at, it is that you are the solution to everything. Wow, everything? Yes. Every thing. That may be a big and bold statement, but I will stick by it. Having a bad day? Make it better. Do not want to be alone? Go take a walk in a park and meet people. Do not know what to do? Come up with two random options and flip a coin. Are you getting the picture? Things are more about you and what you think you probably realize. Every day is a new adventure. Do not be afraid to explore.

Do not be afraid in general. I used to be afraid of spiders, so I picked up a tarantula and now I am not. I used to be afraid of heights so I started climbing trees and now I am not. Confront your fears. "But Matt, I am afraid of dying." Well bad news. You will have to confront that fear one day to. You have no choice but to die. It does not matter how much adrenaline you carry on your person. Death is inevitable. Be happy while you still can. Think of happiness as a choice. You may feel sad, but you can choose to do things that you know will make you happier. So do them. Fear is a natural response meant to keep us safe, but you do not always need to be afraid.

The only true enemy that you have in life is yourself. Take back control and win the fight. The enemy of your enemy is your friend. The enemy of negativity is positivity, so be positive to others and they will be positive towards you. Human society is like that. Be positive and you will see positivity reciprocated towards you. Life is not necessarily a cakewalk. Times may be tough. But trust that you really are underneath your skin. You are strong. You are powerful. You can overcome negativity. The keys are inside your mind and heart. You have all the answers to all your own problems. Just utilize yourself and that is how you will find them. I could have given up numerous times in my life, but luckily I was able to convince myself not to. Never give up. Never surrender. When life knocks you down then get back up. You have the power. Believe me. You are the power. You are alive for a reason. Everything happens for a reason. I am proud of you and I probably do not even know you. Be proud of yourself. Yeah, that is an order. "But Matt, you are just a book. You cannot tell me what to do." Well consider it a goddamn recommendation then. Is that better?

This book is meant to be about life, love, and death because I think those are all important and difficult concepts to understand. I have considered taking my own life because I was in love before. I think that one fact about me somewhat encapsulates all of the sections of this book pretty well. Almost dying has now

taught me to appreciate life more than I did before. I hope you will learn to appreciate yours more as well without having to almost die. I suppose though, that some lessons just have to be learned the hard way. I wanted to die by jumping off a building but that helped provide for me the impetus to get over heights. Using that logic, I do believe that everything happens for a reason. I did not jump because I was worried it would cause my family too much pain.

I may have crashed on my mountain bike because I was going too fast in a trail I had never ridden before. I may always fall in love with another woman because of the biological urge within me to procreate, or maybe not that exactly. But I do believe there is a reason why I always seem to. I do believe there is a reason for everything. Some may be simple and readily apparent, while others may be more complex and difficult to understand. This book is like a portal into what I really believe. I had wanted to write one since I was eight years old and it apparently took me getting a brain injury to finally do it. I think that that serves as evidence that the motivation to achieve and actualize your dreams can stem from very unlikely and potentially unwanted places.

Never before my injury had I wanted to write a book about someone with a brain injury, but now I have. Maybe I did not have to get a brain injury to write a book, but it sure did help. That right there should demonstrate the power of positivity. I wish I did not get a brain injury, but it motivated me to achieve one of my dreams. I want to inspire you. I want you to do whatever it takes to achieve your dreams. You can achieve them no matter how big they are. You will achieve them. The impetus may come out of the least understandable thing you can imagine, but it will come.

Imagine that your life is like a Hollywood film and that you play the part of the leading role. That is how powerful you are. Give an awesome and a commanding performance. You earned this part. Others could have been chosen, but instead you were. What do I mean by that last part? I mean that you are alive for a reason but that that reason may be revealed to you over time, just like how an actor or actress must take time to memorize his or her lines. Also like an actor or an actress, you may have to play different roles in your life. Stand up for yourself and what you believe in. Believe in yourself and stand up for yourself too. You deserve to be admired. Continue being yourself and you will begin to see the true purpose for you being alive. It does not need to be a mystery but you might need to look for the reason on your own. Let me reiterate that you are in control of your own destiny. Things do happen for a reason. You are alive for a reason. I did not die for a reason. I wrote this book for a reason, just like you are reading this book for a reason. You are the reason. You can and should do whatever you want to. Again, I believe in you. Do I need to? No, but I do.

Now is the time for me to fully wrap things up. Thank you for coming with me on this journey. I do not know how long it has taken you to read this far, but I do hope you have enjoyed it. If so, use the "joy" in your enjoyment and try to spread joy to

other people as well. You are an essential component of the human spirit. You are meant to be alive. Love and be loved. Spread happiness and that will make you happy. I want you to be. I really do. Be happy from the bottom of my heart. You do not need to only dream when you are sleeping. Come on. Dream big. Follow those dreams. I know you do not just have them when you are sleeping. They may seem hard to achieve but you can do it. Be *like The Little Engine That Could*. "I think I can. I think I can." Well I think you can too. Actually, I know that you can. Achieve those dreams. Self-actualize. You will and you can. You deserve it.

Some days you may question why you are alive, but here you are. You are meant to be here. You need only to define that meaning for yourself. Hopefully no one takes that power away from you. Be happy. Be glad you are alive because one day you will not be. I cannot say with any certainty what that will be like, but I really do doubt that it will be like this. Remember the title of this book when you feel stuck in life. And there will probably be times in your life when you do in fact feel stuck. So just keep swimming. At the very least tread some goddamn water. I will do it too, even though I do not have to. I have wanted to give up before but luckily I never did and neither should you. Now you have the chance to learn from my mistakes. I made them for you. But I do not intend to make them again, so I recommend that you learn from the ones that I have written here.

You have made it this far and if you just keep swimming you will make it all the way. Nobody knows for certain where that is, but I bet that will not stop you from finding it. This journey that we are all on has many destinations, but I can guarantee that you will find one. You have made it this far, so just keep swimming and you will make it all the way. Where that finish line is may not be known by anyone, but be not afraid to explore the unknown. Life is an adventure. Explore, learn, laugh, and love. And you may encounter others doing that with you. Learn to rely on them. Learn to love yourself and others might learn alongside you. This journey may be difficult, but it will end, so do your best to enjoy it while you still can. But learn from me and be careful not to enjoy it too much or you might end up getting a brain injury. And goddamn does that suck.

I met others who were just trying to enjoy themselves and they got brain injuries too. It can and does happen to anyone even though he or she may not choose it. You cannot always get what you want. But again, you just might find that you get what you need. Embrace love. Embrace fear. Embrace loneliness. Embrace depression. Embrace sadness because this too shall pass. What you do matters because you matter. Sometimes you may feel like you do not but the joke is on you. You do matter. I am certain of it. You are made up of matter, if we must speak scientifically, but you also do matter. You are more than mass and energy. You are a piece in the puzzle of the human spirit. You are supposed to be alive. Learn to recognize that fact and be proud of it. Be proud of yourself too. It can be hard sometimes but do it anyways. Yeah there is often a little caveat to everything like that. You are smart but you may do dumb things. You are kind but you may do mean things. You are

alive but you may not be tomorrow. You hopefully get the point by now. You may not get the point right away but you will get it eventually. You do not degree in philosophy to do that but congratulations on getting one if you do have one. Learn to count on yourself just like you can count on the sun rising every morning. Things will be hard for a reason, but if you are persistent you will do them. You can do it. You should do it. Believe in yourself. It may take time so just be patient. You will reap the rewards of your patience

Love, laugh, and laugh some more. We all do things for a reason. What is the reason though for falling in love? I honestly have not actually figured that one out. Because it makes you feel good? Well sometimes it has led to me feeling really bad so I doubt that that is the reason. Does there really need to be a reason? Well maybe you are not deterministic enough to think that there is. There probably is a reason, but it is just probably just too complex for me to figure it out. I do not need to know everything and neither do you. Just know that your life does have a purpose and that you need to define that purpose for yourself. It may be difficult. It may take your whole life, but you will most likely do it.

You may not know what the true meaning of life is right now but it will come to you one day before you die. What do I think it is for me? I am alive to spread love, knowledge, and too make people feel good. I am alive to be light knowing that the future is bright. I am alive to inspire. Is that why I did not die? It very well may be. I do not have all the answers and I do not want to pretend to. But I am sure that I do have some so I have written this to attempt to share them with you. Sharing is caring a man who I stayed with in Istanbul told me. I do care about you. I may not know you but I do care about you. I love you. I will always love you, no matter what you do, unless you decide to kill people and keep killing people. For god sakes, please do not do that. Spread the light, ok? You have the power to inspire others. You are a light. Now spread it. Light the path so that others may see. Others may be afraid of the dark but if you seek to spread light, then they will not have to be.

Life is hard. Life can suck. Life can get you down. All you need to do is remember to get back up. You are the solution. That may not seem readily apparent, but look deep inside yourself and you will be sure to find it. Again imagine that life can be dark like a cave, but spread the light and not only will you see again. But others will get to too. Your ability to influence positively is probably stronger then you think it is. Be a beacon. Your heart is like a flame. It produces light. You are meant to be here. I need you to be. I want you to be. Do you want to be? Well if not right now then I must recommend that you do some self-discovering. The cave analogy makes sense there too. Discoveries in the dark do occur, but it may help if you bring some light with you. You can help others by spreading the light to them too. Life is like a metaphor. It often means more then you may first think.

Coming to grips with how powerful you truly are is probably more difficult than you think. You have the power to spread joy. You have the power to make others feel

love. You have the power to pick others up when they feel down. You are downright powerful. That power comes from within you. What is the source of that power? It is probably emotions and feeling if I must conjecture. You are energy. You are love. You can be happiness too. I love you. I know I have said it already but once is not enough. I love you. Who do you love? Are there limits to who you may love? You may think so, but I do not. This is real life. This is not *Romeo and Juliet*. We all possess the capacity to love. In my opinion you were designed to. I am not implying that god designed you to love per se. Darwin believed animals such as finches were designed by nature to evolve better beaks so they could eat in order to sustain their species. Why were we designed to love? Maybe we were just to increase our odds to copulate and procreate, but I do believe it goes deeper than that. If you do not agree I encourage you to find a way to convince me of that.

It may take some time for you to realize the true purpose for you being alive, but that is ok. Haste is in fact waste, or so the saying speculates. Channel the real you that is living deep within yourself. It can be hard. If you are struggling then maybe try to meditate. I do not always want to but it does help. That is the power of the mind. You can simply just think and not think about anything at all. Is that not just incredible? You can think without thinking. That is the why I came up with the meditation that centralizes itself on that premise. What really is nothing? Can you even conceptualize nothing? You can think about nothing but even that is something.

That is deep, right? And then you have to understand that you are something amidst many other things, but there really could have just as easily been nothing. No thing is really what nothing is supposed to mean. But the ability to conceptualize and understand comes from within the human brain, which is a thing. We all probably can try to imagine what nothing is, but to actually do it is impossible. You would first have to not do anything, and then you would just die because you could not breathe. Seriously. Try to do it. You cannot. I encourage you to process the meaning of existence. I think therefore I am. What did Descartes have to do to come up with that idea? I have no clue, but damn was that guy fucking smart. That was one mind that was brilliantly beautiful. Do not worry. Yours is too. You may not be making leaps and strides in the world of philosophy, but you are a genius in your own way. Do not doubt yourself and your intelligence. It will do you no good.

I want you to have learned something from reading this. Even that that is just that Matthew Brignola got a brain injury from a mountain biking crash. Well I suppose that that has to count as something. Are you inspired? Did you reflect on what it means to be alive? If not then I hope that you reread this book once you finish it. Yes this is meant to be a strange self-reflexive part of my novel. This book is not just a book though. It is supposed to be a vehicle to inspire you with. Wait books are not vehicles. They are just words printed on paper. Not a literal vehicle. I mean a means of conveyance. My intent with this novel is to convey that you decide

for yourself what the meaning of life is. All of life's secrets are inside of you. Just take the time for you to find them.

There is a good deal of speculation in this book, but the goal is to give you the hint that you ultimately decide what is really true for you. Ask yourself tough questions. I bet that you will not always be able to find the answers. If your head kind of hurts after reading parts of this book then I think I may have achieved my goal. This is not just supposed to be a simple children's story. This is meant to be a deep and reflexive philosophical experience. You do not have to believe in everything that I speculated on in this book. That was not my intention. I just hope that you feel inspired, that you do not take your life for granted, and that you do your best to spread the light. After all, the future is bright. There will always be things to look forward to in the future. I look forward to fully recovering. It will happen. It just will take time.

Introspection is the key. Things will take time but you will figure many of them out. All that you have to do is to believe in yourself. Yes, it is that simple. You are the answer. You were meant to exist. What is the meaning of your existence? That is up to you to define for yourself. This book is really about you. About who you are supposed to be. I am not intending to tell you what to do. I just want you to feel love. Ok, I guess that is kind of telling you something that you should do. But in this specific instance do you think that that was a bad thing? I discussed some happy things and some depressing things. You probably know both those feelings. This book is not bipolar. It is just an inner reflection and an attempt to process who you really might be in the inside.

Learn to look deep inside of yourself and you will begin to see your soul and who you were meant to be. I think that I was meant to be a lover, a deep thinker, and someone who brings joy to other people's lives. Is that who I am in totality? No, I do not think so. I think that I am meant to be many things. I just want my ability to escape death to provide inspiration to others. I will die. I am very aware of that fact. But September of 2020 was not that time it seems. Maybe I still needed to do more things. Here is one of those things. You are reading it. I suppose that I could have made a film instead, but I have wanted to write a book for a long time and I gave up on my dream of wanting to make a feature length film. They are both creative endeavors, but something about a novel feels much more wholesome to me.

I do not know who you are on the inside. Maybe you have not even figured that out for yourself yet, but just be patient and I know that you will. "Well damn Matt, you really do like to act like you know everything." I do not know everything. You might actually know more than me. Although I do know something that most people will not realize. I know what it is like to almost die. I did not even get to see my life flash before my eyes. I will not ever remember even if I did. I hope that mine is a unique perspective to you. I did not choose to obtain it. I fought hard not to die though and I got it partially because of that.

I have tasted human mortality. One day you will taste it for yourself, but until then I hope that you spend your time doing what makes you really happy. You deserve to be happy. Why do you deserve it? You deserve it because you are most likely a human that lives on the same planet as me. You deserve to be happy because you were born. You deserve to be happy because you exist. "But why Do I not deserve to be sad?" If you really desire to be sad then fine you deserve it. You deserve whatever you want. "But I want a million dollars. Do I deserve that?" Do you work under a contract for a million dollars? If no, then you probably do not deserve that. Money is not the only thing that makes you rich. Love can make you emotionally rich. Is that good enough for you? I hope so.

We are entitled to have many wants and to have many desires but you just need to know that you will likely not fulfill all of them unless you are the most rigid minimalist who will ever live. "I prefer to breathe for breakfast rather than eating food." If that is the kind of person that you are then ok, you probably will fulfill all your desires, or you might just die before you really can. Being a minimalist is not necessarily bad but it is good to indulge at times. You live by whatever philosophy suits you the best. This book is not meant to limit your freedom of expression. Actually I intend the opposite. I want to express how you can really reveal and express who you are on the inside. Some things merely just take time. You will achieve your dreams. You will get many of the things that you want. It just helps to be realistic. Set goals for yourself, but understand that it may take time for you to reach those goals.

You may not get everything that you want in life in a day. It is normal to get frustrated when you do not get the results that you want right away. But keep trying and working and you may eventually get what you want. I do not honestly know what you really want, but I do know that if you sustain a positive mental attitude that you will be far more likely to get those things. Some days are not exactly going how I want them to go, so I will just sit and try to say nothing, do nothing, and wait until I am tired enough to go to sleep.

You cannot always get what you want. I am not telling you to lower your expectations, but to be open to the idea of not getting everything that you want to get. I understand that that is a pretty simple principle that you are probably familiar with, but I do not think there is any harm in iterating that. You will not always get what you want. There will be time though, when you do get things though that you do not want. I did not want a brain injury, but I got one anyway. The sooner you embrace the darkness of reality, the sooner you will know how to actually make yourself happy. Just like how the contemplation of death can be generative, so can the acceptance of disappointment. You will be let down. You will have bad days. But you may also have amazing days and even just ok days. Hey, just "ok" is better than bad. I think that the worst day of my life was when I got a brain injury. And I cannot even remember that day. But I guarantee you that it was bad. Almost dying

is not good. It is definitely not as bad as actually dying though. Well at least I assume that it is not as bad as actually dying. I am happy that I lived. I am happy that I did not die yet.

The day of my accident did have some oddly serendipitous things about it though. That off-duty EMT did not have to be there and my friends could have let me take my armor off. I could have lived in a different state that does not have the nation's finest hospital for treating brain injuries. I sure am unlucky for getting a brain injury, but I am particularly lucky for other circumstances following the day of my accident. I could think that now my life really sucks, but I prefer to maintain a positive mental attitude. "I did not die that day. I did not die that day." That is definitely a negative thing. It is better to focus on that than to say, "I got a brain injury. I got a brain injury." I did get a brain injury but I also narrowly escaped death. Which one is more positive? The answer to that question is hopefully fairly obvious. "I did not die yet. I did not die yet." If you just read that, I hope that you say the same thing to yourself everyday that you do not die. You will die. I will die. Embrace it. It is unavoidable. It does not matter if your friends tell you to keep on your armor or if an EMT is riding behind you. You will die. There will be time until that day comes. Do what you can to enjoy that time while it lasts.

I am happy and you should be too. You are not dead yet. You will not get every single thing that you want, but you do not need to dwell on that fact. Dwell instead on the fact that you are alive. You are fucking alive. You could have just as easily been nothing, but here you are. I transcribed that meditation for you so that you actually try to conceptualize what nothing really is and that we are all something instead. I will not be offended if you never actually do it, but I do think that the ideas it can give you will be good for you if you just think about that concept. There could just as easily have been nothing. I will never fully understand that reality and neither can you. You are some thing. You are a living human being. Determine your purpose for being that thing on your own. You will find it one day. You deserve to be alive. Thank you for existing. I am proud of you.

Different things make us lucky. I am lucky I did not die and you are lucky that you have not yet either. Everyday you could be thankful for that. There are a vast amount of things that you could be thankful for, so I hope that you are. You will have your bad moments. That does not mean that you should not be positive. you have the power to influence your emotions. It is better to stay positive rather than being exclusively negative. You get to make the choice. Would you rather choose to think positively, or would you rather think negatively? You did not have to be born, but you were. Are you proud of that fact? I am proud of my mother for giving birth to me. Be proud of your mother as well and your father too. Tell them that you are proud. They are responsible for you having come into existence. Take pride in who made you. You did not get to choose who did that. I understand that some parents can be bad and abusive, but they are still responsible for their children being alive. You are alive. Are you proud of that fact? do you need to

consult with the human spirit in order to be proud? Well the joke is on you again. You consult with it everyday whether you want to or not.

This is your only life. Are you making sure to make the most of it? You do not have to, but why would you not strive to? I certainly seem to ask you, you the reader, some silly questions sometimes. I just want you to feel like you are part of this story. I wrote this for you. I know. I did not dedicate this book to you, but I hope that you get the idea. Are you fulfilled? Are you in control of whether you are or not? I know. Those are intentionally difficult questions to answer. The solutions to all your life's problems are inside of your mind. You are the solution. Are you having a bad day? Do something to make it better. Are you having more problems than that? Well use the same logic and just try to do something that will make them better. You are the one who is ultimately in control of yourself in your own life.

You are supposed to be here. Supposed to. I do not honestly even know exactly what I mean by saying that but I am confident that I am right. You are not dead yet. That is for a reason. Be happy about that fact because you could literally die at any moment. Love. Love and be loved. It is honestly just as simple at that. You are not dead yet so you can still love. I suppose you could still hate to but I would advise against that. Hate literally gets you nowhere except in misery and constant suffering. Be the best you that you can be. Every day can be made better than the last. You always have the power to make it better. I am far too familiar with darkness. Hence the phrase that the future is bright so spread the light. I am more than just a product of my mistakes. You are too. Believe in yourself most of all. Use that belief to overpower your mistakes.

Focus on the bright side. Be the light. Spread it. There is no good reason that I have encountered not to be that and to do that. There is a flame burning deep inside of you. Help to ignite others. People need you. I need you. I may just be a stranger but I am glad that you live on this planet. Be glad that you do too. Please, I am begging you. I really do love you and no I do not necessarily know you. How is that possible? If I do know you, then know I may have done some bad or mean things to you in the past, but that now I am sure that I love you and I am more than glad that you are alive. Yeah that one was intended for the homies. You know who you are. We never had to meet but I am certainly glad that we did. I did not actually die even though I almost did, so I really do hope that that fact does not disappoint you.

I really do love you and care about you. Yes you, reader. I do not care who you are. All that matters is that you are alive. I really cannot say thank you enough times. Harness your energy and by that I mean the energy inside of you. Utilize it to do well for and to inspire others. You can do it. Yes you. So go out and do it. That is a demand. No I do not mean to control you. I just want to impress upon you the vital role that you could help play in society. You can play the role of a true helper, the role of a lover, a friend, and the role of a hero. But that is not all. You can decide the rest for yourself what else that you should be. I really do believe in you and have

faith in you. Let that sink in for a while. I want too care about you and I do not even know you and may not necessarily be alive when you are reading this but I hope that the spirit of my words is immortal. You are a gift. You are a treasure. Thank you for continuing to be yourself and please do not stop

Getting to the end of this book scares me because I will no longer be able to praise you. I will just keep swimming though and another opportunity may arise. You are the power. Be yourself. You are so amazingly beautiful. Yes you. I do not care if you are a man or a woman. I think that you are beautiful. I may not even know what you look like, but I do believe that. Open your heart and open it wide. Let others come inside of you. You have the power, the strength, and the courage. All you need to do is believe in yourself. Please do not let me be the only one. Not that I am assuming that I necessarily would be.

Have no fear. You are meant to be here. We want you here. And if you think you know someone who does not, then do something to help prove him or her wrong. You have the right and the power to do that. Look deep inside yourself for all the answers. I know that you have them. You maybe just are uncertain that you found them. Dive deep and keep swimming. You will find them. That I can guarantee. You are an essential component if the human spirit. It could not possibly live on without you. You keep the wheel spinning. Thank you for being alive. You probably did not choose that initially but everyday you continue to. You definitely did not have to, but here you are.

You should not only learn how to love others, but also to love yourself. That may be difficult at certain times, but I recommend that you do it anyways. I know that you have the power to. I did not die for a reason. Well maybe I did not die yet for multiple reasons but damn, did I come close. I am lucky that I did not. You may think that what happened to me is not lucky, but I must emphasize that I am lucky that things were not worse and that I managed to survive. I certainly did not have to. I do not really do not know how to fully comprehend that. Is there a god and was she looking out for me? The atheist in me says "hell no," but for all I know maybe she was. And yes, I will stand by she. I may not honestly know that I actually believe in here at this point, but if she does exist I am confident that she is a woman. I know that does not really make sense. I say that I do not believe in god, but then I say that she is a woman. Hey, I mean you must admit that being given birth to by a divine creature is better than being created by an old, white-haired bald guy.

We may not receive all of the answers. You are free to believe whatever you want to believe. I encourage you to do that. I hope that you do not rely on somebody else to instruct you in what you should believe in. I know people who do expect to be to by somebody else should tell him what to believe in though. Figure it out for yourself. Why does somebody need to do it for you? That sounds like a thing that a d4manding young child would do. You do not need to trust me on anything. I believe in freedom. I do not know if that principle is honestly embodied by many

religions though. You should decide what to believe in. Consider what is said in a church to be a recommendation and not just the “word of God” and you have the right idea. Please understand that I am trying to tell you what to believe in either. You can determine that for yourself.

I have had enough of the god and this religious talk. I have no place commenting on what anyone really chooses to believe in. I just want people to be inspired and to inspire others. Each person should do whatever makes him or her happy as long as that happiness does not come at someone else’s expense. Do not take advantage of others and you should be rewarded. I am fairly confident that you were already aware of that principle, but there is no harm in saying it again. You do mean a lot. Some days you may not feel like that, but I hope that you will begin to consider that fact everyday. And I mean “mean” as in you are worth a lot and not that you are actually mean. Well it is perfectly normal to be mean sometimes, but it makes you a better person to try not to be.

Maybe I am stating the obvious. If so, then why do some people never seem to get it? Be like the opposite of a magnet. Well at least on one pole. Positive attracts positive. Negative repels negative. There that right there is the normal behavior of magnets. I hope that you realize that I am not trying to give a miniature science lesson. I just want to impress upon you that you should be positive. Hopefully that is not too difficult to understand either. I think that you get the point and that it is actually a good thing. “Magnets. How the fuck does that shit work?” I honestly haven’t the slightest clue. I believe that the principle still stands though.

Be positive. I really recommend that you do it. Understand that will probably not be able to be positive everyday. Please be aware that that is normal and ok. But you can still do your best to be positive all of the other times. Boom! Drops the mic. Really, just be positive. Is that too much to ask for from you? Maybe I am being demanding. Well if you think that then you are not being positive! It really is a lot simpler than you probably think. Example: “I am stuck in traffic and am going to be late to work. At least I drove because I would have left at three a.m. to be able to walk and get there on time.” Example two: “I got a brain injury and almost choked on my own blood to death. Almost choked to death. That is a lot better than actually choking to death.” Take my tragedy as an example. You will have bad days. But you will also have good days that hopefully counteract the bad ones.

Some things are good and some things are bad. But just realize that you have the power to make things better. “The holocaust was bad. How could you make that better? Did you ever hear about Oskar Schindler? He employed Jews and kept them and their families safe during the holocaust. He took it upon himself to make things better. Hopefully we never have another holocaust, but take Schindler as an example. You can be positive. You can help others. Why would you not necessarily? You can improve the lives of others. I cannot think of a particularly good reason why you would not. True, there are some extenuating circumstances where might

want to help but it is better not to, but you could always go help somebody else. Be the change you want to see in the world. Come on. You can do it. Believe in yourself. Believe in others as well. Some people may not really deserve it but others do. Do not dwell on the fact that there are indecent people. Be the opposite and be decent.

Life gives you problems, but trust the fact that you can be the solution. All you need to do is to look down inside yourself. It definitely helps if you learn to love yourself. Go ahead and give yourself a hug. You deserve it. Be proud of yourself. You may have done bad things in the past, but if you remain positive you are less likely to do more now. I think that that is a fair assessment. I know I have done mean and rude things before, but I still try to focus on the positive. You can control your mentality. Have a positive, mental attitude and things will make more sense that way. You choose whether to be positive or not to be. I know which I would prefer and I think that you probably prefer the same thing. So be positive. It does not need to be difficult. But if it is then start by saying, "I am loved. I deserve love in my life."

Be the key, the answer, and the solution. You can do it if you are willing to. Be confident. Do not be afraid. Today may not be a good day, but there are good ones in your future. Just be patient and wait for it to get better. It will get better. Some things just take a little bit of time. I have been low. Really low. But I have always gotten back up. You can too. I mean I have divulged some times when I was about to kill myself, but I did not. I got over it. Things really do get better. You can be happy. You might not get to be happy everyday, but that is not necessarily the end of the world. Unless there is a there is an asteroid the size of Texas hurdling towards the earth. Then it could be the end of the world. Then yeah, you can afford to not be positive. But who knows? The asteroid could have a lot of positively charged space metals in it and your little bit of positivity could help repel it.

Despite my pseudoscientific attempts to prove that being positive will help you, I hop that you will recognize that it can. Maybe I am just preaching to the choir. Whatever that even really means. Are there actually we known examples when a pastor promotes preaching to a choir? Well there are not any particular ones that I can think of. I do think it is a silly saying. But look. I used it too. Maybe I am silly as well. Well actually, I prefer the word "goofy."

Act like a mirror and reflect positivity into your surroundings. Not only should you be positive, but also you should work to encourage others to do the same thing. I am using a bunch of metaphors to help prove my point. Hopefully they all make decent sense. I did study English and poetry in college after all. The metaphors are not intended to confuse you though. I just prefer to play with language. I do think that is better than being boring.

If you do have a problem with that, I hope you can find a way to send me some hate mail. But if you really have read this far you know that I would honestly not want to

recommend that. How about love mail? Nice mail? Let's be friends in real life mail? There I go. That is a lot better. Hopefully you think the same thing. "No Matt! I prefer hate mail." Ok curmudgeon. Send me all the hate mail that your heart desires. Just kidding. I do not think that hate actually comes from the heart.

I am on a journey. You are too. There will be difficult and potentially dangerous parts but be not afraid. I certainly have been afraid and I thought some things that I seriously regret but I cannot turn back time. I am not a time lord. Since I made the smart choice not to kill myself, I must now live with the reality that I have wanted to. It is definitely not a very sexy reality. That is ironic since I am always searching for love. I highly doubt that many women would consider that attractive. Now there are those really unflattering things about me. I have a brain injury and I have been suicidal. Would you want to be with someone like that? That would definitely not be my first choice but seeing as those two things are true for me, I would consider it. Love is blind after all. Or so the saying goes.

I have really been wondering if god is real now. Were there an angel looking out for me and is that why I did not die? Regardless I was lucky. I could have died from choking on my own blood or have really extreme brain damage from hypoxia. Were those two visions I had of god being a woman real? If god is a woman maybe she did not let me die because she was taking care of me like a mom takes care of her child. Most Americans think that god is a white bearded man, but I think god would be a race-less woman. It is funny I think that because I have been an atheist since I was 13 years old. I even submitted a documentary about the evolution of religions to an atheist website. We did not win the competition but we sure tried.

What do you believe? Is there a spiritual realm? I honestly am not sure what I believe in anymore. Did I just have an acid flashback or have I really seen god twice? The more logical and believable thing is that it was probably just the result of drugs. Part of me just wants to believe though. Is god a woman or a bearded, white male? I guess I may just have to wait until I die to find out. The mystery of life may be only solved by death. Well that is kind of morbid. That should not be the outlook of an optimist. But I suppose I do not match the definition of one. I have been depressed and have wanted to take my own life. Despite that I do feel optimistic. I am glad I never jumped off of that bridge. I am glad I just got a brain injury instead of dying. No, I do not want a brain injury, but at least I did not die. I was pretty close to dying on that day after all. I got lucky though and did not. I suppose that maybe just lady god was looking out for me.

I wonder why I have wanted to kill myself multiple times? I do not think that it is genetic. At least as far as I know there is not a history of suicide in my family. Maybe I am just an anomaly. What is the source then? Honestly it is usually loving a woman that results in me becoming suicidal. Be it unrequited love or mutual love, I become helpless. Love is supposed to make one feel good and cared for rather than becoming suicidal. No one wants to die alone I believe and neither do I. I usually

end up wanting to kill myself because of love, but I keep doing it anyways. I suppose I will probably be on the day when I actually die. All I can do is hope that I have gotten wise enough that it will not be by my own hand. I do not want to become a self-murderer now. I want to inspire, love, take care of others, and help others to truly see what they can be. I want people to see who they truly are on the inside. I am a lover. Many people are probably other things than that.

Love a lover. Love a friend. Just love. I do not think that is wrong to want that in the world. Why can't we be friends? If I met you I would hope that we could. Maybe I do know you and we already are. Friendship can be hard to come by but I love the pursuit of it. Love is probably the emotion that I know the best. I am a lover and not a fighter after all. I have never actually been in a real physical fight, which I know is not necessarily the norm for a male. Is love just an emotional response or is it more than that? I fall on the side that believes that it is more. Could it be an actual force of nature? Is love more than just a release of neuro-chemicals? Again, I definitely believe so.

I am an emotional being. I feel very deeply. I care for others. I love others. I need others. I need those things in my life. I do not think that that is probably abnormal. I write love poems to women. I paint for women. I take care of women. I cook for women. I rub backs. I rub feet. I give oral, sexual pleasure to women. Yeah I just went there. I am just a man after all. I suppose I want this book to be read by many people but I just got all sexual. Well I believe that is ok. *50 Shades of Gray* was a bestseller after all. I did not go into detail into how I like to orally pleasure women. Hopefully I get a pass because of that. Find a way to send me fan mail if you would like that though. I am here to please and to pleasure. Yeah, now that is what I call some word play.

Love, pleasure, friendship, and food are just some of the things that I really desire. I assume that food is pretty obvious. Hopefully pleasure is too. Honestly all of those things should seem pretty obvious. I hope that you desire most of those things as well. I am simple when it comes down to it. I am in some ways a minimalist as well. I am not a big fan of extravagance. I like playing physical games, eating, and making music. That is relatively minimal. Well maybe not the music part. I prefer simplification as opposed to complexity. An opposing example though, is that I read whole books rather than just the Cliff Notes. I have never actually even used Cliff Notes. When I was studying in college people recommended it but I would always prefer to read the real book. I once made an effort to read one book a day for two weeks straight.

I like to challenge myself, which may be another reason why I crashed on a mountain bike and got a brain injury. When things are too easy I get really bored. I used to skateboard and the normal mentality for that is to go big or go home. I guess it makes sense that I was born in Texas because Texans do love big things after all. Love, attraction, and risk taking are all traits that describe me pretty well. I

am an emotional being and love is an emotion after all. I will love romantically until the day I die and that already almost happened to me once. I do not count the days I was suicidal because I never really did almost die on those days. I learned my lesson. Well hopefully I really did learn it. Maybe I should take it upon myself to accept the challenge to not question my own life ever again. There I go. That is definitely a challenge worth taking on.

I have struggled, but I have also persevered despite my struggles. Keeping ones head can be quite difficult at times. But I suppose one should just carry on. Little things can let me down but I try to get back up as much as is possible. I did not have to survive my accident, but I must come to accept the reality that I did. People such as my religious father believe that I survived for a reason. I imagine that the news of my accident was pretty startling and traumatic for them. If I believed in god, I would have prayed as well. "But Matt, I thought you said god is a woman." If there is a god I do think she probably is a woman, but I could have just been high too. I will be sure not to dismiss the possibility that there is a god like I used to, but I am a very evidence oriented person. Since I took drugs, I see that as evidence that my vision was most likely a delusion. Who knows though? Maybe I should start a religion. My friend Myco wants to start one so maybe I should too. Maybe my followers would be more likely to believe in my visions because I have a brain injury.

Enough of the god talk. I do not plan to start a religion. I would much rather be an atheist. Maybe I was supposed to have a brain injury to crystallize my vision of god being a woman. Well that did not work. I am not a believer. If god was a woman would you be baptized in blood after you lived for one month? Ok I understand that I went a little too far with that one. I love women. I am sorry if you are a feminist and I upset you. I consider myself a feminist too. I think jokes should know no gender. I will admit that that was a little disrespectful though. I am sorry. Sorry the American way of saying it and not sore-e. Wow I am really being discriminatory. Maybe I did deserve to almost die. Man, that is deep. Lady god maybe wanted me to be a little more sensitive and so she almost killed me to knock some sense into me literally.

Start a religion. Respect women more deeply. I apparently have some things to do. I thought I did respect women though. "If you do then why did you write the insensitive jokes then?" All right that is fair. I more than goofed up. I should be more considerate and caring. After all, I am so obsessed with falling in love with women. Irony knows no gender I guess. I will strive to be more considerate and caring. Everyone should take it upon himself or herself to be. I know that everyone is not perfect. We all make mistakes. So please forgive me for my transgressions. I am not, and never will be perfect. I am prone to making mistakes just as we all are. I am and will never be perfect. No one is. I assume that you probably believe the same thing. This book is kind of like a movie. I like to break the fourth wall, meaning that I like to make the audience aware that they are just reading a book

after all. In others words, consider yourself a part of my story. The plot thickens. You are now a part of it. I bet that you did not expect that when you first started reading this. Maybe you did though. If so, then I wish you congratulations. The fourth wall is indeed broken. Well actually I do not know what this is really called when it is done in a novel. Just look of “breaking the fourth wall” and the metaphor will make more sense.

Alright. Well I have discussed much in this novel. I discussed life, love, death, drug use, psychology, and philosophy. Some of those things go really well together. Oh and I almost forgot. I discussed spirituality. This book is full of many topics. Reflect on what you liked the most. Maybe you did not like any at all. But thank you for choosing to go on this journey with me. We really did go to a lot of places. Some were probably more pleasant than others. That is typical of journeys though. I am a complex person so I assume that that has been reflected into my first novel. I plan for my second one to be about my Bulgarian grandfather. Maybe from you having read this book you understand that by now. I have really revealed a lot about myself in this novel. You know about my love escapades, my drug use, and my philosophical beliefs. This book has been really enjoyable to write though. I hope that it has also been enjoyable to read. I can just imagine that if you, the reader, believe that it is, that then you gently just nodded your head a little bit right after reading that. Goodbye fourth wall. Goodbye.

I went through a lot to be able to write this book. Some was good, but some was downright horrible. Well I can at least check one dream off my list. Now use my attitude and go follow one of yours. You do not have to sleep to dream. You do have to love yourself to actualize those dreams though. Some days I really do not love myself, but the days I do I dream hard. I dream of love, I dream of inspiring people, I dream of spreading light. Once again get it straight. The future is bright so spread the light. Some days you will struggle to but do not give up. The future is bright for you too. Come on now. Spread the light. You will encounter darkness on your life’s journey but if you spread the light then others will spread it to you. Be happy. Be proud. Fall in love. Take care of somebody else. Do that emotionally, physically, or why not both? What does it really mean to love? How do you do it? I bet that you know how. So now go show a stranger some love. I helped children learn and I am proud of it. I believe that my capacity to love others helped me do that. I did stop teaching though. I blame that on public school administrations though.

Maybe I did not die because I was meant to do much more, or maybe it was just a lucky circumstance of chance that I did not. It is fun for me to think that I did not for a reason though and not just because there was an off duty EMT right behind me. It is fun to imagine that I survived for a more mystical reason than that though. It is a beautiful idea, but one that I imagine can never be substantiated. That is one beautiful thing about the human brain. Even if it becomes injured it can still imagine improbable realities. I do think I have had a premonition. I dreamt that one of my physical therapist’s that took maternity leave had her baby die. Sadly I do not have

her email to see if her child is alive and well. My sister has had premonition-like dreams that her friends relatives have died and they turned out to be true. She could have just circumstantially had those dreams, or they could have been actual premonitions. There is no true way of really knowing I suppose. It is particularly weird though. Was I given the ability to see a separate reality? There is a good chance that I will never actually know that. I am not a mystic but I sure am racking my brain on some mystical ideas.

Do you believe that everything happens for a reason? In some respect did I have to almost die? Why, why, why? That is an obvious question as well when seen from a particular perspective, but I suspect that you get what I really mean by that now. Why do I keep falling in love and losing it? Why am I an atheist that has visions of a spiritual entity? Why? Why? Why? I can only speculate as to the reasons why. Things can be far more than they appear to be. Maybe I should study mystical philosophy, like Sufism.

Many humans before me have speculated on the answers to these questions that I have. Just like the Sufis, I revel in poetry. It is a beautiful means of expressing the beauty of life. I use it to express pain, happiness, love, pain, sorrow, and many more emotions than that. I use it to flatter women that I am attracted to as well. That is a mystery of life. What is true meaning? What is true anything? Is it just things that are physical? After all, there could have just as easily been nothing. I could have not written this book. There are infinite possibilities, but there is only one reality that I am aware of.

What is the true purpose of being alive? I cannot even speculate on that. Is there an actual purpose to being alive? I suppose that you will have to decide that for yourself. It is not my job or my wish to decide that, or anything for you. I believe in and wish to respect individual freedom. I do not think that the mystery of life can ever be solved. Many philosophers and scientists have tried but everyone gets to speculate on what he or she truly believes that the answer is. I want you to be perplexed. I do not think that you can find all the answers. You cannot just Google why you are alive and get the whole answer. Actually I did exactly that and Google does not even seem to know.

There you have it. Human society has come really far in some capacities, but we have not figured out what the true and philosophical meaning of life is. Maybe you just have to figure it out for yourself. There is not necessarily an answer to every question. Life is just inherently complex and confusing. Many have and will speculate on what its true meaning is, but they do not have to be trusted or believed. I do believe that you are the fabricator of your own reality. I will say it one more time. I love you. This is the end. Thank you once again for journeying along with me. I love you.

The End.

