"Self Mind"

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JULY 22 LAST YEAR WAS MEANT to be a typical Sunday. Just like every Sunday, my mother and I were getting ready to visit my older brother at his Waikiki apartment, where we would talk for a little while. But July 22nd was different. That chilly morning, we got a phone call from his roommate telling us my brother was going to the emergency room. As we drove to Queen's Hospital, I didn't know what to think. Although I tried to assure myself that nothing serious could have happened to him, anxiety clouded my mind.

My brother, Tyson, emigrated from Vietnam with my mom and my other older brother to the United States in 1990, with dreams of a new life and fresh opportunities. He enrolled in high school with virtually no knowledge of the English language. Even though he had to simultaneously manage a part-time job at McDonald's, he excelled in academics and was the top of his class in calculus.

At 34 years old, he was the epitome of health: he ran marathons every year, had a healthy diet, and never smoked or drank alcohol. When I got to the ER and saw him lying in the hospital bed, he looked like the Tyson that I always knew. Nothing seemed wrong. He just seemed tired, and he didn't have the energy to speak.

However, coming back from an MRI scan, my brother seemed different. His eyes were unfocused and dazed, as if he didn't see the room in front of him. Uneasiness and fear rushed down my spine. I shouted for help, just as my brother's body started to spasm. I felt a profound emotion surging up in me, one that I had never experienced before--a wrenching sense of trepidation, laced with sickening adrenaline. The seizure took control of his body, and he began to foam at the mouth. His body seized up, but I was frozen still. I didn't know what to do. I felt useless and terrified.

Tyson told me, when I was just a kid, not to work while I was in high school. I was young, though, and still wanted to work because I wanted to make money, like him. During his high school years, he took on a part-time job after school, even though it meant he had to come home late every night. Often, he would stay up through the early hours of the morning, determined to complete his schoolwork. He held down

the job, despite its exhausting physical toll, because he had to: he had to assist with the bills and support my mom, so that she could take English classes at the local community college. Tyson said that I didn't have to work, because he would always be there to support me.

While my brother was in the hospital, my mother and I went there every day from before dawn to late at night, when the streets were empty. Tyson had developed severe brain inflammation as a result of the seizure. He had dozens of tests done: X-Rays, MRIs, blood tests, spinal taps, a bronchoscopy, and even a brain biopsy. A labyrinth of IV tubes, wires, and cables were hooked up to his body, monitoring his life signs and feeding dozens of chemicals and solutions into his bloodstream. The doctors kept him constantly sedated. His brain inflammation was life-threatening, and he caught a case of severe pneumonia. His doctors had to place him on life support. In three weeks, my brother had gone from being in the best shape of his life, from being a veritable Superman, to laying on his deathbed.

When I was a kid, I was a crybaby. I cried when I didn't get the toy I wanted. I cried when I didn't get the food I wanted. However, at some point during my childhood, around the age of six, I stopped crying. No matter how much I was teased or pushed around, I never cried. No matter how much I was mocked about my clothes, or my ethnicity, I didn't cry.

August 11 last year was the first time since childhood that I cried. It was the day that my brother passed away. And it was the first time that I ever saw my mom cry. It was a traumatizing experience, and for a while I was depressed that such a tragedy could occur so arbitrarily to someone like my brother: someone who was strong, someone who was healthy, someone who lived by a strong moral code and never sacrificed his values for material rewards. But after a while, I realized that the circumstances of his death were not a refutation of his beliefs, but instead, a reminder of their importance. Even though we cannot control the twists and turns of life, we must deal with them as best we can. My brother, even though he didn't know English, enrolled in school and ultimately excelled. And at the same time, to help our mother go to school on the side, he took on a part-time job. Certainly he must have wished that he hadn't faced those disadvantages, but he didn't complain. Rather, he faced the realities of his situation head-on, and succeeded. Tyson's death was a tragic reflection of the cold, random chance

of nature, but it was in no way any verdict on his philosophy: instead, I realized, it served as a clear reminder to me that the worst can happen to even the best, and that the strength of an individual lies in his ability to maintain his values when faced with such difficult situations. Today, I still hold onto the lessons that my brother taught me through his actions: to put the needs of your family first, to always persevere in the face of adversity, and to never compromise your ideals for petty desires. To lose heart in these values because of his death, then, would be a harsh disservice to Tyson's legacy.

ANALYSIS

In "Self Mind," Timothy takes on the role of author and brother, describing his brother's death with poignancy and honesty. Utilizing his gift for storytelling, Timothy shares the rawness of his emotions, creating an essay that contrasts despair and hope, admiration for his brother and devastation for his loss. Much of the essay is somber, a tone that is apropos for the essay topic, but Timothy prevents the heaviness from becoming excessively depressing by relating parts of his past and Tyson's past, along with the broader philosophical lessons he learned from the painful experience of losing his brother. Timothy, like Sarah in her essay "Unshakable Worth," (Chapter 7) creates a powerful essay from family tragedy in a way that invokes admiration rather than pity.

The introduction of Timothy's essay sets an ominous mood without being overly melodramatic. We wonder why "July 22nd was different," feel the "chilly morning," and share Timothy's uneasiness as anxiety clouds his mind. Timothy goes on to give us a sense of who Tyson is. Without explicitly stating that he admires his brother, we can sense Timothy's respect for his brother's ability to overcome language and financial barriers as a newly arrived immigrant from Vietnam.

This narrative is particularly compelling because it combines different styles of narration and different paces of storytelling. For example, the first paragraph sets the scene for a specific day while creating a mood of slight discomfort. The second paragraph describes one of the crucial people in this story and takes a time scale of several years. The third paragraph continues explaining Tyson's story and brings us back to the ER, to the immediacy and urgency of the situation on July 22 last year. In the fourth paragraph, the pace of the narrative changes dramatically, especially when we arrive at this sentence: "Uneasiness and fear rushed down my spine. I shouted for help, just as my brother's body started to spasm." Timothy's short sentences help create a sense of paralysis as he describes how he felt at the time: "I didn't know what