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The Climb Back

The alarm rang at 6:00am to wake me up for my morning running just as it has since the beginning of the year. The spring semester was just over on May 12th giving me more time for my daily routine. This daily routine was a New Year resolution I set with two other friends of mine, Stephen and Chris. We wanted to run two miles every morning for the rest of the year. I enjoyed this routine with Stephen and Chris as they ran beside me with the same resolution and resolve. In fact, I started taking it even more seriously as the weeks progressed until June approached. Then, on the fifth night of June the pain began.

I was laying in my bed and rolled around in distress as the pain steadily increased in my left abdomen region. As midnight approached, the pain became unbearable leading me to rush to the ER to get it checked. An MRI scan in the ER revealed that I had appendicitis. It wasn’t until 2:00am that an ambulance was available to transport me to Parker Adventist Hospital. I arrived at the hospital at 2:15am and was rolled to a room through eight swinging doors and an elevator.

I woke up once at 3:00am as the nurse came to ask me some simple questions about my identification. I woke up another time at 3:40am as the nurse was attaching a wristband to my left wrist. Yet again, I was woken up for a third time at 5:00am as the nurse told me, “The time for your surgery is confirmed to be at 7:00am.” I was thirsty and disorientated as I looked around the room. It was dead quiet except for the beeping of the monitor next to my bed and my heavy breathing. This silence was something surreal to me as it made me realize how alone and secluded I felt. Everyone around me was a stranger that knew only my name and face. My phone sat still on the table beside me. There was no ringing or the notifications of a text message I usually hear. It felt as if I was being forgotten. I went back to my slumber with this pit of solemn sorrow in my mind. I was completely prepared for surgery by 7:00. Although it was a restless night full of events that transpired so suddenly and quickly, I was just ready to finish this operating process. I was finally completely prepped for surgery for my appendicitis as I was rolled on my gurney to the operating room.

The surgeon looked at me as she introduced herself. They were preparing me for the anesthesia and told me to count to ten. So, I began with a whisper, “one, two, three…four”. It came as a surprise to me when I woke up in a completely different room as I whispered four. I lost those two hours like they were just two seconds. I was healthy again, but wasn’t exactly mobile. The rest of the day I tried walking for two minutes at a time. It was agonizing to know I lost a part of me that I worked for the past six months. I was moving extremely slowly unlike those 6:00am runs prior to surgery.

The pain was steadily swallowing my last bit of strength I had left. I walked in a slouched posture as if walking upright would lead me to collapse. The stitches in my middle abdomen were prying into my skin. With every step, it felt like my stomach would rip apart. With this sensation I realized I would be abandoned by society if I were to stop walking. Only a week ago I was running two miles every day, but now I couldn’t walk for two minutes. The pain made me realize I would be abandoned by Stephen and Chris, who once stood by my side for my resolution to get in shape this year. There was only silence as I still received no messages from anyone or a call asking me if I was okay. Waiting for any notification from my phone, I continued walking one step at a time with my pathetic idealization of myself.

An old man dressed in a gown clutched gently onto his IV stand as he was struggling to walk to my end of the hallway. His slouched posture made his back curve as his head fell to shoulder level. His withering white hair and his distressed smile made me empathize with him. As he approached me, he looked at me with a smile as I steadily approached him and he said with a chuckle, “Wanna race?” With a slight smile on my face that felt more like a frown, I realized my loss I’ve faced even after all the work I put in every morning running since the beginning of the year. I went back to my room with this sense of loss and waited for anything to happen in this silent rectangular room but only listened to the drops of water in my IV tube as I stared at my phone and then the clock for the next few hours hoping for a text or a call that wouldn’t arrive.

At around 5:00pm, I was driven home and received some help as I walked upstairs to my room. I lay in my bed in silence as there was no contact from my friends for the forthcoming days. I sat there not being able to move due to the pain that was caused by the slightest nudge. The ominous stillness of the air in my room put me to sleep as I was being engulfed by this deep sorrow after the surgery. If anyone approached me in my room, it was out of pity, not compassion. My parents and my friends avoided me as I lay there. My lack of capabilities were the bane of my thoughts for the next three weeks. The few times I did go grocery shopping with my parents I was either faced with hesitant glances from strangers or disgruntled mutters. I realized the way some strangers viewed me as a disturbance that they’d rather deem nonexistent. My lack of physical capability made me realize I was worth nothing to society.

However, I was recovering well as I walked for longer periods of time and spent more time out of bed in the next four weeks. Then, I was reminded of the Broncos 7K run in September that my whole family signed up for. I was hesitant to sign up too and had thoughts of remaining in my room and alienating myself from the challenges that my community had to offer and recalling those unapproving glances I’ve encountered in public. The run was scheduled for September 6th and it’s been four weeks since the surgery and I’m back on my feet. Although I wasn’t as able as before the surgery, I thought it was time I stopped alienating myself and seized this opportunity to consequently be accepted by my friends, family, and society.

I had the last few weeks of July and the whole month of August to prepare for my run. This was my chance to be a part of something and feel accepted by peers and family once again. Because I conditioned myself by doing some running during the weeks before surgery, I thought that regaining this endurance and muscle won’t be too difficult. I began preparing for the 7K by running only one mile. The first ten to twelve were proving to be a difficult time with a slight pain near my abdomen region where my stitches were. I was becoming accustomed to the endurance aspect of the running after my sore muscles recovered. Then came the 1.5 miles and then a week later I was able to run 2 miles. It was the furthest I would go for now from my incapabilities and alienation, but much further for the years to come. ”Maybe Stephen and Chris won’t leave me behind anymore,” I thought to myself as I collapsed on my bed after the run.

September 6th finally arrived. I was standing in the crowd right next to the Sports Authority Field with my nervous posture next to numerous other people of various diversities. Of all these other people were Stephen and Chris, who stood right beside me. I managed to convince them to sign up for the race a week prior. The segments of people A to E had already been called up and began their run. Stephen, Chris, and I walked alongside all these people around me as I approached the starting line and prepared myself for the toughest seven kilometers of my life. I reminisced about the mornings the three of us spent running before my surgery. They looked towards me with a smile before we began and proclaimed, “Hope you can keep up with us.” It was sincere smile of compassion and acceptance rather than that of pity. I had meager preparation, but felt dedicated and excited to be a part of this group that would accept me for my dedication. The runners around me and I began with a steady jog as the signal was given to begin so as to not collide with each other in the narrow beginnings.

I kept my pace with Stephen and Chris for five minutes, but ended up following someone else’s pace later on. As I struggled with my breathing I approached the first water table offering everyone running small plastic cups of water. I could accept myself again and hopefully be accepted by this crowd by proving that I was capable of achieving something again. I took this as a motivational challenge rather than as a display of my own lack of capabilities. My capabilities and acceptance of myself were the factors I used to gauge the society’s acceptance of me. I sprinted as I reached the 1.5 mile marker.

I began jogging again, and then walking. I repeated this routine for what felt like five minutes until I saw the Sports Authority Field again. There it was, the finish line I had been yearning for. The field, the way it seemed, wasn’t changing in size no matter how long I ran. At least, I wasn’t agonizing over the pain of being neglected by everyone around me anymore. It has only been three months, but I was glad to be back on my feet and ready to accomplish such tasks as this one since the surgery. The outside of the stadium became more immense by the second. I finally knew what I was capable of and also knew that I was capable of much more.

The sidewalk felt so much lighter as I approached the finish line. This sidewalk I’m running on will lead me to the finish line, my accomplishment among my acceptance. Stephen and Chris and my family were already waiting for me at the finish line. I saw it. The entrance to the field had a finish line just about 300 yards ahead. I wasn’t facing the negligence I experienced right after the surgery. It didn’t feel as though I’d be cast aside from society just because of my crippled posture. I ran past the finish line and left behind my troubled memories.

My parents cheered for my efforts with a hug as they smiled gleefully. Stephen and Chris were approaching me with their hands held high for a congratulatory high five. They accepted me back again after those two agonizing months of seclusion. There wasn’t any silence anymore. There wasn’t any disapproving glances or negligence to my existence from the people around me. I was finally smiling again as I cheered with everyone around me as the other runners smiled back in acceptance.