THE TALENT SHOW
A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

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By
Nicole M. Powell

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Name: Powell, Nicole M.

APPROVED BY:

________________________
Joseph Pici, MFA
Faculty Advisor

________________________
James Boehnlein, PhD
Faculty Reader

________________________
Tereza Szeghi, PhD
Director of Graduate Studies
ABSTRACT

THE TALENT SHOW
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Name: Powell, Nicole M.
University of Dayton

Advisor: Professor Joseph Pici

The Talent Show, A Collection of Short Stories is a multi-themed project that explores the everyday lives of everyday people. Hope, fear, and love are just a few of the themes that permeate throughout these tales. This collection is quite personal; deriving from actual events that have occurred over the past several decades, and are unified by an underlying theme of loss. Each story plays with language, and uses open dialogues to convey messages. The narratives engage readers with snippets of life that evoke emotion, while leaving its readers with thought-provoking images.
I dedicate this to my family.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am forever grateful for the love and devotion of my family. I would not be who I am today without the support and guidance of my parents’. I would like to thank my children, Timmy, Maddi, and Evie for putting up with such a grumpy mommy. Last, I would like to thank my best friend and husband, Tim. Tim, you always believed in me, especially when I didn’t.
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It ain’t me, It ain’t me, I ain’t no senator’s son, son.

It ain’t me, it ain’t me; I ain’t no fortunate one, no.

It ain’t me, it ain’t me, I ain’t no millionaire’s son, no.

It ain’t me, it ain’t me; I ain’t no fortunate one, no.
“Every man has to do this,” that’s what his father told him. As he sat at the table, staring down at his breakfast, he realized all of sudden, he wasn’t hungry. Not even mom’s egg benedict with bacon, sausage and gravy could take his mind off of it.

“What time is your appointment,” she asked, while cleaning up the kitchen.

“Four o’clock,” Lee quietly murmured. She walked over to the table and looked down at him,

“You’ll need to leave straight from school in order to make it on time.”

“I know. I will,” he said, staring blankly back up at her.

All through the day, he wandered through the hallways like a lost soul, his body going through the motions. Homeroom first, then Math, English, Science, History, and then to lunch. After a quick trip to his locker to grab his lunch, he walked into in the cafeteria and straight over to his usual table. His buddies, Lou and Fred were already sitting there plowing through their lunches like a herd of cattle.

“Hey fellas,” Lee said as he sat down next to Lou.
“Hey man, they both said, mouths full of food. He opened his bag to reveal its contents; two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, a bag of chips and a banana. He peered down over the food and realized he still wasn’t hungry.

“Happy Birthday,” Lou sang as he sipped on his carton of milk. “You’re eighteen today, an adult. You’re a man now. How does it feel?”

How does it feel, he thought. How does it feel? Oh, yeah, it’s supposed to feel great. Turning eighteen is supposed to be great. This is supposed to be the best time of my life, but it’s not.

“Uh, okay, I guess,” Lee finally replied.

“Hey man, we’re going to meet over at Lou’s house after school to look at his motorcycle, Fred said. “You coming?”

“No,” Lee said. “I can’t. I, um, have an appointment, um, downtown at four o’clock.”

Lou and Fred stopped eating. They all stared down at the floor, speechless for a moment.

Then, clearing his throat, Fred broke the silence as he got up to leave.

“Okay man,” they responded.

“We’ll catch up to you later then,” Fred said.
Wow, it’s almost 3:15; this day has flown by, he thought, as he looked up from his desk to the black and white clock above the door. Normally, he would have been thrilled that the day had gone by so fast; but not today. As soon as the bell rang he grabbed his books and headed straight out the back of the building to the parking lot, avoiding eye contact with everyone he passed. He climbed inside his car, and threw his books in the passenger seat. Every man has to do this, he thought, as he gripped the steering wheel.

As he started the car he noticed his reflection in the rear view mirror. He looked different today, he felt different. As he pulled out of the parking lot he looked in the mirror and saw the school fading in the distance. The school looked different today, he looked different today.

He circled the building three times before finally settling on a spot near the main entrance. As the hair on the back of his neck started to tingle, he climbed out of his car and walked over to the entrance. Every man has to do this, he thought, as he opened the door and walked inside.

The main lobby had an eerie feeling to it. It was the kind of lobby that doesn’t want people congregating inside it. There were no pictures on its walls, no décor, just
signs. Signs directing a person how to escape it as quickly as possible.

At the front desk sat an older woman with short black hair, reading a newspaper. She glanced up at him and without a word, pointed to the hallway on her left. Before he could ask, she had already bowed her head, hiding beneath her newspaper.

His clodhoppers squeaked on the shiny waxed floor as he made his way down the corridor. Sweat started to bead on the top of his forehead, trickling down the side of his face. He came to the very last door on the right and stood for a moment, paralyzed in fear. He pulled out his handkerchief, the one that grandma had sewn with his initials on it. He nervously wiped the sweat from his face and neck before folding it back into its square shape and shoving it back into his pocket.

He looked around and tried to breathe. He sucked in so much air that he began to choke. Every man has to do this, he coughed, as he walked inside the office.

He filled out his forms and handed them to a man at the counter. The man looked at the forms and then looked back at him.

“Lee,” the man said.

“Yes, sir,” Lee replied.
"I see here that you’ve just turned eighteen."

"Yes sir," he replied.

"I also see here that you are only a junior in high school," the man stated.

"Yes sir," he replied, his voice shaky.

"Well, don’t worry son," the man continued. "You won’t get called up while you’re still in high school," he said as he threw the forms on top of a rather large pile. "You will get your card within two weeks. When you receive your card, put in your wallet immediately, and keep it with you at all times."

"Yes sir," Lee replied, staring down at the green tiled floor. As he walked out of the office he heard the man say, "It’s okay son, every man has to do this."

#

"Oh man, I can’t believe it, we’re finally graduating tomorrow," Lou said, wiping the dirt off of his motorcycle.

"Right on," chirped Fred. "It’s finally over, no more school for this guy," he sang. "Hey, man, aren’t you excited," Fred asked.
“Uh, yeah. Oh, yeah man, I’m excited,” Lee replied. I should be excited. It’s supposed to be the best time of my life. But, it’s not, he thought.

#

He walked in the door after work, glad that it was Friday. He had plans to hang out with his friends at the diner tonight, and a date to go to the drive-in on Saturday. The house was unusually quiet as he hung up his letterman jacket and walked into the kitchen.

He noticed the supper table was decorated with the good linens, the ones that mom only gets out during the holidays.

Who’s coming for supper, he wondered, as he started walking around the house. He was excited to see the table was filled with all of his favorite foods, but his curiosity was starting to take over. Where was everyone?

He heard his younger brothers playing ping-pong downstairs. He heard a sound coming from the garage and knew it was his father.

Now, he knew something was wrong. When Dad is out in the garage before dinner, that meant he wanted to be left alone. He walked down the hallway towards his parent’s
bedroom and began to hear something strange. With each step closer, he realized what it was. It was his mother, and she was crying. Crying was something she rarely, ever does.

He hesitated a moment before calling out to her. Startled, she stopped, and quickly came out of her bedroom. She said hello as she briskly passed by him and rushed into the kitchen. What in the hell is going on, he wondered.

He could cut the tension with his butter knife, but he didn’t know what was going on. His mother and father hardly spoke during supper, only exchanging quick glances at one another.

Afterwards, his brothers went back downstairs to resume their table tennis match, and his father quickly went back into the garage.

He got up from the table and started helping his mother clean up. She quickly sat him back down.

“Oh, no, I’ll get it, you just relax. I’ll slice you a piece of pie. I made pecan, you’re favorite,” she said as she looked away.

He was so confused. His parents were acting so strange. The pie was still warm, just like he liked it. When he finished, she walked over and grabbed the plate and
dropped it before she could get it into the sink. The crash startled both him and his mother.

"I’m sorry. I’m so clumsy today," she said as she bent down to pick up the pieces. He rushed over to help her and saw tears falling from her eyes. Before he could ask her what was wrong, she pulled something out of the pocket of her apron.

"This came in the mail today," she sobbed. He watched his hand move from his side in slow motion, taking the letter from her hand. He sat back down at the table and stared at it. He knew what it was. The hair on the back of his neck was standing straight up, and he could feel the sweat building up in the middle of his back. It felt cool as it slid down the middle of his back and into his pants. His hands trembled as he peeled back the envelope and slid the letter out. He read the first line and dropped the letter onto the table, unable to move, unable to breathe.

Dear Lee R. Jones: US51799392
You are hereby directed to present yourself for Armed Forces Physical Examination to the local board named above by reporting at...

"Ten months. I’ve only been out of high school ten months," he kept repeating, as he stared out the dining room window. He looked up at his mother. When their eyes
met, she turned and rushed back to her bedroom. Then, he thought, every man has to do this. He could still hear his mother weeping in her bedroom.

#

“You ready, son,” his father asked as he finished his coffee. “It’s three-o’clock.” Lee didn’t respond. He sat there for a moment before walking down the hall one last time. He looked in on his brothers who were fast asleep. He hugged his mother and walked outside into the darkness.

Neither spoke while his father drove, but they both were thinking the same thing. His father parked behind a line of cars sitting in front of the building.

His father jumped out of the car first, running back to the trunk to get his son’s bag. He sat there, staring around, wondering when, or if he would be back. He opened the door and his father was standing there, holding his bag. He took his bag from him and swung it around his shoulder. Lee extended his hand to his father, who quickly grabbed it. Pulling him close, he hugged him tightly. Leaning into his ear, he whispered, “Godspeed son,” his voice quivering.
He walked into the building and felt that eerie feeling again. His clodhoppers squeaked as they glided across the freshly waxed floor. His breathing became erratic, and his head began to hurt.

He walked into the office and was directed to a small room with approximately thirty men. When he walked into the room, he met the gazes of sixty eyes. All young men, all just like him. Their eyes briefly met, speaking without words.

Then, a tall, thin man walked into the room. His uniform was crisp, his shoes shined, and he was covered in metals. He asked the men to stand so it could be official.

Once sworn in, they piled onto a bus and headed to Fort Knox, Kentucky. As the bus pulled away, he stared out the window and saw his father, still standing where he had left him. Their eyes met as the bus passed, his father standing, paralyzed.

Dad, I don’t want to go, I just turned twenty. Dad, I’m just a kid, don’t let them take me, please. Please dad, he thought.

Godspeed, son, rang through his ears. When he could no longer see his father, he stared down at his shoes. Every man has to do this, that’s what his father told him.
“Welcome to Fort Knox, Kentucky,” the drill sergeant shouted as the men exited the bus. “You belong to the Army for the next two years.” Lee watched him speak and could hear the resent in his voice.

“You draftees will spend two months here for basic training, before being given your assignments,” the drill sergeant barked.

Two years, he thought, I belong to them for two years. He bought a calendar and stared at it. Two years, he thought, as he started marking off the days. With each passing day, came a big red “X.” Every man has to do this, he thought.

“Jones, Lee R., US51799392, you have been assigned to the TMP. You’re going to Fort Dicks, New Jersey for six weeks,” his Drill sergeant said.

New Jersey, he cringed. Man, I don’t want to go to New Jersey, I just want to go home. He pulled out his wallet and stared at a picture of his girlfriend. Every man has to do this, he sighed.
“Jones, Lee R., US51799392,” the sergeant yelled, “You have been assigned to Fort Hood, Texas to finish out your tour of duty.”

“Texas,” he moaned. Man, I don’t want to go to Texas. I just want to go home. He was getting further and further away from his life. He pulled that picture of his girlfriend out of his wallet. Every man has to do this, he groaned.

He was always excited to get mail from home, but not today. He received a letter from Lou. Dayton, Ohio? Why is he writing from home, instead of the base he is stationed at, he wondered. He opened the letter, read the first line before crumpling it up and throwing it onto the floor.

“Hey man, I failed the eye exam. So, I’m out.” He picked the letter back up and finished it.

Lou went on to say that Bill hadn’t passed his physical either, something about flat feet. He also said Jim left town before he was to report for his physical. Rumor has it that he fled to Canada.
“Unbelievable, this is unbelievable,” he shouted, ripping the letter to shreds. I just don’t understand this, he thought, staring down at his shoes. He pulled out his wallet and hesitated, before shoving it back into his pocket. Yeah, every man has to do this, he snorted.

#

“Jones, Lee R., US51799392, you got your orders. You’re going to Vietnam son,” his drill sergeant said. He stood in his bunk, stunned, unable to move. He couldn’t see, he couldn’t breathe. Everything went numb.

He couldn’t control his thoughts. I’ve been here for almost eleven months. I only have ten months to go. I don’t want to go to Vietnam. I don’t want to go, I just want to go home.

That night he laid in bed, staring up at the ceiling. I was so close, he thought. Only ten months to go. Why did I have to pass my physical? Maybe I should have gone to Canada. What if I don’t make it back? Oh, God, I don’t want to die.

Then, his thoughts drifted from his girlfriend, to his family, to his friends, and back to his girlfriend. Every
man has to do this, that’s what his father told him. He began to weep.

#

As he boarded the plane, he looked around, one last time. He smelled the air. It smelled fresh, of grass and pine. He wondered if he’d ever make it back. Godspeed son, echoed through his ears.

Then, when he stepped outside of the plane, he felt the tropic heat swarm over his face. He smelled the air. It smelled stale, of fish and sand. This land is like no land he’d ever been.

“WELCOME TO VEE-IT-NAM,” he heard one man say, as they climbed off the plane. With each step down, his fear began to rise. All he could think about was, why am I here? Why me? I’m just a kid.

With each step closer to the ground, he thought of his mother, his father, and his little brothers. With each step down he thought of his friends, Lou, Bill and Jim. With each step closer to the ground, he thought of the girlfriend he left behind. He couldn’t control it any longer. That’s when he started to cry.
He stood there with the others. The others that were just like him. They were all looking around, desperately searching for something familiar. They were all looking for something, anything. He found nothing.

Finally, a man in uniform walked up to them, and they all snapped to attention. The man’s uniform presented a collection of many metals. His face displayed the price he paid for them.

I just want to go home, he thought, as the man began to speak.

“Men, welcome to Cam Ranh Bay,” his new commander stated. Lee looked around at these unfamiliar faces in this unfamiliar land, before looking up to the sky. Then, he began to pray. As he grabbed his gear and walked to his new bunk, he whispered, NOT EVERY MAN HAS TO DO THIS.
There’s a hold up in the Bronx,
Brooklyn’s broken out in fights.

There’s a traffic jam in Harlem
that’s backed up to Jackson Heights.
There’s a scout troop short a child,

Kruschev’s due at Idlewild.

Car 54, Where are You?
Scanner

Dispatch: 1-william-11 and 1-william-12 for a burglary in progress.

Officers: Both cars, go ahead.

Dispatch: Both cars, respond to 1137 3rd Street. The home owner is advising she is home alone and can hear someone trying to break into the house through the front door.

Officers: You’re clear, we’re en route.

Dispatch: Both cars en route at 0005 hrs.

Dispatch: 1-william 11 and 1-william 12, the female resident is advising the subject attempting to break into the house is a male, and is using some kind of bat or crow bar to try to get inside.

Officers: We’re clear.

Dispatch: 0007 hrs.

Dispatch: 1-william 11 and 1-william 12, she’s advising he has made entry. I repeat, he has made entry. She has gone upstairs and locked herself inside her bedroom. Be advised, she is unarmed.

Officers: You’re clear dispatch. We’re about 30 seconds off.

Dispatch: 0008 hrs.
Dispatch: Both cars, be advised I can hear a man’s voice and a female screaming.

Officers: 1-william 11 and 1-william 12 we are on scene.

Dispatch: On scene at 0009 hrs. Be advised the line is silent. The line is open, but silent...

#

Dispatch: 314 and 211 for a robbery in progress.

Officers: 314 and 211, go ahead.

Dispatch: Please respond to the Stop & Go, 1050 Main St. A patron is advising that a b/m, wearing a red shirt and blue shorts is pointing a gun at the clerk. The patron was able to leave the store. Time lapse is 1 minute.

Officers: We’re clear and en route.

Dispatch: Both cars en route at 0010 hrs.

Dispatch: Be advised the alarm company just called to report a panic alarm at the business.

Officers: We’re clear.

Dispatch: 0012 hrs.

Dispatch: 314 and 211, I’ve attempted to contact the store; however, no one will answer.

Officers: We’re clear.

Dispatch: 0014 hrs.
Dispatch: Be advised the reportee has left the area, I have no further information.

Officers: You’re clear, dispatch. Put us on scene.

Dispatch: Both cars on scene at 0015 hrs.

Officers: 314 to dispatch. I need a medic to this location, I’ve got one down.

Dispatch: You’re clear, a medic is en route at 0016 hrs.

#

Officer: 820 a traffic stop.

Dispatch: Go ahead, 820.

Officer: 820, Ohio registration, DRT9161. We’ll be at Ludlow and East St.

Dispatch: You’re clear 820, 0020 hrs.

Officer: 820, I’m chasing one. As I walked up to the vehicle, he sped away. The driver is a w/m, wearing a white t-shirt. We are southbound on Ludlow, approaching 2nd St.

Dispatch: You’re clear. All East units be advised 820 is in pursuit of a black ford mustang with Ohio Registration DRT9161. The driver is a w/m, wearing a white t-shirt, at 0022 hrs.
Officer: 820, we are still southbound on Ludlow, passing 10th St. We are at speeds of approximately 60mph.

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear at 0023 hrs.

Officer: 820, we’ve turned west onto the entrance ramp to I-75 northbound.

Dispatch: All units be advised that 820 is now entering I-75 northbound.

Officer: 820, we are northbound I-75, approaching the 4th St. exit. We are at speeds of approximately 75mph.

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear at 0024 hrs.

Officer: 820, we are passing 4th St. and approaching the 6th St. exit. We are at speeds of approximately 80mph.

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear at 0025 hrs.

Officer: 820, we’ve passed 6th St. and are approaching State Route 35. We are at speeds of approximately 95mph.

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear at 0026 hrs.

Sergeant: 810 to 820, are you still at 95 mph?

Officer: 820 to 810, yes Sir, we are at 95 mph.

Sergeant: 820, is there a lot of traffic on the interstate?

Officer: 820 to 810, no sir, there is not, maybe one to two cars.
Sergeant: 810 to 820, you are clear to continue your pursuit. Be advised to continue to use good judgement.

Officer: 820, we’re approaching Brown St. St. We have now reached speeds of approximately 100mph.

Officer: 820 to dispatch, I’m shutting it down. 820 to 810 we have shut the pursuit down, shut it down due to dangerous speeds.

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear at 0027 hrs.

Officer: 820 to dispatch, we have passed Brown St. and are approaching Main St. and he is gone. We no longer have a visible on him.

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear at 0028 hrs.

Officer: 820 to dispatch, we have passed Main St. It looks like he has left the area. Dispatch: 820, we just got a report of a traffic crash at the entrance ramp to State Route 35. It’s a one-vehicle and it is matching the description of the Ford Mustang.

Officer: 820, we’re en route.

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear at 0030 hrs.

Officer: 820 to dispatch, start the FD. I need an engine and medic. He’s struck the retaining wall! The
car is on fire! I need a fire truck and an ambulance now. NOW!

Dispatch: 820, you’re clear. FD and a medic are en route at 0030 hrs.

Officer: 820, to dispatch, have them step it up, I can’t get the door open to get him out…hang on man, I’m trying. I’m trying to get the door open, but the handle, it is burnt. HANG ON MAN, OH, GOD, HE’S...

#

Dispatch: Dispatch to 943, you copy?

Officer: This is 943, dispatch. I copy you ma’am.

Dispatch: Dispatch to 943, can you please respond to US 127 at 502?

Officer: This is 943, yes ma’am I can respond to US 127 at 502. Is this a traffic crash, ma’am?

Dispatch: Dispatch to 943, that will be a big NEG-ative, Sir, it’s Bessie. She is blocking the intersection again.

Officer: This is 943, Ha, ha, okay, ma’am. I’m en route to have a word with Bessie.

Dispatch: Dispatch to 943, Please be advised that Bessie’s owner is on scene.
Officer: This is 943, you’re clear, ma’am, I’m fixin to be there shortly.

Dispatch: Dispatch to 943, be advised Bessie’s owner called back and advised she has decided not to cooperate, and is now laying down. He’s worried she’s going to get hit.

Officer: This is 943, hee hee, you’re clear, ma’am, I’m fixin to be there in less than a minute.

Dispatch: Dispatch to 943, you’re clear, and good luck to you, sir.

Officer: This is 943, thank ya ma’am, and if you would, kindly show me on scene.

Dispatch: Dispatch to 943, on scene sir at 0100 hrs.

#

Dispatch: Any unit in the east available to take a motorist assist at the Speedway, 901 N. Main St.?

Officer: 311 to dispatch, we’ll take it, we’re just down the street on a meal break.

Dispatch: You’re clear, 311 and thanks. It will be a blue, Chevy Malibu, with Ohio personalized registration, I-C-U.
Officer: 311 to dispatch, you’re clear. We see them, please show us on scene.

Dispatch: On scene at 0115 hrs.

Dispatch: 311, when you clear, can you respond to 105 S. Main on a juvenile complaint?

Officer: 311 to dispatch, go ahead.

Dispatch: Mother is advising it is bed time and her 5 yr. old son is being defiant and threatening to run away.

Officer: 311 to dispatch, you’re clear. As soon as we’re done here, we’ll stop by and put him to bed.

Dispatch: 311, you’re clear, thanks at 0117 hrs.

#

Dispatch: 1-william 20 and 1-william 22 for a domestic dispute.

Officer: Both cars, go ahead.

Dispatch: For 1-william 20 and 22, respond to 801 Levy St. for a dispute between male and female. I have the female on the line and she is stating that her husband just arrived home and is intoxicated and threatening to harm her and the children.

Officer: You’re clear, dispatch. Show us en route.
Dispatch: Both cars, en route at 0200 hrs.

Dispatch: For 1-william 20 and 22, be advised the husband has been at the bar for the last 2 hours and came home and starting arguing with the female caller.

Officer: You’re clear, dispatch.

Dispatch: 0202 hrs.

Dispatch: For both cars, there are no known weapons inside the house. Be advised that the husband is now throwing objects at the wall. I can hear noises in the background. The caller is attempting to get the children out of the house.

Officer: You’re clear, dispatch. Go ahead and plot the house for us.

Dispatch: 0203 hrs.

Dispatch: Both cars, I heard the male and female both scream, then I heard what sounded like a child scream, before the line disconnected. The line is busy upon call-back.

Officer: You’re clear, dispatch. We are about a minute out.

Dispatch: Be advised once you turn onto Levy St. from Main, it will be the 4th house on the right side of the road.

Officer: You’re clear, dispatch.
Dispatch: 0204 hrs.

Officer: 1-william 20, show both cars on scene.

Dispatch: 0205 hrs.

Officer: 1-william 22, we’ve got one at gunpoint. Start a medic and have them stage at the corner of Main and Levy.

Dispatch: Starting a medic to your location at 0206 hrs.

Dispatch: Both cars, a medic is en route and will stage at Main and Levy until advised.

Dispatch: 1-william 22 were you clear?

Dispatch: 1-william 22?

Dispatch: 1-william 22, and 1-william 20 a check-up?

Officer: 1-william 22, we’ve got the male half at gunpoint. He has a knife. We need more cars here!

Dispatch: All available units start for 801 Levy St. 1-william 22 and 1-william 20 have one at gunpoint, and the male subject has a knife.

Officer: 1-william 11 and 1-william 12 we are en route.

Officer: 1-william 15 and 1-william 16, we are also en route.

Sergeant: 1-william 10, I am en route.

Dispatch: All units en route at 0207 hrs. 1-william 22 and 1-william 20 a check-up?
Dispatch: 1-william 22 and 1-william 20 a check-up?
Dispatch: 1-william 22 or 20 check-up?
Dispatch: All units there is a restriction on “A” channel for the south units at 0208 hrs.
Dispatch: 1-WILLIAM 22 AND 1-WILLIAM 20 A CHECK-UP?
Officer: 1-WILLIAM..... SHOTS FIRED. I REPEAT, SHOTS FIRED. MAN DOWN! WHERE’S THAT MEDIC? GET EM’ IN HERE!
Officer: 1-william 11 and 12 on scene.
Officer: 1-william 15 and 16 are also on scene.
Dispatch: All units on scene at 0209 hrs.
Sergeant: 1-william 10 I just pulled in behind the medic.
Dispatch: You’re clear sir, at 0210 hrs.
Sergeant: 1-william 11 and 12, go inside and check on the female and the kids.
1-william 15 and 16, tape off the area here.
Officer: 1-william 11 to 1-william 10. Sir, I need you inside right now.
Sergeant: 1-william 10 to 11, I’ll be right in.
Sergeant: 1-william 10 to dispatch. I uh...
Dispatch: 1-william 10, go ahead.
Dispatch: Dispatch to 1-william 10, go ahead.
Sergeant: 1-william 10, I, uh, need homicide here. Um, dispatch, uh, contact the coroner, please.
Dispatch: You’re clear, 1-william 10 at 0211 hrs.
Officer: 1-william 20, the medic has removed the male half to the hospital.

Dispatch: You’re clear, 20, at 0212 hrs.

Sergeant: Um, 1-william 10 to dispatch.

Dispatch: 1-william 10, go ahead.

Sergeant: Have you contacted the coroner yet?

Dispatch: Sir, we’ll let you know as soon as when we reach them.

Sergeant: You’re clear, dispatch. Who is the on-call lieutenant?

Dispatch: Sir, it unit 6.

Sergeant: You’re clear, dispatch. We need to wake him up, I need him to respond here as soon as possible.

Dispatch: 1-william 10, we have the coroner on the line.

Sergeant: You’re clear, dispatch. Have them respond with 2 crews.

Dispatch: at 0212 hrs.

Dispatch: 1-william 10, we have unit 6 on the line. Sir, what do you want me to advise him?

Sergeant: Dispatch, advise him I have... uh, 4 bodies here.

Dispatch: You’re, uh, clear, 1-william 10, at 0214 hrs.

Dispatch: 1-william 10.

Sergeant: Go ahead dispatch.
Dispatch: 1-william 10, they’ve all been, notified. They are all en route.

Sergeant: You’re clear, dispatch, thank you.

Dispatch: 0215 hrs.
And now I’m glad I didn’t know,
The way it all would end, the way it all would go.

Our lives, are better left to chance;

I could have missed the pain,

But I’d have had to miss the dance.
“Four fucking years! It’s been four, God-damn, mother-fucking, years,” she howled, as she darted passed him, grabbing her purse from off of the dinner table. She stopped, dead in her tracks, and glanced back at his emotionless face.

“I swear to fucking God,” she yelled as she slammed the apartment door. She stood silent, still, in the hallway a moment; engulfed in the various odors that one encounters living inside an eight unit complex.

She could smell the lard that the old lady in apartment F uses to cook all of her meals. The retired nuns that live directly below were having Chinese take-out. The couple next door were having pizza, again.

Overwhelmed by the smells, she tore down the stairs attempting to escape their imminent attack on her nostrils.

Reaching for the doorknob, she turned and glanced back up at the apartment. Asshole isn’t even coming after me, she thought. She let the door slam behind her, hoping he could hear it. Everyone heard it.

As she started her car and backed out of the visitor’s parking space, she saw him, sitting there on the couch. Jerk didn’t even move, she thought.
He turned his head towards the window, looking down at her vehicle. Their eyes met as they studied each other for a moment. He stared down, emotionless, while she glared up, pleading for something, anything. Nothing.

She extended her middle finger on her right hand, and stepped on the gas, squealing the tires as she blazed out of the lot.

“What a waste. What a fucking waste of time,” she roared, as she zipped through the parking lot and out onto Main Street. I’m done, that’s it. I can’t do this anymore. I’m done. I’m done. I’m so done, she kept repeating over and over again.

She made it to her mom’s house in record time, screaming into the driveway so recklessly that she almost struck the garage door.

Rushing past her father, who was sitting on the front porch, she flung open the screen door and called out, “Mom? Mom, I need you.”

Her mother stepped from around the corner of the kitchen.

“Was that you driving like a maniac,” she inquired.

“I need to talk to you,” she cried.
“Hmm, let me see,” her mother said, placing her left hand along the left side of her face. “You two had another fight.”

“How’d you know? Is it that obvious,” she thought, looking down at the carpet.

Reading her daughter’s expression, her mother hesitated, then sighed.

“Well, my dear that is pretty much all you two do anymore-argue. Maybe it’s time you…” she started to say before her daughter abruptly interrupted her.

“I don’t know what to do. We break up every three months, and then get back together. He just doesn’t want to commit. He doesn’t want to get married, or have kids. Why do I stay,” she sobbed, as tears spilled down her cheeks onto the carpet.

“That’s an excellent question, her mother echoed back at her. “Why do you stay,” Her mother’s face was stern, serious. She sat there, stunned for the moment. Her mother never took that tone with her when she was upset. Her mother never asked her such a question like that.

“Why do I stay? Well, well, I’ll tell you why I stay. I...stay... she went silent. She stared back down at the carpet, grasping for something to say.
Why DO I stay, she thought to herself. Several moments passed before her mother started to turn and walk away.

“I don’t know why,” she finally responded. Not convinced, her mother turned back around and glared at her daughter. Her face started to soften.

“I’ll tell you why you stay,” she said. “You think you are in love with him. But, you also think he will change.” She lowered her head, staring down at the damp carpet, while her mother continued.

“Honey, you are not going to change him. He has made it quite clear what he wants. And, what he wants is fine, for him. But, let me ask you something. What is it that you want?” She sat down next to her.

“I want to get married, and start a family, what everyone wants,” she replied, still staring down at the puddle she created.

“No, not everyone wants that. Some people never get married or have kids, and that’s ok,” her mother explained, placing her hand on her daughter’s shoulder.

“So, what do I do,” she asked, looking up at her mother.

“Well, you have to make a decision. You have to decide what you want, what is going to make you happy,” her mother
whispered in her ear as she hugged her tight. “I’m making dinner, would you like to stay,” her mother asked.

Oh, yes, Lasagna, with garlic bread, she thought, as she breathed in the aroma coming from the kitchen.

She stayed for dinner, talking to her parents about all the current happenings at work; while listening to their stories.

After dinner, she thanked them both and said she needed to run. As she got into her vehicle, she saw them both in front of the screen door, waving goodbye.

She felt strange. She saw her own reflection in her mirror as she quickly backed out of the driveway. She looked at herself. Her face was flush, swollen. She met her own eyes in the mirror. They appeared so sad. She looked out her window to her parents and smiled, waving back at them as they disappeared from her rear view mirror.

She didn’t go straight back to the apartment, but had nowhere else she wanted to go; so, she drove around for some time, trying to collect her thoughts. She stopped at one of her favorite childhood places, the elementary school down the street from the apartment; the one with the wooden play set that wrapped around the entire back part of the playground. It reminded her of a happier time; a time when she didn’t worry about things, such as boys.
She parked her car and walked around to the back of the school. The scent of the wood reminded her of a particular night she had visited the playground. She slid down the big metal slide and swung on the swings for a short time, before climbing the rock ladder and sitting inside the fort. Looking down across the playground she could see across the school parking lot and out to the street. She watched the steady flow of traffic, guessing how fast each car was going.

She continued playing her game until it got too dark to see anything but headlights. The stream of lights put her in a trance for several minutes, before she realized how late it was getting. The school park closes at dusk, but she wasn’t worried. She would just flash her badge and say she was just leaving; and that would be that.

When she arrived back at the apartment, it was late. She turned off the headlights before she pulled into the space, as not to shine any light into the blacked-out building. She snuck into the unit and treaded softly upstairs. Her nose was instantly saturated from the remnants of the building’s occupants’ earlier dinners.

She slipped inside the apartment, softly closing the door. It looked different. She stood, staring at the kitchen, the dining room, and the living room. She looked
at his blender, his table, his couch. She stood staring down the hallway towards the bedrooms and the bathroom. She stood staring towards his bed, his dresser, his bedroom.

Nothing here is mine, she thought as she laid her purse on the floor. He was asleep. She crept into the bedroom and gazed down at him. He looked so solemn, so peaceful, and emotionless. She observed him for several minutes, hoping that he might awaken.

Maybe he’ll open his eyes, say I’m sorry, and take me in his arms, she thought. Yeah, right. Who AM I kidding.

She crept back into the living room and sat down, turning on the television, but not too loud. She flipped through the channels three times before giving up and turning it off.

She grabbed a piece of paper and began to write. Reasons to stay versus reasons to go, she whispered, as she drew two columns. She continued to writing for what seemed like forever, until she suddenly stopped herself and looked up. There was a glow radiating from beneath the bathroom door. She heard the cascading of water. She saw a haze arising from the bottom of the door. He was awake. She
hastily folded her piece of paper, and tucked it inside her pocket.

He walked from the bathroom to the bedroom, where she could hear the zipping of his shirt, the Velcro of his duty belt, and the snapping of his duty weapon into his holster.

He walked into the living room, and straight towards her. Without saying a word, he kissed her on the cheek and walked leisurely into the kitchen.

She heard the cabinet door open, then the drawer, followed by the refrigerator. She heard the crackle of plastic, the smell of peanut butter, then grape jelly. He grabbed his lunch box, waved goodbye and gently closed the apartment door.

He didn’t even say a word. No, I’m sorry. No, I love you. No nothing, she thought, as she watched him back out of his parking space and leave the complex. She watched him slowly fade away, hoping. She was hoping he would look up at her, maybe stop the car; do something. Nothing.

She pulled her piece of paper back out from her pocket and began unfolding it. She examined its contents closely for several minutes before placing it on the coffee table.

I just don’t understand, she thought. He won’t give me a reason for anything. He won’t tell me why. I get nothing, she thought.
She grabbed a pillow and blanket and decided to sleep on the couch. As she started to doze off, she glanced down at her paper lying on the coffee table.

I wish he knew how much he hurts me, she thought. Why can’t I just walk away, she sobbed. She dropped down off the couch and placed her hands together.

“Please Lord, help me. Help me walk away from this relationship. I have prayed so many times that he would change. I know now that he will not. Four years of ups and downs and I just can’t do it anymore. I am hurting. I am praying for you to help me change. I do love him, but I need to move on. We don’t want the same things. I pray that I am able to let go, and move on. I pray that I find someone else and get married and start a family. I pray that what comes around goes around. I pray that he regrets letting me go. I just can’t walk away. Please, PLEASE let me walk away. I am so unhappy,” she wailed, climbing back onto the couch.

Half way through his shift he decided to come home to eat his lunch. He entered the apartment and was startled to find her fast asleep on the couch. Covering her with the blanket that had fallen off the couch, he noticed her piece of paper on the coffee table. He unfolded it and
began to investigate. After a few moments, he folded it and placed it back on the coffee table.

He stood over her for several minutes, staring down at her. He watched her breast slowly rise and fall. He patted her head ever-so-slightly, before gently brushing her hair away from her face. He saw her flush, swollen face. He could smell the salt from her tears.

He continued to stand over her for several more minutes, almost as if he were frozen in time. She looked so solemn, yet so peaceful. He lowered his head, sighed, and slowly backed away. He lost his appetite. He walked towards the door and turned around. He looked back. He opened the door and stood for a moment, glancing back one last time, before closing the door behind him.

The pounding on the front door startled her to the point that she fell off the couch.

What the hell? Who could that be, she thought. People have to get buzzed into the building, so who would be knocking, she wondered. As she staggered to the door, still half asleep, she tried to look at the clock to see what time it was.

She looked through the peep hole but couldn’t quite focus her eyes, so, she just pulled back the hatch and opened the door.
She was speechless. There, standing before her was the chief and her closest coworker. She studied them for what seemed an eternity until the chief cleared his throat and finally spoke.

“Uh, Nikki, there has been an accident.” He cleared his throat again. “It is with deep regret that I must inform you that....”

Then, the walls suddenly closed in, suffocating her as she dropped to her knees and began to scream. She looked up towards the sky and sobbed, “Oh, dear God, what have I done....”
Is your heart filled with pain,

    Shall I come back again?

Tell me dear, are you lonesome tonight?
She went limp. She was completely numb. The shock crashed through her body like a title wave, causing each limb to buckle and retreat inwards. As she dropped to her knees, she looked up to the ceiling and screamed, “No!”

Next thing she knew, she was standing naked in the shower. The hot water cascaded down her back and began swirling around the drain. The steam created a fog that masked the entire room. She began to sob. She sobbed so violently that her body shook until she vomited. This can’t be, she thought. I just saw him last night. We are supposed to go skiing next weekend.

She looked down and noticed she was dressed. She felt her hair, it was sopping wet, and she was now sitting in front of the television. She didn’t remember getting dressed.

She picked up the phone and couldn’t remember her mother’s number. She stared at the dialer as if she had never used a phone before. She looked at her hand and her fingers suddenly started moving. They moved across the keys, pressing 2-9-4-3-1-8-7. How strange, she thought. She didn’t even know she was doing it.

The phone rang once before a soft voice answered.

Blur
“Hello,” her mother said.

“Mom,” she screamed. “Mom, he’s, he’s dead,” was all she could say.

“I’m on my way,” her mother replied.

Next thing she knew, she was sitting in his mother’s living room. She could hear people talking, but was paralyzed. They were talking about making arrangements, and making phone calls. Is this really happening, she thought. Is he really gone? I just spoke to him yesterday. We are supposed to go skiing next weekend. She didn’t cry.

“Jim will go and bring his uniform over,” she heard his mother say. “Bob is on his way,” she heard his father say.

She laid down and tried to sleep. She couldn’t stop her mind. She just didn’t understand. What is going on? What is happening here? This isn’t real…

Next thing she knew, it was morning. She showered and dressed and followed his parents out the door. Where are we going so early, she wondered.

She was sitting next to his parents in an office, filled with brochures and pamphlets. ‘Plots versus Mausoleums,’ was the title of one brochure. ‘Cremation,’ the title of another.
“Let’s go have a look,” the strange man in the black suit said.

She held her breath as they walked into a room filled with caskets. As she exhaled, she looked around, horrified at the thought of him being inside one. She fought to take in a breath. She started to panic. I, I can’t breathe, she thought.

Why am I here, she questioned, as she looked for the closest exit. Then, she heard his mother speak.

“There are so many to choose from. I just don’t know.” As his mother started to cry, she felt herself moving towards her, reaching for her hand. She looked around and pointed her finger.

“That one, the one with the cherry wood and gold trim,” She said, looking at them.

“Yes, yes,” his mother said. “I like that one too,” she said, squeezing her hand. “Okay, then, that’s the one we want,” his father said to the man.

“Good then,” the man replied. “Now, let’s take a walk outside.” They sobbed as they hugged each other, walking outside.

We walked for about five minutes before coming to a newly sodded area. She stood, paralyzed in her thoughts as they continued walking ahead. This can’t be happening, she
thought. I can’t be here. I just don’t understand any of this. I just saw him. I just spoke to him. We are supposed to go skiing next weekend.

She didn’t cry.

“Oh, I just don’t know,” his father said. She watched as his parents stood still, staring blankly at each other.

Suddenly, her feet began to move. She moved towards them, as her hand was frantically waving at the strange man.

“I like this spot, right here, under this tree,” she said, motioning them to come take a look.

They walked over to the tree and stood, gazing up.

“I think this would be a nice plot. It will be shady and cool here during the hot summer months. And, you could put a nice bench right underneath. The sun will always rise and set behind the tree every day.”

They looked at each other briefly, before his father said, “Yes, I think so. We agree, this plot will be just fine.”

As they all started walking away, she stood there, gazing up into the tree. I just don’t understand, she thought. I just saw him. We are supposed to go skiing this weekend.

She didn’t cry.
Next thing she knew, she was sitting in his old bedroom. She stared at each wall, studying them over and over again. She stared at the pictures that these walls held, trying to imagine what each moment captured must have been like.

She listened to stories about the past, and what he was like growing up.

She laid in his old bed, staring up at the ceiling. She wondered if he used to do this when he was young. She wondered what he must have been like.

Then, her thoughts drifted to the present. I just don’t understand, she thought. This isn’t really happening. He can’t really be gone. I just saw him. I just spoke to him. He said he’d see me later. We’re supposed to go skiing next weekend.

Then, her thoughts drifted towards the future. What am I supposed to do, she thought. Where am I going to live? How can I go to work? I am alone. Oh, God, I am all alone. I’m, all, alone. I…am…all…a-l-o-n-e….

Next thing she knew, it was morning. What day is it, she thought. It was still dark as she walked out into the living room, stumbling over something. She looked down and saw them, covered in dirt.
She was searching the house, frantically. He’s here, he’s here, she kept whispering. She searched the entire house for him, but, he wasn’t there. Just his shoes. She walked back over to them and reached down. They were so cold. Even the dirt on them was still frozen.

At that moment, a sharp, piercing pain traveled from the center of her chest throughout her body. The pain spread from the inside out like wild fire.

My God, she thought. He is really gone. But, but, this can’t be, she thought. What day is it? It’s Wednesday. I just, just saw him on Sunday. I talked to him on Sunday night. We are supposed to go skiing this weekend.

She shined his shoes. She shined his shoes. She spit-shined his shoes.

Next thing she knew it was time for bed. She had taken his shoes and shined them the entire day. She spit, she waxed, she buffed, and she spit. There wasn’t a trace of dirt on those shoes. The shoes were so shiny, she could see her reflection in them. She had taken his shoes and shined them, for 12 hours straight. She shined his shoes.

She heard someone at the door. She sprang out of bed and ran to the hallway. As she rounded the corner she heard his father’s voice, and an unfamiliar one. It was
his uncle, his father’s brother. Why in the world did she think it would be him? As she walked back, they spotted her. She hugged them both and walked back to his room, climbed into bed, and pulled the covers over her eyes. This has to be a dream, a very bad dream, a nightmare, she thought.

She sat in the car, staring at the building. I can’t go in there, she thought. He’s in there. All this time, she had been wanting to see him, to touch his face, and hold his hand. Now, she was terrified. Okay, open the door and slide out. Her shoes were shined, her uniform crisp. One foot in front of the other, she whispered, as she slowly followed his family inside.

The director met them in the lobby and walked everyone into a dimly lit room. The room was large, with several rows of chairs. As she looked around the room, she noticed a casket at the far end. It was the casket she picked out. Oh, dear God, she thought. There he is. He’s here. It’s him. It can’t be him. I just saw him on Sunday. We are supposed to go skiing this weekend.

As she followed his family, their steps were rapid and long. You could feel the urgency in their movements. As they got closer, the movements shifted and became shorter,
slower. It was as if all of a sudden no one wanted to get
to up to the casket after all.

When they stopped, they stood there, staring. When
his mother first saw him, she dropped to knees, letting out
a cry that forever echoed inside her ears.

It looked like him, yet it didn’t. His face was oddly
shaped, and discolored. They had placed his glasses on his
face. Why did they do that she thought. He never wore
them.

She watched as his family touched him, rubbing his
hands, shoulders and face. She heard his mother cry when
she touched his face, running her fingers along his
hairline.

As they moved into the office to discuss his services,
she made her way to the casket. Okay, move your feet, she
thought. Okay, left foot, then right foot. She continued
to concentrate on her feet, inching closer and closer until
she bumped the casket.

She stood, unable to move, unable to breathe. She
stared at his face. His eyes were closed and covered by
those stupid glasses. She imagined his ocean-blue eyes
underneath those eyelids. She stared at his hands. They
looked so strange. She thought about the last time he
touched her, and what it felt like.
She touched him. His hands were cold. His shoulders were cold. His face was cold. She ran her fingers along his soft hair and moved around his temple to the back of his head. She let out a whimper when she felt a portion of his skull was missing.

She shook hands and hugged hundreds of people. People were lined up around the parking lot and into the street. The director had to leave the building open so that everyone had an opportunity to pay their respects.

It lasted almost 8 hours, but the time seemed to fly by. She didn’t even realize how exhausted she was until she got back to his parent’s house and sat down on his bed.

She didn’t eat, she didn’t drink. She just laid there, staring at the ceiling.

When she woke, she looked outside and noticed it had snowed. There was a light coating of snow on the ground. She was so tired that she had forgotten to take off her uniform. She would have to iron it before the service.

I have never seen so many police cruisers in one place, she thought, as they pulled into the parking lot of the funeral home.

Next thing she knew, they were at the church. It was standing room only. She looked around, staring into the faces of friends, family and strangers.
She stood up, and slowly marched over to his casket. She grabbed one end of the American flag that was draped over his coffin, and began to fold it. Nice and crisp, she thought. Now, don’t go too fast. The Sergeant took the flag from her, and then they saluted. She didn’t cry. She was warned not to.

She saluted the coffin, and slowly marched back to his family.

They all stood at attention as the coffin was loaded into the hearse. It was a short ride to the cemetery, just a few long miles down the road.

He was laid to rest in the snow, just like the day he died. The bagpipes played, the gun salute rang out, and the rider less horse walked by. The radio echoed his final call, “Unit 33, you went beyond the call of duty. Thank you for your ultimate sacrifice. May you rest in peace. Unit 33 EOW 1-12-1998.”

And that was it. People started walking away. She stood there, frozen, unable to move. Where is everyone going, she wondered. Where do I go? What do I do? I don’t understand. I just saw him on Sunday. We’re supposed to go skiing this weekend.

She drove back to the apartment and sat down on the couch. She looked around, noticing the dust that had
collected on the furniture. She hadn’t been there in almost a week. Was she hungry? Should she eat?

She folded her uniform, hung it in his closet, placing her shoes neatly next to the empty spot where his had been. She climbed into his bed. She stared out the window into the night’s sky. I haven’t seen or talked to him in almost a week. Oh, My God, he’s really gone. We were supposed to go skiing. We should be at the lodge right now. Oh, My God, I’m never going to see him again, she thought.

OH, MY GOD, HE’S GONE. She rolled over, turning away from the window. She tried but couldn’t fight the pure exhaustion, and started to fall asleep. I’m alone. I am alone. I am all alone….

The moon crept in through the window, casting but a single silhouette against the wall. She cried herself to sleep. She cried.
The game of life is hard to play,
    I’m gonna lose it anyway.
The losing card I’ll someday lay,
    So this is all I have to say.
Therapy

Why the fuck am I here, he thought, as he sat down in the oversized chair.

“So, I understand you are having nightmares. Is that correct,” the doctor queried.

“Yes, that is correct,” he replied. He looked around the room, noticing all of the artwork, pictures and degrees plastered all over the walls. Even doctors have ‘I love me walls’ he thought.

The doctor studied his facial expressions, and examined his body language for a short time before asking, “So, tell me about these nightmares.”

“Okay. The nightmares first began immediately after the incident,” he stated. “They were limited to the actual incident itself, and I thought I could handle it. However, now, the nightmares have changed.”

“How so,” the doctor cut in.

“The initial nightmares were only about the people that were involved in the incident. But, but now, uh...” The doctor could see the sweat pouring down his face now.

Handing him a handkerchief, the doctor asked, “But now who are the nightmares about?”
The tears began to well in his eyes as he looked at the doctor and whispered, “My son. The nightmares are about my newborn son.”

“Tell me about the incident,” the doctor probed, looking up from his notepad.

“About six months ago, I was working, and got sent to a house on a report of a drowning. I flew to get there. Upon my arrival, there was no one around. Not a single person to direct me which way to go. As I ran around to the rear of the house, I confirmed the address with dispatch and was stopped dead in my tracks.

The gate to the back was locked. I yelled and shouted for someone, anyone to open the gate and there was no one around. I started kicking at the gate. I kicked it three times before the damn thing flung open.

I ran around to the backyard and then straight to the pool. I looked down and saw him. He was lying at the bottom of the pool. I just dove right in. I dove in with my radio, gun belt, everything. I swam down to him, grabbed him and started towards the surface when I saw her.”

“There were two people in the pool,” the doctor asked.
“Yes, there were two,” he countered. “I was dispatched on the report of a man drowned in a pool. Once I saw him, I reacted and wasn’t looking for anyone else.” Handing him another handkerchief, the doctor asked, “So, there was another person in the pool, a woman.”

“No, I mean, Yes, but it wasn’t a woman. It was a girl,” he said while wiping his forehead.

“Please, continue,” the doctor said.

“So, as I was starting to bring the man up to the surface, I looked over and saw the little girl lying at the bottom of the other side of the pool. Next thing I knew, I had let go of the man and was swimming towards the little girl.”

The doctor sat up in his chair and leaned towards him. “Yes, I see,” he said. As his voice started to crack, he shifted his weight from one side of the chair to the other.

“I grabbed the little girl, and swam to the surface as fast as I could. When we got to the surface, another deputy was running towards us. We got her out of the pool and started CPR.

When the little girl started to breath, I turned and dove back into the pool after the man. I got to him quickly, but I had a hard time getting him to the surface.
My clothes were soaking wet and heavy, and I still had all of my equipment on. I started pulling him up and then we started to sink. I tried three times to get him up to the surface but couldn’t. I got tired. I needed air. I had no choice but to let him go so I could get to the surface to get some air.

I was exhausted and my clothes were like weights, pulling me down. I kicked my legs, but couldn’t get myself to the surface. I was just so exhausted, and just couldn’t swim. I started to panic. I thought I was going to drown, and all I could see was my son’s face. I thought of him and my wife and thought, My God, they’re going to have to bury me.

I sank to the bottom of the pool. With one large push, I pushed off from the bottom and started kicking my legs as hard and fast as I could, and made it to the surface. At that point, there were emergency medical people on scene and they helped me get the man out of the pool. We attempted CPR, however, the man, he, he didn’t make it.

“So, the man didn’t make it, but the little girl survived, right? You brought her back to life,” the doctor asked.
“That’s right,” he said. “She survived. I went to visit her at the hospital the next day, and spoke with her mother.”

“Oh, and what did her mother say,” said the doctor.

“The mother, she thanked me. She thanked me for saving her daughter’s life. She told me that the doctors said she was pretty much like a vegetable, but alive. So, I looked at the girl’s mother and asked her if I did the right thing?

“And what did she say,” the doctor asked.

“Yes. She said yes, you did the right thing. My daughter is alive because of you. You brought her back to me. You saved me from having to bury my little girl.”

The doctor looked up from his notepad and asked, “How old is this little girl?”

“She is 6,” he said, rubbing his forehead.

“Why did you ask her mother if you did the right thing,” said the doctor.

“Well, because when I found out that she was going to be like a vegetable, I thought, good God, what kind of life is she going to have? What about the quality of her life? I kept thinking of my son, and what would I do if I were in her situation.

“What would you do,” asked the doctor.
“I, I don’t know,” he cried.

“So, tell me about how the incident happened,” asked the doctor.

“Well, I was told that the little girl wanted to go swimming for a few minutes before it was time to go home. So, the little girl was swimming, while the man was watching her. She apparently got too close to the deep end of the pool, and began to panic. She started going under, so the man jumped in to try to save her. The man didn’t know how to swim. He panicked after he jumped in and instantly sank to the bottom. I remember hearing a lady screaming at me while I was in the pool. It was later that I found out it was the man’s wife. She appeared from inside the house after I jumped into the pool.”

Puzzled, the doctor asked, “Where was she when all of this was happening?”

“I don’t know. I think she was inside the house. Maybe she was still on the phone with the dispatcher,” he replied. “I never understood why she didn’t come out to meet me or unlock the gate.”

“So, what did she tell you,” asked the doctor. He started shifting in his chair, his posture stiffening. “I never spoke with her,” he replied. “The detectives and
the fire department spoke with her. All I remember was her screaming at me."

"Do you remember what she was saying," the doctor asked.

"Oh, yeah, I remember," he said. "She was screaming at me to save her husband because he didn’t know how to swim. And when I came to the surface with the little girl first, she started yelling that I saved the girl first because she was white and not her husband because he was black."

"I see," said the doctor. "Tell me, what did you think of that? How did you feel about that?"

"Are you kidding me," he snapped. It had nothing to do with race," his voice stern in his reply. "He was an adult man in his fifties; and she was a small child, only five or six years old. He had already lived a good part of his life. While she, on the other hand, she hadn’t lived at all. She had her entire life ahead of her. And now, she has her entire life to live, possibly as a vegetable."

"Tell me, do you regret saving her," the doctor bluntly asked.

"No. I’ve questioned whether or not I did the right thing for a little while now, but I do not regret it. I have visited the little girl and her mother since, and she
has improved slightly. Her mother thanked me again, and told me she has hope; something she wouldn’t have if it weren’t for me.”

“It’s important that you have come to accept what has happened,” the doctor stated. “You did what any good human being would have done. I don’t see anything wrong with the choices you made that day. You brought a little girl back to life so she could have a chance at a future. You did everything you could to save that man, almost losing your own life in the process.

What you are experiencing now is called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Did you attend a debriefing after this incident?”

“Yes, he snapped. “I attended a very informal one with everyone that responded to the scene. It was conducted about an hour after it happened.”

“Right afterwards, huh,” mumbled the doctor. “Did you have another debriefing a few days later?”

“No,” he replied.

“Did they take you off duty for a few days?”

“No, they did not.”

Did they send you to talk to a therapist or counselor?”

“Nope.”
“How about a psychologist or psychiatrist?”

“Nope.”

“Have you talked with anyone?”

“Just my wife,” he replied. “She thinks I need to see a doctor or therapist.”

“I think she is right,” the doctor said.

“Now, you said the nightmares have changed,” asked the doctor. “You were having nightmares about the incident and those involved, but now they’re involving your son. Is that correct?”

Looking down at his feet he softly replied, “Yes, my son. In my dream, I arrive at the house, go through everything that I actually went through, and jump into the pool. There is only one person at the bottom, a child. The child looks just like the little girl that I saved. But when I grab her and start to pull her towards me to swim to the surface, it’s, it’s my son. I, I see my son’s face.”

“Okay. We are out of time. Let’s get together, say next week, to continue...
Teach your children well, their father's hell,
did slowly go by.
And feed them on your dreams, the one they fix,
the one you'll know by.
Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you,
you would cry.
So just look at them and sigh, and know they love you.
Funeral

She knew he was awake. Wiping off the steam from the mirrors, she could hear little footsteps in the hallway. As she wrapped herself in her robe, she glanced at the mirror. She could see the sadness creeping over her face, it made her uneasy. She walked down the hallway and into her bedroom. He was quietly waiting for her, sitting on her bed.

“Hi Mommy, what are you doing,” Timmy smiled. His hair was messy. He had slept well this time.

“Good morning, Timmy. I am getting ready. I have to leave for a short while.”

He sat down on the bed, watching her stare into her closet for a moment before trying to grab her arm.

“Mommy, where are you going?”

“I have to go to a funeral, she sighed. She knew what was next.

“Mommy, what is a funeral?” As she looked down at his tiny, round face, she tried to gather her thoughts. “Well, a funeral is where people gather together to say goodbye to someone they’ve lost.”

“Mommy, why say goodbye? Why don’t they just go look for the person if they’re lost?”
She could see the curiosity in his eyes as she began to struggle.

“Honey, the person isn’t actually lost. The person died. The person is gone, and, she isn’t coming back.”

“So, she is never coming back,” he asked.

“No, she is never, ever coming back.” She knew what was next.

“Mommy, why isn’t she ever coming back,” his curiosity building.

“Honey, I could try to explain it to you, but you’re just too little to understand right now,” she said. She began fumbling through her clothes, before picking out a black skirt and a black sweater. She laid them on the bed and looked over at Timmy. She watched him try to process everything, before looking up at her, still smiling.

“Are you going to miss her?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered. I am going to miss her very much.”

“Is that why you are sad,” he asked.

“Yes, that is why I am sad,” she replied.

“Are there going to be lots of people there?”

“Why, yes. There are going to be lots people there. There will be her family, her friends, and the people she worked with.” She knew what was next.
“Are all the people going to miss her,” he asked.

“Oh, yes, all the people are going to miss her,” she said.

“Are all the people going to be sad too?”

“Well, yes. All of the people are going to be sad.”

He stood up on the bed and motioned for her to come to him. She picked him up and placed him on the floor. She kissed his cheek, and he kissed her back.

“Uh, Mommy?”

“Yes, Timmy.”

“When you go to funeral, you have to wear black, itchy clothes? When you go to funeral, you have to say goodbye to someone that is never, ever coming back? When you go to funeral, you have to be around lots of sad people?”

“Well, Yes, Timmy. That is right.”

“Uh, Mommy,” he asked, now standing at her bedroom door. “That doesn’t sound fun,” his smile had disappeared from his face.

“No, it sure doesn’t,” she replied. “Funerals are not fun.”

He stared at her for a moment, trying to process everything. He stood there, motionless. She could tell he was really trying.
Then, the front door opened, and he could hear grandma’s voice. His smile quickly came back to his face as he turned to go greet her. He stopped, looked back at her and asked, “Then, why go?”

Before she could reply, he was already skipping down the hallway to the stairs.

“Hi Mamaw,” she heard him say. She looked at the clothes on her bed before turning back towards her closet. She sighed.
Hakuna Matata,
What a wonderful phrase.
Hakuna Matata,
Ain't no passing craze.
Socks

“AHH, I CAN’T WEAR THESE, MOM! I JUST, CAN’T, WEAR THEM,” she cried, pulling off her new purple socks.

“But, honey, they’re new, and I washed them so they’re nice and soft,” Mom answered.

“NO, NO, I, I can’t wear them. They, they hurt me,” she replied, balling herself into the corner of her bedroom.

It was too late. She could see the melt down starting. She painfully watched her for a moment, before walking over towards her.

“What am I going to do,” she heard her whispering to herself. “I can’t walk around barefoot. I don’t like to be barefoot. I can’t wear my shoes without socks. I can’t go to school without shoes. OH, NO, WHAT AM I GOING TO DO!

Her mother’s heart was crushed as she continued to watch her rock feverishly back and forth.

“Okay, sweetheart, tell me what hurts,” Mom asked.

“They hurt my toes,” she said. “They stab my toes and it hurts,” tears now streaming down her cheeks.

“It’s okay, it’ll be okay,” Mom said, patting her head. She turned the socks inside out and felt all around noticing nothing unusual about them.
“See,” she said, wiping her eyes. “Right there! That is what is stabbing me.” She pointed her little finger at the stitching at the top of the socks. Her mother examined the stitching and wondered for a moment what to do.

“Will you try it back on for me,” leaving the sock inside out.

“Do I have to,” she sniffled.

“Yes, please, I want to check something,” her mother replied.

“Okay, okay, I’ll do it.” She slid the sock back over her foot and pointed her toes.

“Hey,” she smiled. “No stabbing. I don’t feel anything stabbing my toes. Wow, Momma, what’d you do? How’d you fix them?”

“It was the stitching that was stabbing your toes, so I made it disappear,” she smiled.

“How, by magic,” she asked.

“Oh, no honey,” she chuckled. “We are going to have to turn all of your socks inside out. That way, you won’t feel the stitching stabbing your toes.”

“Okay, Momma,” she grinned, as she put the other sock back on her feet.
It means no worries,  
For the rest of your days.  
It's a problem free philosophy,  
Hakuna Matata.
BEEP-BEEP, BEEP, BEEP-BEEP, BEEP, BEEP............

“We interrupt you’re regularly scheduled programming for an important weather alert,” the man shouted through the television screen.

Oh, dear, she thought, as she watched her children gather around the television, clinging to every word the weatherman uttered.

“It looks like we have some bad weather coming our way,” she interrupted. Her memories of going through this with him, began to rear its ugly head. Now, there’s three...

“What kind of weather,” the girls asked.

“Well, it looks like we have some severe thunderstorms heading our way.” She paused a moment to see their reaction.

“What’s a severe thunderstorm,” Evie asked.

“It is a rainstorm with thunder and lightning and wind,” she replied.

“Are we under a warning,” Maddi asked.

“Yes, honey we are,” she quickly responded. “But, that’s okay, it’s just heavy showers with some booms and flashes of light.”
“Yeah, but what about tornadoes? Can we get a tornado? Are we under a tornado warning,” she asked.

“We are under a tornado watch, that’s all,” she said.

“We’re now under a tornado warning,” Timmy yelled, as he ran into the living room.

She could see the fear in his eyes. Oh, no, she thought, as the news settled in with the girls. Evie started to cry, while Maddi started right for the stairs and straight up to her bedroom.

“Okay, it’s okay, we’re going to be alright,” repeated. “Let’s all head down to the basement and turn the television on downstairs. We can watch the news and play some games.” She watched as they were frozen.

“Okay, Timmy,” she snapped. “You’re in charge. I need you to take Evie downstairs, while I go get Maddi.” That was all he needed, as he jumped up, and sprinted towards his baby sister.

“Okay Mom,” he said, grabbing Evie with one arm. She could hear him calming her down while he carried her downstairs and into the basement. She glanced at the television before jumping back to the sound of the sirens. Oh, boy, she thought, as she raced upstairs to get Maddi.

“Maddi, honey. I need you to come downstairs with me,” she said in a soft, calm voice.
“No, no I can’t,” she heard her say. She walked into her room to find her in her favorite spot in the corner, rocking back and forth.

“Sweetheart, we need to go downstairs to the basement.

“I don’t want to,” she cried. “I’m scared.”

“I know you’re scared,” she replied. We need to go downstairs with your brother and sister. It’s safer down there.”

“It is,” she asked. “Why?”

“Well, it is safer because it is underground, and there are fewer windows down there. It is safer to be underground when bad weather comes.”

“I heard sirens. Are we under a tornado warning now,” she asked.

“Yes. That is why we need to go downstairs. It is not safe up here,” she replied. “We can go down there and watch TV, eat some snacks and play some games. How does that sound?”

“Okay, Momma,” she replied. She carried her downstairs where the other two were already eating potato chips, drinking some juice and playing cards.

“Hey,” Maddi asked, pulling up a stool. “Can I play too?”
You're gonna miss this,
you're gonna want this back.
You're gonna wish these days,
  hadn't gone by so fast.
These are some good times,
so take a good look around.
You may not know it now,
but you're gonna miss this.
Momma? Would you rather be locked in a cage with a tiger, or lick peanut butter off of a hobo’s foot,” Maddi giggled.

“Hold on, just hold on Maddi,” I replied. “Alright, okay now. Does everyone have their backpacks?” I start the van and let it warm for a moment. It is a cool morning, and we’re all still adjusting to the day-light savings time change. After a few moments...

“Backpacks?”

“Yes,” they all answered.

“Okay, girls. Do you have your lunch bags,” I quizzed.

“Yes, Momma,” they replied.

“Do they have those cool packs in them to keep them cold all day,” I asked. Sometimes I forget to put them inside their lunch bags.

“Yep,” the girls reply.

“Okay, then. Hey, Timmy. Do you have your clarinet and chrome book.”

“Yesss,” Timmy answered.

“Everyone have their seatbelt on,” I barked.
“YESSS,” they all replied.

“Okay, then. Let’s go,” I said, backing out of the driveway.

“Alright, Maddi. I’m ready to play.”

“Okay,” Maddi said. “Momma? Would you rather be locked in a cage with a tiger for an hour, or lick peanut butter off of a hobo’s foot,” Maddi giggled, again.

“Hmm, let me see,” I replied. “I think I would have to lick the peanut butter off the hobo’s feet.”

“Really,” Maddi asked. “Why not the tiger?”

“I don’t think I would chance being in the cage with the tiger,” I said.

“It’s just for an hour,” Maddi replied.

“Yeah, but what if the tiger is hungry,” I answered.

“Aren’t all tigers hungry,” Evie said.

“Okay, okay,” Maddi said. “Evie? Would you rather kiss an elephant, or jump off the roof into a tiny pool?”

“Is the elephant a boy elephant or a girl elephant,” Evie asked.

“It’s a boy elephant,” Maddi giggled.

“Uh, okay,” Evie said. “Well, is the elephant a nice elephant?”

“Of course it’s a nice elephant,” Maddi chuckled.

“Aren’t all elephants nice?”
“Well, I don’t know, Maddi. That’s why I am asking,” Evie said. “Okay, how high is the roof of the house,” Evie asked. “And, how big is the pool?”

“Oh, Evie,” Maddi replied. “I don’t know, just answer the question.”

“Okay, Maddi, okay. I would kiss the elephant. I’m afraid I might get hurt if I jump off of the roof. I mean, hey. What if I didn’t land in the tiny pool?”

“Alright, okay,” Maddi said. “Timmy? Would you rather have super strength or…”

“I don’t want to play right now,” Timmy stated.

“Oh, well, okay,” Maddi sighed.

“Well, why don’t you want to play, Timmy,” Evie asked. “What’s the matter? Don’t you feel ok?”

“I feel ok,” Timmy replied. “I just don’t feel like playing today.”

“So, why don’t you want to play then,” Evie asked.

“BECAUSE I DON’T FEEL LIKE IT,” Timmy yelled back.

“Fine, then,” Evie replied. “Geesh, you don’t have to yell.”

“Hey, Maddi,” Evie turned towards her. “Would you rather walk to and from school barefoot, in the snow, or ride the bus in your underwear?”
“How much snow are we talking about here,” Maddi asked. “At least a foot of snow,” Evie replied. “Maybe two feet.”

“How far are we talking about here,” Maddi said. “Are we talking about walking from our new house or old house? I mean, the new house is like 3 miles away. The old house wasn’t even a half mile away!”

“New house,” Evie snickered. “You would have to walk 3 miles through 2 feet of snow to get to school Maddi.”

“Well, hmm, let me think about this for a moment,” Maddi said. “DUH, EVIE,” Maddi yelled. “I would walk to school barefoot in the snow! There’s no way I would ride the bus in my underwear! That would be so embarrassing!”

“Yeah, I know,” Evie agreed. “It would be the ultimate of embarrassment!”

“Alright,” I chirped. “Unbuckle your belts girls, we’re here. Have a good day, and I’ll see you right here at 2:30.”

“Okay, Momma, see you later,” they said, waving goodbye.

“So, is everything okay with you,” I asked, turning out of the parking lot.

“Yeah, why,” Timmy asked.
“You always play that silly game with the girls every morning,” I replied.

“I just didn’t feel like it today. I have a headache,” he said.

“Why do you have a headache,” I asked.

“I don’t know,” Timmy answered. “Well, eighth grade is tough. I have two tests today. One in math and the other in science.”

“You studied, right?”

“Yeah, I studied,” he said. “Honors math is just harder than regular math, and I’ve been struggling with science.”

“I’m sure you’ll do just fine,” I said. “You work really hard at school, and if you study hard, it will pay off.”

“I know, I know,” he replied.

“Well, have a good day, and good luck on your tests,” I smiled. “I’ll see you this afternoon.”

“Okay, bye mom,” he replies as he rushes out of the van towards the side of his building.

He smiles and waves as I drive away. The car ride home is silent.

Tuesday
“Okay, everyone have their backpacks, lunch boxes, and instruments,” Mom shouted.

“YES,” they all replied.

“Okay, then. Seatbelts fastened,” she asked.

“YES,” they all replied.

“Okay, then. Let’s go,” she said. Let the games begin, she thought, as she backed out of the driveway.

They hadn’t yet reached the main road before she heard Maddi ask her sister, “Okay, Evie. Would you rather, eat brussel sprouts, or kiss a boy?”

She looked in the rear view mirror and saw the horror on Evie’s face.

“UGH,” Evie moaned. “Can you change it to pizza?”

“Pizza,” Maddi griped. “Why do you want me to change it to pizza?”

“Because,” Evie snickered, “I don’t like brussel sprouts.”

“You’ve never had Brussel sprouts,” Timmy chimed.

“Yeah, but I know I wouldn’t like them,” Evie replied.

“No changes,” Evie, Maddi said.

“Kiss the boy on the cheek,” Evie asked.

“Yeah,” Maddi answered.

“OOH, GROSS,” Evie yelled. “NO WAY.”
“I choose neither then,” said Evie. I don’t like Brussel sprouts or boys.”

She glanced over at Timmy, who was now laughing at his baby sister.

“Okay, Timmy,” Maddi snorted. “Would you rather…oh, are you playing today?”

“Yes, I’ll play,” Timmy replied.

“So, Timmy, would you rather be totally bald, or have no teeth,” Maddi giggled. Evie joined in.

“Hmm, let’s see,” Timmy thought.

“Like, no hair or teeth forever, or can they grow back,” Evie asked.

“EVIE,” Maddi yelled. “I am asking Timmy, NOT YOU.”

“SORRY,” Evie mumbled, sticking her tongue out at her sister.

“Well,” said Timmy, “I think I would rather be totally bald.”

“Really,” Maddi replied. “Why would you rather have no hair than no teeth?”

“Yeah, Timmy-boy,” Evie joined in.

“Well,” Timmy said. “If I have no teeth, then I can’t eat, and I have to eat to survive.”

“Yeah, you definitely like to eat,” Evie snickered.

“Hey now,” Mom said.
“If I have no hair, I can just put a hat on,” Timmy chirped.

“Oh, yeah, right,” Maddi replied. “I never thought of that. Okay, Momma, it’s your turn.”

“Sorry, we’re out of time,” Momma said as she pulled into the school’s parking lot.

“Okay, we’ll pick it up later this afternoon when you pick us up from school,” Maddi smiled.

“Have a good day, girls. I’ll see you in about six and a half hours,” Momma waved.

“Okay, bye Momma,” the girls yelled as they ran up the back steps.

“So, who do you think is going to win the race this week,” Timmy asked, while scrolling through his phone.

“Hmm, well, I’m not sure,” she responded. “I’d like to see Earnhardt Jr. win. But, I don’t know where he is starting from.”

“Yeah, I know he’s your favorite,” Timmy said. “He’s starting fifth this week.”

“Who’s on the pole,” she asked.

“Guess,” he replied.

“I don’t know, Logano,” she asked.

“Nope,” he grinned. “The one and only.”
“Ah, she smiled, Jeff Gordon, huh.” She giggled as she recalled how since the age of three, Timmy has liked Jeff Gordon.

“It should be a good race,” Timmy smiled.

“Yeah, it should,” she replied. “Well, you have a good day, and I’ll see you later this afternoon.

“Okay, bye Mom,” he waved as he got out of the van.

“Bye son,” she waved back.

Wednesday

“Okay, everyone got their backpacks, lunches and stuff?”

“UGH, Yes, Momma,” they all replied. She sighed at their annoyed attitude towards her.

As she started her drive, she turned on the radio and heard a song that made her smile. Oh, I haven’t heard this one in years, she thought, as she turned up the volume. As she turned up the volume of the music, the girls turned up the volume of their conversation. “Hey girls, could you keep it down a little, please,” Mom pleaded.

No response.

She turned the volume up a little more, which now irritated the boy, who then turned up the volume of his
phone, reciprocating the irritation. The girls, who were also irritated, turned up the volume of their conversation.

The phone and the voices were so loud that she couldn’t hear herself singing along. She felt it coming, but she couldn’t help it.

“Shut up! All of you, shut up,” she screamed.

Now, the radio was blasting through the silence that filled the van. She quickly turned down the volume and yelled, “All I wanted to do was listen to a song! ONE SONG, and you couldn’t let me, now could you?”

She looked into the mirror and saw the middle child beginning to cry, while the youngest stared out the window, fighting back tears. She glanced next to her and he quickly turned away.

She sighed heavily, and turned off the radio. The rest of the drive, which seemed to take forever, was completely silent. Do I even say anything to them, she thought, as she pulled into the parking lot of the girls’ school. Should I tell them to have a good day, when I’ve ruined their morning?

But, before she could gather her thoughts, the girls were already out of the car and walking towards the back steps. Maybe they’ll turn around and I can wave at them,
she hoped. She anxiously waited, watching, but, they didn’t. She drove on in silence.

She started to contemplate whether or not to talk to the boy, but decided against it. She pulled into the lot, and before she could even come to a complete stop, he was already getting out of the car. She knew he wouldn’t turn and wave after he slammed the door shut.

Feeling guilty, she sighed and drove home in silence. I’ll apologize to them when I pick them up today, she thought, as she pulled away.

**Thursday**

Mom pulled out of the garage, backed down the driveway, and started down the street. The remnants of yesterday’s drive still fresh in her mind. Before she got to the stop sign she heard Evie call out to her.

“Hey, Mommy, you forgot to ask us if we had our backpacks, lunches and instruments.”

“Oh, yeah,” Mommy said. “I thought you guys didn’t like it when I asked you that.”

“Oh,” they all three replied.

“Hey, Momma, what about asking us if we have our seat belts on,” Maddi asked.
“Oh, yeah, right,” Momma replied. “I didn’t think you liked that either.” They were silent.

“Are you feeling okay,” Timmy asked.

“No, no I’m not,” she replied. “I don’t feel well today. I have a bad headache. So, how about we keep it quiet today, no games, and no radio. Okay?”

“Oh, uh, okay,” the girls replied. She could hear the disappointment in their voices.

After a few moments, she heard them begin to whisper amongst themselves. She glanced over at Timmy, who was engaged in his phone.

She glanced in the mirror from time to time and could see the sadness on their faces.

Another longer than normal drive, she thought, as she drove them to school, hitting every red traffic light along the way.

She pulled into the lot with every intention of telling them she was sorry she didn’t feel well, and to have a good day. But, before she could say goodbye, the girls were already out of the van and walking towards the steps. She watched, hoping this time that they would turn around and wave. But, they didn’t. Sighing, she drove on in silence.

When she pulled into the lot of the middle school, he also got out without saying anything. She looked over at
him, and he gave a fake smile as he shut the door. She watched to see if he would turn around and wave. But, he didn’t. Tears started to stream down her face as she drove home, in silence.

Friday

They piled into the van, excited that it was FRIDAY. She backed out of the garage and down the driveway to the street. She started down the street and suddenly threw the van into “park” gear.

She looked back and saw the bewilderment on each of their faces. She waited a moment, to see if any of them would ask, but they didn’t. So, she turned to them and asked, “Everyone got their backpacks, lunch boxes, and instruments?”

“Yes, Momma,” they all sang out. She could hear the excitement in their voices. “Everyone have their seatbelts fastened?”

“Yes, Momma,” they all sang out again. Smiling, she threw the van back into “drive” gear and sang, “Okay, then. Let’s go!”

They talked about what they were going to do over the weekend, and barely got through a full round of ‘would you
rather,’ before she pulled into the parking lot. That was a quick drive, she thought as she pulled up in front of the school yard.

“Bye, Momma,” the girls smiled as they got out of the van.

“Bye bye, girls. Have a good day. I’ll be right here when you get out,” she smiled.

“Okay, Momma,” they waved, as they walked towards the back steps. As she started to pull away, she noticed that the girls had walked to the top of the steps and stopped. She slowed down and watched as they turned back and waved.

She and Timmy talked all the way to school, mostly about NASCAR.

“Alright,” she said. “Have a good day, and I’ll see you later this afternoon.”

“Bye, Mom,” he smiled, as he got out of the van. She watched him as she started to pull away. He too, stopped when he got to the front entrance. He turned to her and waved.

She drove home, with the radio on.
When it was dark, now there's light.

Where there was pain, now's there's joy.

Where there was weakness, I found my strength.

All, in, the eyes of a boy.
The Talent Show

Oh, my God, I think I’m going to throw up! What in the world is he thinking, she thought, as she fought the burning pressure that was building inside of her throat.

She paced the gymnasium floor wildly, fearful for what was about to take place. He always tells me when he has something going on at school, she whispered to herself. If his teacher hadn’t have told her about this last week, she never would have known about it.

Strange. This is so strange, she muttered as she started scanning the gymnasium for the nearest exit.

“Excuse me, but are you ok,” a woman asked as she walked passed.

“Yes, well, no, my son is getting ready to perform next, she chirped.

“Oh, I see,” said the woman. “Oh, it’s just a little talent show, I’m sure he’ll do fine,” as she walked away to her seat.

Just a little talent show, she thought. It’s more than a little talent show. There are five hundred people sitting in this gymnasium. And, he’s going to sing in front of all of them. Alone. She just doesn’t understand.
Journal Entry: Saturday, August 31, 2002

We took Timmy out for dinner tonight at Applebee’s. It did not go well. The staff came out to sing to a patron and he totally freaked out. He cupped his hands over his ears and started screaming and crying hysterically. Tim scooped him up and carried to the men’s room to calm him down. People stared at us, so I just smiled and said that all the clapping and singing startled him.

Twenty minutes later, they returned, his little face flushed and swollen from crying. We paid for the food that we never got to eat and quickly left the restaurant. Their food isn’t that good anyways.

#

Journal entry: Monday, October 3, 2005

I had a meeting with the director of the preschool program today. It did not go well.

“Timmy is disruptive and physically aggressive towards the other kids in class,” she said. He doesn’t want to participate in class, he won’t talk or make eye contact and
is...unteachable at this point.” UNTEACHABLE? How could she say that? He’s only been there a month! I told her we would work with him at home.

#

Journal entry: Friday, November 18, 2005

I picked Timmy up from preschool today, and the teacher stopped to talk to me, again. It did not go well. She said he pushed one girl down and tried to kick a boy. I could tell she was frustrated by the stern tone of her voice. She has no idea how much I dread picking him up from school.

Every morning I drop him off, hoping that he has a good day. And yet, every afternoon I pick him up, only to hear how bad things went. She stated that hopefully being off from school next week for Thanksgiving will give him some time to relax and take a break.

I told her we will continue to work with him at home. She nodded her head in agreement, but her frowning smile didn’t seem very reassuring. When we got into the car, Timmy began to mumble.
“Momma, I hate schooalt, peas don’t make me go back.” I asked him to repeat what he said, but he just stared out the window. So, I turned on the radio. Timmy loves music. He likes to sing along.

#

Journal entry: Wednesday, December 19, 2005

I had another meeting with the director of the preschool program today. Guess what? Yep, it did not go well. Same old stuff—He’s disruptive, won’t participate, aggressive towards the other children… I told her that every morning for the last two weeks he has been complaining of not feeling well. He will say he has a belly ache, and ask if he can stay home from school.

When I asked the director why she thought he might be doing that, she had no response. So, I asked her if I could observe the class tomorrow. Maybe I could just peek in through the window for a little bit. Reluctantly, the director replied that I could observe the class. I told her that I would be there sometime after 9:00 a.m. A part of me is really nervous about it. I am afraid of what I might see.

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Journal entry: Thursday, December 20, 2005

I pulled Timmy out of preschool today! Okay. First, I went to the office at 9:15 a.m. and got a visitor’s pass. I walked down the hall to the room and stood there for a moment, trying to calm my breathing. I paced back and forth for a few minutes before finally stepping up to the window on the classroom door.

Okay. Second, I looked into the classroom and searched until I found Timmy. As I peered through that window, I was absolutely horrified at what I saw. There was my little boy, standing in the corner of the classroom. He was all alone, and talking to himself. Poor little guy! He was staring up at the bulletin board, and gesturing like he was having a conversation with it.

The teacher was on the other side of the room, teaching the other kids, as if Timmy weren’t even there. It was as if he DIDN’T EVEN EXIST! That teacher, THAT WOMAN was not paying the slightest bit of attention to him. I watched this continue for approximately fifteen minutes, debating whether or not to barge in. Then, suddenly, the teacher started a new activity.
She gathered the kids up and started working at a craft table. She brought Timmy over and sat him down. He picked up a marker and started to color, when another boy grabbed it out of his hands. I could see the boy say to Timmy that he had had the marker first. Timmy stared blankly at him, before picking up a different marker to color. The same boy then grabbed the second marker right out of Timmy’s hand. Timmy tried to grab this one back, but the boy wouldn’t let go. The boy said something to him, and then stuck his tongue out at Timmy. I could see the color in Timmy’s face change from cream to rose. I put my hand on the door and started to turn the knob, when Timmy jumped out of his seat and pushed the boy down. The boy yelled out, and the teacher came right over. She immediately removed Timmy from the table without even asking what had happened. I let go of the knob, and stood there, paralyzed in my emotion.

The teacher sat Timmy down at another table and warned him to behave. He picked up a crayon and began coloring again. The boy sitting next to Timmy was staring at him. Timmy looked at the boy and tried to talk to him. The little brat pointed his little fat finger in Timmy’s face and started laughing.
I looked away from the window. It was too painful to see my son try to make a friend, only to see him fail. I peeked back through the window and watched the smile fade from my little boy’s face. I saw his color change from cream, to rose, and then to bright red. As he stood up, his chair fell over. He turned and faced the other little boy, his little face-flushed and big eyes starting to water. Then it happened. He pushed the boy down. The boy then yelled for the teacher, who, again, immediately removed Timmy from the table.

This time, she placed him at a table alone on the other side of the room. The table had nothing on it. It had no paper, no markers, or crayons. I watched her point her bony finger at his nose while she told him to just sit there and be quiet.

As she turned and walked away, Timmy, jumped up and ran over to the corner of the classroom, the spot where I first saw him, and began a conversation with the bulletin board. He was fighting back his tears as he stared up at the bulletin board. His tiny lips quivered as he began talking to himself. I watched his petite arms flail back and forth feverishly, as his mouth seemed to move at lightning speed. It was as if he was desperately trying to plead his case over everything that had just happened.
My heart was racing, pounding. It felt like it was beating right out of my chest. I couldn’t watch this. Not a single minute more. My hand shook as I grabbed the cold, brass knob and slowly turned it. I fought for a deep breath and swallowed, almost choking. I felt sick to my stomach. I could feel the color of my face starting to change from cream to bright red.

Fighting back my tears, I swung the door open, revealing myself to the teacher and everyone inside the classroom. Like a tornado, I stormed inside, glaring at his teacher, the entire time. As our eyes met, she quickly looked away. I proceeded to stare down every single one of those bratty children sitting at those bratty tables.

My disruption interrupted Timmy’s private conversation with himself, as he turned around to see what was going on.

As soon as our eyes met, I could feel my face cool and soften. A look of relief came over his little face as he started to smile.

“Hi Mommy,” he said. “What er you doin der?”

“Get your stuff babe, we’re outta here,” I smiled back.

I have never seen that little boy move so fast! He ran over to the hooks on the wall, grabbed his backpack and ran
straight for me. He held my hand as we started for the door.

The teacher, now glaring at me, started walking towards us.

“I didn’t know he was leaving early today. Does he have a doctor or dentist appointment,” she snorted.

“Nope. He doesn’t have any appointments,” I replied. “I have been watching outside the window for the last fifteen minutes and I have seen all I need to see. He is coming home with me.”

“Oh,” she replied, stunned for the moment. “Okay, Timmy, we’ll see you tomorrow then,” she stated, half-heartedly. As I started to close the door behind us, I turned and glared back at her.

“No, no you won’t. You won’t see him tomorrow. He won’t be back,” Before she could reply, I slammed the door behind us. No sooner, did we get to the office so I could turn in the visitor’s pass, did the director come out to meet us.

She said hello to Timmy, who gripped my hand so tightly as she spoke that it actually hurt.

“I hear you are pulling Timmy out of preschool,” she said, peering down over her wire-rimmed glasses.

“Yes. Yes, I am,” I replied as firmly as I could.
“But, why? Why would you do that,” she said.

I explained to her what I had just witnessed, and she DIDN’T EVEN RESPOND. She just stood there, blank, emotionless. This silence lasted for what seemed like an eternity before she finally looked into my eyes.

“But what will you do? He needs to be in school,” she barked.

“Yes, he does need to be in school, but, not this one, I replied.”

Before she could say another word, Timmy quickly squeezed my hand and blurted out, “Let’s go Mommy.”

We raced each other to the car. He kissed my cheek as I buckled him into his car seat.

“What was that for,” I asked.


“Okie dokie, McDonald’s it is,” I replied, choking back my tears.

So, I turned on the radio. Timmy loved music. He liked to sing along.

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She heard the clapping of the audience, as her heart began to race. Still pacing, she whispered, Oh, God, Timmy’s up next. All those painful memories completely flooded her. They rushed back through her like the blood pumping through her veins.

I know we’ve come a long way since then, she thought, as she made her way to her seat. He had loved his new school, and they loved him.

Her thoughts were racing through her mind so fast she was dizzy. Being diagnosed with Autism had explained and clarified so many things. She recalled all the doctor appointments, all the speech therapy, and all the occupational therapy.

She recalled all those long, long, nights. She recalled working with him at home, just so he didn’t have to struggle. He was doing so well, getting A’s and B’s, she thought. He’s even playing football and baseball. He was making friends. He has been keeping eye contact with people, just like a normal kid. But, he’s not a normal kid.

So, he’s going to stand up there, on that stage, in front of all of these people, these five-hundred people and sing a song?
Suddenly, her thoughts were interrupted. His teacher walked out onto the stage, smiling and waving at all of the students, faculty and parents.

“Okay, okay everyone, simmer down. We saved the best for last. Here he is, Timmy Powell!”

Oh Lord, she yelped, as she covered her face. She could feel the rhythm of her heart as it pounded inside her chest. The sweat began to pool at the base of her neck, sliding down towards the middle of her back. She quickly scanned the audience for the quickest path to get to him if it didn’t go well. She gulped one last time, praying what was in her throat would stay down.

He walked out onto the stage and looked around. She felt sick to her stomach. She grabbed her tissue and held it close to her face. He stood silently, looked around the gymnasium, and smiled.

Completely paralyzed in fear, she looked up to the ceiling and began to pray. Dear God, please, please let this go well. Please God, please God, PLEASE GOD….

The music started and he bobbed his head to the beat, still looking around and smiling at the audience.

Suddenly, he grabbed the microphone and immediately began to sing, still smiling down at the crowd. He started to dance around, and the crowd started to cheer. They
clapped. They cheered. They chanted his name. He looked up and down, and all around, making eye contact with everyone. He sang. He danced. He danced, and he sang in front of five-hundred people.

Who is this child, she thought, as she sat there, completely stunned. She couldn’t take her eyes off of him. She was in awe of what she was seeing. There was her son, up there, on that stage, singing in front of all these people. There was her autistic son, up there, on that stage singing in front of all these people.

Her face flushed from cream to rose, as a wave of emotion engulfed her. She smiled like she had never smiled before. She smiled, knowing that this moment would forever live in her memory. She could feel her heart smile as she sang along with her son. This time, she didn’t fight them back, but let the steady stream of tears flow. Flow down her proud face.
WORKS CITED

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