

Medical History:

Notes from patient on medical history

If you're reading this you have been granted the greatest gift of all time: life. However, this gift is not just something you hold onto. Life is a gift that you must consistently invest in. Like a plant, you must water it and feed it with sunshine. In technical terms, life is just the allotted time you are given to breathe and have a beating heart, and it is the verb that carries the meaning. Life is only made valuable by constantly living. Yes, this seems pretty given, maybe even redundant, but I assure you it is not. Because life is just time, but living is the act of making memories and moments to make that time valuable. Think of life as your plant, and the actions you take are what make the value of life grow. Each moment you experience is a drop of water into the soil or a ray of sunshine. However, every moment feeds the value of life in a different way. Like a different nutrient to the plant, different moments give new knowledge and meaning to you. And yes, there are moments that make small simple additions, but there are some that cause waves of change. Maybe you're asking yourself who is this girl to be telling me all about the value of life? How can she know all this deeper knowledge? It is because of my biggest moment thus far. A moment that forever changed my life and my view of it.

Here is what I remember:

It was the end of July in a suburb just north of Atlanta, which you may know implies heat and humidity. With no agenda for the day, I found myself moseying down to the slope of my driveway. The way the hill faced, caught the sun in just the perfect way that it was nearly impossible to resist. I felt my bare feet absorb the warmth of the rough pavement as I trekked to the perfect spot. I lowered down to the ground to be able to absorb the same warmth I felt on my feet over a greater surface area. My back laying on the warm rocky cement and my face catching each ray from the sun directly above me, I closed my eyes and smiled. This moment was completely ordinary. I do not remember each of these details because the warmth of the blaring sun transformed my life, but rather the events to follow. I was in complete relaxation. A moment of quiet before the biggest event of my life. As I laid there paralyzed in peace, in a distant hum I could hear chiming of my mom's ringtone. Again, completely regular. I thought nothing of this. It was just a normal day. A few moments later, the blissful state that consumed my body was shaken as I heard a trembling yell from the backyard. I heard my mom say my name in a way that you can feel in your core. Like when your parents call your name in that way that you just

know you're in trouble, the tone of her voice was the perfect clue to tragedy. Something had happened, and I knew in that exact moment that everything I knew would change.

My limbs went from lying limp on the pavement, to shooting up and hustling to my mom's side without even being commanded. My mind was such a blur because of it was filled with a racing train of possibilities of what the words I was about to hear could be. And as I looked up into my mom's eyes, it was all confirmed, something horrible had happened. I remember the look on her face like it was just moments ago because I felt like I could look into her soul and see the pain and fear. And this is not something you normally see in your parent; they are the strong ones. So, when her mouth finally opened to speak, I could feel every beat of my heart. I remember her exact words. She said, "I think your dad has been hit by a car." She couldn't say any more, and I didn't ask her to. I knew what needed to happen. In that moment, I changed. I went from being the person that my parents had so purposefully protected, to being the person that would be their support. It felt like my mind went into tunnel vision, the everything else in the world was insignificant in this moment. So, I helped her into my car like she was unable to herself, and we pulled down the driveway I had just been lying on moments before. I had no idea where I was going because I knew nothing about what had happened, but it did not occur to either of us because we were both so overwhelmed by the thought of what we were about to encounter. She finally produced the words out of her state of shock to tell me where we were headed, and I was horrified to learn that it was less than a mile from our house. Of all these events, this incredibly short drive is the only time I draw almost complete blank on because my mind felt like it was on another planet. As we rolled up to the intersection to take a right to our destination, we were stopped by a congestion of cars. The accident was about a quarter mile further down that road after we turned, but we couldn't reach it because of all the cars backed up. My mom let out a disturbed remark about how this backup must be caused from the accident, and my heart sank. I remember the sinking feeling of realizing that my dad was somewhere down that street, injured and alone, with what felt like half of our community sitting in their cars watching him bleed. But I remember feeling angry at these people. I did not think it was fair for them to be watching this, probably cursing the traffic because they were in a rush to get somewhere, and not realizing that my dad, the man I love and admire, was down there suffering. It felt like all these people had no heart for the situation. As anger took over me, I whipped my car over to the side of the road and pulled up onto the sidewalk because we needed to be there already. While this may have just been another moment for some of these people stuck in traffic, this was the worst day of our lives and our priority was to get to my dad's side. So, with no care in the world of where my car was parked, we both flew out of the car. I remember running down the sidewalk and not feeling my legs move. My mind was so occupied with the shock of what I was about to

see, that my body just had to figure out how to operate on its own. I finally make it to the spot, but I had come to a complete halt as I took in one last long breath to prepare myself. As I looked up, the first thing I saw was a typical silver minivan in the middle of the road, but then I noticed that the windshield was shattered in the shape of a person. And then, I saw the crowds of familiar faces all crowded around the scene, but not my dad. I couldn't find him. And as I began to investigate where he was, I was stopped from going around the van by the wide-open arms of a stranger. At this point, my mom had vanished somewhere in the scene, so I met by the body of a large woman and her words. As she physically held me back, she told me, "you can't see this, it is too much for you." That anger that had already vested in me earlier, broke into action and pushed her out of my way, ignoring any manners I had. I could not believe the audacity of this stranger to tell me I couldn't see my dad, but when I rounded the van, I realized she was trying to protect me. What my eyes saw next is an image that will never escape me. A man was laying there on the familiar warm pavement I had just felt under my body, but in a pool of blood. My eyes followed the blood as it drained down the storm gutter like rain. Then I blinked several times to make sure I was seeing this mangled bicycle right because it was destroyed from impact. As my eyes wandered back to the man, it was not my dad. There was no way it could be. No part of his face had the warm look that made my dad my dad. His limp body in no way resembled the strong man that I looked up to and considered my rock. And especially the wailing and moans coming from his lungs in no way sounded like the deep assuring voice that had talked me to sleep every night growing up. But as I studied his clothes, I knew it was him. His blue and black cycling uniform that had been worn so many times it looked loved, was now stained with red too. I approached him from his head, so my head hung over his. I looked him in the eyes and said, "Daddy I love you. We are here for you. You are going to be okay." And instead of being met by my dad, I was met with the response from a completely alternate thing that had taken over my dad. He did not recognize my mom and I, and when the paramedics rushed in to get him in a brace and slide him onto a backboard, he could not recognize they were trying to help him. He yelled and screamed and tried to pull himself off the board and I watched in horror, but then turned to see my mom. I realized that yes, this was my dad, a man I love and admire, but this was her husband. The man she chose to spend her life with, and there she was watching him be pushed into an ambulance strapped down against his will, screaming in pain, an unrecognizable person. With our eyes full of tears, our minds full of fear, and our hearts full of shock, we loaded the ambulance and headed onto our new reality.

These were the moments that redefined life for me. There is something about seeing one of the people you love the most on the face of death that really strikes you. After months of hospital time, multiple surgeries, rehab, therapy, and more, I am so unbelievably lucky to have my dad standing next to me today. My dad has always been someone I loved and appreciated, but now

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that we have gone through all this and had to picture life without him, I cherish life with him. These moments that were filled with fear, gave me a whole new outlook on life. I cherish the time we have. I cherish the people around me while I have them. And most of all, I cherish the time I have been given to live. I plan to make the most of my allotted time by taking in these moments and realizing their meaning to my life.