

Metamorphosis

It's funny how a day that changes the rest of your life can start out like any other. The day my brother died started out just like any other day in July...stiflingly hot and boring. At six years old, I still ran eagerly outside to continue my daily ritual of conducting a dinosaur dig in the front yard. My brother, at age 19, was already a workaholic by day and a party animal by night. He was rarely home during the daylight hours, but when he was, I would beg him to play with me outside. I loved it when he would grab me by the arms and spin me around faster and faster until I was so dizzy I begged him to stop. That is how I remember him.

This particular summer day I diligently continued my dinosaur dig, watching the cars pass occasionally. The sound of the neighbors mowing their lawns filled my ears as I tried to ignore the fact that the skies were beginning to gray. When it started sprinkling and I could ignore it no longer, I decided to put my dinosaur dig on hiatus for the rest of the day and go inside. Or rather, my mother decided it for me.

"It's time to get ready to go to church!" my mother called.

Grumbling the entire way, I allowed her to scrape the dirt off me and force me into the bathtub. Even more unwillingly, I donned my dress. Wednesdays were a source of great annoyance for me. My outdoor time was cut short, and I was forced to become a proper young lady and sit still for what seemed like hours at a time.

Fortunately, I was still at that tender young age at which it was deemed acceptable for me to draw and color in church. I remember thinking that my brother was usually home by this time. Not that he went to church with us, but he was usually pulling in

around the same time we pulled out. Occasionally, he would work late or stop by the store, causing him to arrive while we were all gone.

By the time we were ready to leave, the rain was pouring. Me, my other siblings, and Mom left the house in a dash, leaving Daddy behind. He worked the night shift, so he was sleeping. We made it to the church despite the onslaught of rain, and I wiggled my way through yet another sermon.

As we walked out to the parking lot, we saw that the rain had stopped. All the little old ladies pulled off their rain bonnets as they proceeded to chat in the damp July night. Impatiently waiting for my mother to finish her gossiping, I sat in the car, anxious to get home.

After an eternity of waiting, we finally pulled away from the church and drove home, the water from the downpour still splashing as the tires cut through it. On the way home, I watched the stars and dreamed of my dig site and the dinosaur I would find there one day.

We pulled into our driveway only to find two dozen or more cars packed into our driveway and anywhere else they could find to park. I indignantly noticed that some fool had parked in my dig space, but my childish curiosity soon took over anger.

By this time, my mother was frantic as she managed to find a place to park the car and jumped out, finding relatives, friends, and strangers all standing around waiting for our return. They had been trying to rouse Daddy from his slumber, but that was a lost cause as I knew from many summer nights of waking Daddy up for work with what I liked to call the “Wake Up Daddy Train”, complete with song and various music makers.

My mother quickly located the leader of this motley crew, my uncle Ernest, the alpha male, and gave him a pleading look.

“What’s wrong? What’s happened?” she asked as she grabbed him by the shoulders in a gesture that said she was willing to do whatever it took to get the information she wanted as quickly as possible.

“We’ve tried to wake Frankie,” he began, the pain obvious in his voice. “But all the doors are locked. There’s been an accident.”

At this point my mother burst into tears. As a six year old, I didn’t really understand much more than the fact that something had happened to my brother and Mommy and Daddy were sending me off to stay with Aunt Doris and Uncle Bobby for “a while”.

Some people insisted he was dead. Others said that he was alive, but just barely. He had ran off of the road in the rain and hit a brick house head on in his brand new, candy apple red Ford Mustang.

After my mom unlocked the door with her fumbling hands and woke up Daddy without my help, they set off for the hospital, leaving me with Aunt Doris and Uncle Bobby. Aunt Doris tried to reassure me, but at the time, I still didn’t really understand what had happened. All I knew was that my parents were leaving me.

The cars soon began to clear out of our driveway and off of our lawn. Not to mention the dig site. I climbed into the car with my aunt and uncle and we drove in silence to their house. I remember feeling hurt because Jonathan and the others were deemed grown up enough to accompany my parents, whereas I was not. But these thoughts soon left me as I fell asleep on the backseat.

The next morning I was frightened to awaken in a strange place. All too soon, I began to remember the events of the night before.

“What happened to David?” I cried, jumping off of the strange couch I had been laying on. Soon my Aunt was by my side holding some of my clothes that I didn’t remember her getting and telling me that we were going to see him that day.

I quickly dressed and we ate breakfast before departing for the hospital where I would learn of my brother’s fate.

Soon we arrived at the hospital and inquired as to my brother’s whereabouts. The rotund lady at the nurse’s station pointed us in the direction of the I-see-you.

“Why did the lady say that? Why did she say I-see-you?” I asked with the innocence that comes with being only six. Innocence that I would lose all too soon. Innocence replaced by a forced maturity and responsibility that most teenagers do not have.

“ICU means Intensive Care Unit,” my Uncle Bobby explained patiently, as we rounded the corner, following the dotted blue line on the ceiling that claimed it would lead us to ICU. I still didn’t understand why the lady said that, but I figured I would find out soon enough.

“Ah, here it is,” Uncle Bobby said in a hushed tone. “Room 1028.”

Also among the things I didn’t understand was why we were whispering. Uncle Bobby opened the door to Room 1028 to reveal a single bed. I tiptoed up to it to peer at its occupant.

It was David. His head covered in a white cloth cap, tubes coming from his nose and mouth, machines whirring in the background, his pale skin blending in perfectly with

the white hospital linens. He had never looked less like my brother than he did at that moment. I looked on in horror before bursting into tears. Loud, sobbing tears. The kind of tears that get young children kicked out of the ICU by angry nurses.

Still sobbing as we went down the corridor, I asked Aunt Doris where my Mommy and Daddy were. She said that they must have gone to get something to eat and that we should go back home.

“Home” was their home, not mine. My home was with my parents and my brothers. For a while I alternated between being with my parents and being with my Aunt and Uncle. A while after the I-see-you incident, my parents dared to take me back to see my brother. This time I was prepared for the lifeless form I saw. The shell of the brother I had once known. And I realized now, that I might never know again. The doctor came in to speak with my parents. He said that my brother would never get better and that no other hospital would ever take him because he was too bad off. My mother began to cry, and I wrapped myself around her legs in a gesture of comfort.

He would be a vegetable for the rest of his life. He was brain dead the doctors said. They told my parents to take him off of life support and let him go. I hugged my mother’s legs tighter to my body as if they were life itself.

“No,” she told them between sobs. “I won’t take him off life support.”

For three months he was in a coma. Three whole months, my mom staunchly held her ground in refusing to take him off life support.

But then a miracle occurred. Little by little, day by day, he was becoming more and more responsive. Some days he would blink, or his fingers would twitch, until one

day he opened up his eyes and looked around. After three months of being a vegetable my brother was awake. But his journey was nowhere near over.

I'll never forget his second first word. We were all gathered in his hospital room—the new one in the new hospital that they had transferred him to, once it became clear that he was going to come out of the coma. All six siblings in one room, parents too. And David opened his eyes and smiled and said “Chad.” We couldn't believe it. He had finally spoken. Chad, our older brother, must've been proud, to have his name be someone's second first word. After that there were many more second firsts. He learned to eat normal food again. He learned to sit up and stand and walk again. He learned everything over, just as if he were a newborn baby. But he would never be the same. The brother I knew was indeed dead.

He may look the same on the outside, but on the inside he has a completely different personality. I guess that's what happens when you suffer a traumatic brain injury. In essence, the person you used to be dies. He is also physically disabled and his speech and hearing is impaired. But none of those things matter. What really matters is that I lost my brother in a car accident. But somehow the shell that used to encase him is still here and someone else is in control.

But sometimes there are moments when I can see the Old David shining through even now, 10 years later. And when that happens, I smile and I remember how things used to be. Me digging up dinosaur bones and waiting for him to come home and pick me up and spin me around. Him holding me in his lap and letting me steer his first car around the front yard. Him telling me that he turned into a wolf-rat at night and laughing as I got scared and asked him what a wolf-rat was. Him replying that it was a rat the size

of a wolf. These are things that the New David doesn't even remember. But I know as I look out across the front yard to my dig site that they happened and that's what keeps me going.