

1. My Stroke

“That which does not kill us makes us stronger”ⁱ
—Friedrich Nietzsche

Traumaⁱⁱ

1. A deeply distressing or disturbing experience
2. Physical injury

March 15, 2015 (Journal entry)

It was Sunday, February 22, 2015. I had just been on vacation from work for a week, returning from a wonderful hockey road trip with my middle son James. We drove together to Allentown Pennsylvania to see the Phantoms (the Philadelphia Flyers farm team), then it was on to Pittsburgh to see the Penguins play. Two more pins in our map in our family quest to visit every American, and National Hockey League arena across the United States and Canada. We returned from the trip on Friday and had a great weekend with the rest of my family. I went to bed that Sunday night like any other night.

Except that when I woke up in the wee hours of Monday morning, February 23, there were six strange men in my bedroom. I was startled to look up and see one of these men next to me on my side of the bed. He had a shaved head and goatee. My heart was thumping ... I saw red. My initial thought was ATTACK, and in a split-second, I had the vivid image of charging him, head-butting him and slamming him into the closet door, so I could then attempt to fight off the other assailants in my bedroom.

That’s when I felt my wife’s hand on my shoulder.

“Steve, it’s okay, they are police officers, they’re here to help you,” she said.

“What?” I said confused.

“You’ve had a seizure, I couldn’t wake you for 15 minutes, so I called 9-1-1,” she said with a voice holding back tears.

“What, what the *fuck*? What are you talking about?” I said with fear.

“They’re here to take you to the hospital,” she said.

“Fuck that, what are you talking about? I don’t know them,” I said still shaking with fear and the urge to fight.

“They’re police officers,” she said again.

“I don’t fucking know them, I’m not going fucking anywhere, what the hell are you talking about?” I said heart pounding.

See, the problem with this situation was that my adrenaline was pumping on overdrive. We are all built with a natural fight or flight response. The one thing that I learned about myself a long time ago is that my instincts are never to run. I have always told my kids to wake me up from a distance with a stick, for fear that I would get startled and accidentally hurt one of them.

Before my wife Karen and I were married, I was sleeping over at her parent’s house on a cot next to her bed. The cot was lower than the bed with about a foot of distance separating them. Karen had rolled over and apparently her hand came down off the bed and landed on me. I woke up with my fist clenched, retracting toward my chin. I looked over to see her hand hanging against the side of the bed. I thought to myself, “Okay, you’re about to throw a punch, or you just threw a punch?” I was on pins and needles hoping I didn’t just accidentally punch my girlfriend. You know when a little kid falls, and then there is that silence before a delayed cry. This is exactly what happened. I waited, mortified and then, sure enough, Karen slowly let out a wail, “...Aaagggggghhhhhh.”

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry,” I said. “I think I just punched you.” Not exactly words any true man ever wants to have to utter to his girlfriend or wife.

This fighter instinct of mine has made for some funny/mortifying family stories and close calls, but thank God, Dad has never accidentally attacked anyone with the exception of that one incident. There were two times that I did come close to hurting one of my children and both incidents involved my oldest son Brian.

The first “Bear Scream” incident (as we’ve come to call them) occurred when my wife and I were sharing a room with Brian during the renovation of my in-law’s house. We had two beds squeezed into one room. Our king-sized bed was in the corner of the room against two walls. Karen was nine months pregnant with our son James at the time. She slept on the outside, so she could easily get in and out of bed. Brian was seven and his bed was sideways against ours. He had apparently rolled over in the night and knocked into some sort of toy that made a noise which startled me. Both Brian and I awoke when my feet hit the floor. Standing above him, I let out an “ATTACK” death scream ... “Rrrrooooooaaaaaggghhh!”

Now if there actually was an intruder in the house, flexing my arms like The Incredible Hulk and screaming like a bear probably wouldn’t have been my first plan of attack, but it just happened that way. I quickly tried to surmise what had happened and didn’t know how, from a lying position, I somehow leaped sideways from my side of the bed, over my pregnant wife and landed on the ground, “ready to kill.” I looked down at my son who was suddenly awakened by his father hovering over him screaming like a lunatic. Luckily, it didn’t seem to faze him one bit. He just sort of laughed and with a smile said, “What are you doing Dad?”

I didn’t get the answer as to how I got out of bed that night, while sleeping, until about five years later when the second “Bear Scream” incident occurred. This time, Brian was quietly tiptoeing into our bedroom to tell his mother that he needed his inhaler. He said that, from a lying position, I suddenly sprung up to my feet and started charging across our bed toward him. I woke up at the corner of the foot of my wife’s side of the bed, screaming once again like a bear, about to charge off the bed and attack the “intruder” in my room. Fortunately, the sound of my son’s voice woke me up. I opened my eyes to see him cringing against my dresser, his legs shaking, as he shouted, “Dad, it’s me Brian, it’s me!” My heart rate was jacked. My wife was angry, this time my son was old enough to be scared, and I was petrified. Neither of them seemed to have any sympathy for me though, because apparently, *I was the problem*. I couldn’t go to sleep for about an hour or two after that, until finally, I was able to calm myself down. You see, I’m never the “tough guy” or “attacker” in my head. Instead, I’m the guy who’s about to be killed and I am deathly afraid. My instincts tell me that I’m in a fight-to-the-death scenario, and I’m not letting anyone hurt me or my family.

My wife was very aware of this history the night of my stroke, as she inserted herself between me and the police. Karen said that she asked me if I knew who she was, knowing that if I didn’t, she needed to move away from me. When I agitatedly responded by saying, “Of course I do ... you’re my wife,” she knew I was awake and wouldn’t hurt her, but was very afraid of what I might try to do to these “strangers.” I remember that I was terrified and thought I needed to attack right away, but what I found out later was that when I first came to, I actually frantically slid away from the man and toward my wife’s side of the bed. The cop with the goatee then backed away from the bed, where he had been watching over me, and ended up back against the closet door. I only remember seeing him at the closet and thinking “Attack.” I was unaware that he had actually backed away from me, and that he had been watching over me for around five minutes before that to make sure I didn’t fall out of bed as Karen gathered my belongings for the hospital. My wife said my eyes darted around like crazy as I was trying to comprehend what was happening around me. I guess this is when my brain kicked in with the thought of head-butting the man and attacking the rest of them. I thank God that, even in my confused and fearful state, the word “Police Officers” registered in my

damaged brain. I think now to the movie *Good Will Hunting*, when, at Will's sentencing, the Judge says, "You hit a cop, you're going in." ⁱⁱⁱ

Everyone has their own opinion, but to me the cops are the good guys. You don't hit a cop ... period! Another thing you don't want to do is attempt to head-butt a cop and slam him into the wall when you have internal bleeding in your brain. In my defense, I didn't know my brain was bleeding at the time, but luckily my common sense rule of "You don't hit a cop" was enough to protect me from worsening my condition by slamming my skull into another man's face.

What I came to find out later was that I had a stroke while I was sleeping and that the right side of my brain had a bleed which caused me to have a Grand Mal Seizure. The adrenaline coursing through my body and the aftereffects or "Postictal Confusion" of the seizure would not allow me to feel the pain in my head. In fact, at this point, I also didn't realize that I had bitten into my tongue as it rolled back in my throat while I writhed unresponsively. My wife said I was shaking the whole bed with my hands clenched up near my face in tight fists. She said she shook me and tried to hold me to wake me up, but she couldn't move me. She was concerned I was going to choke as blood dripped down my face from my tongue.

Thank God that, in addition to our kids, we live with my wife's parents. My wife said she was scared to leave me, but didn't know what to do, unable to move me, so she ran to her parents' room in a panic and asked them to call 9-1-1. She then ran back to stand next to me, afraid that I would fall out of the bed. I laid there doing this strange breathing where I was blowing air out of my mouth as my lips shook. Karen said I did this over and over again, gurgling for several minutes, then just laid very still. She was afraid that at any moment I would simply stop breathing.

The cops arrived on the scene very quickly. I remained unconscious for around 10 more minutes as they all waited for the paramedics to arrive. Then, I started to finally come to. My wife climbed back into bed beside me and tried to comfort me, doing her best to put herself between me and the police officers.

"Steve, it's okay, they're police officers ... they're here to help you," she reassured.

I can only imagine the fear that must have been going through my poor wife's head at the time. She saved my life, and to thank her, I repeatedly told her that "this is bullshit" and made it clear that I would never forgive her for this. Don't worry, I have apologized to her many times since and thanked her for saving me. She has been my rock through all of this and words cannot describe how much I owe her.

"I will never forgive you for this," I snapped at my wife as I reluctantly let an EMT take my blood pressure. Karen would later tell me that I looked at the blood pressure cuff as if it was some foreign object which I had never seen before. I had my whole body, except for my arm, leaning away from the EMT. I was very leery that the man was somehow trying to hurt or trick me. I am only 35-years-old. I was extremely afraid and there were these strange men in my room who I wasn't allowed to hit. I knew I didn't like it, but what I couldn't comprehend at the time was the "You had a seizure" part. A seizure? Why the hell would I have a seizure? I don't have seizures.

"Sir, you have to go to the hospital," the EMT delicately said to me.

"Fuck that, I'm not going fucking anywhere with anyone. I don't know you! I have to go to work," I said, stubborn as an ox, still not understanding how serious my situation was. My wife, once again, was able to calm me down enough to convince me to allow her to help me get dressed and take me outside to go to the hospital.

Apparently, when I came to, the police asked my wife if I was always like this? They also questioned her about any possible drug use. Standard questions, I'm sure, but with my "pleasant" disposition and paranoid ranting, the idea of possible cocaine or Angel Dust (PCP) use was definitely a concern that the police had in trying to establish a threat assessment.

My wife was quick to defend me and assured the police, “No this is definitely not my husband, he never acts this way.” I have come to learn that my actions at that time were pretty common for a person who has experienced a Grand Mal Seizure. Regardless, I still feel bad about the way I acted.

My father-in-law and mother-in-law, among many others, have been such a blessing through this entire ordeal. I believe it was actually my mother-in-law, Josephine, who called 9-1-1. My father-in-law, Lou, stayed with me to help calm me down.

“It’s okay, you know me,” he kept saying.

Days after the events of that night, my father-in-law made a point to tell me that, even in this scared and damaged state, my sole thought was for my children. I would not leave the house because of my boys. My two youngest share a room attached to my bedroom. I remember having a foggy recollection of seeing my youngest son Brody sitting up awake in his toddler bed through all of my ranting and mayhem. Something about seeing this little two-year-old huddled in the corner of his toddler bed confused, scared the living hell out of me.

My father-in-law would later tell me that, in that moment, I said to him, “I need you to watch my boys, promise me to stay with them and make sure they’re okay.” I’m very grateful, not only that he was there at the time, but also that he made a point of letting me know how impressed he was by the fact that my basic instinct was concern for my family and not for myself. I strongly believe that our true selves are revealed in tough times. I’m not proud of many of my actions in the wake of my stroke, but I do find solace in the fact that, in those initial moments of delirious confusion, my thoughts were of protecting others and not of myself.

I found out later that the EMT and police were relieved that I could actually walk. My wife said they were concerned that the sharp turn we have on our staircase would have made bringing a stretcher to the second floor near to impossible. The alternative would’ve been to strap me to a board and carry me down the stairs and around the turn. Of course, a 6’4” fat man with his 290 lbs. of “dead” weight secured to a board, did not present an ideal carrying situation.

As I got myself dressed, I apparently looked in the mirror at the blood on my face and protested that “I didn’t bite my tongue, my lip is just chapped and must have cracked.” I still wasn’t feeling anything at the time. It wasn’t until later that I could feel the chunks of my tongue missing from where my teeth bit down. We walked out of the front door, my wife leading me by the arm. I was surprised to see the street full of police cars and an ambulance with lights swirling.

“What the fuck is this? I’m not fucking getting in that,” I apparently said.

What did I think, the five cops and EMT walked to my house? See, the problem was that because of the stroke and seizure, my brain was unable to connect logical dots. So I was honestly shocked to see all of this commotion in the street and I got very angry again. The cops and EMT tactfully kept their distance, while allowing my wife to attempt to reason with me. My wife, the clever woman that she is, once again found a way to get through my stupidity and spin the situation into one that I would agree to.

“Steve, if I drive you to the hospital then they’re going to make you wait forever. If you go in the ambulance, they’ll see you right away and then you get to go home quicker,” she said, brilliantly knowing how to navigate what she knew I would want to hear.

“This is fucking bullshit, and I will never forgive you for this Karen,” I said, finally giving in while climbing into the ambulance.

After more drama with me initially refusing to lay down on the stretcher in the ambulance, then accusing the EMT of driving in the wrong direction and not really taking me to the hospital, I eventually was taken to the Emergency Room, where I caused a lot more havoc and continued to rant and carry on about “how ridiculous” this was and that I didn’t need to be in the hospital. I actually was convincing enough that I caused the hospital staff to underestimate how severe my condition was at the time.

My wife said that she kept telling anyone who would listen that “This isn’t like him, he’s not acting like himself, something’s wrong!” She told me later that even though I knew who she was, she couldn’t say for sure whether I was capable of pushing her in front of a moving car.

“You were just really mean,” she said.

I had this menacing scowl on my face and my eyes seemed to be full of rage and hate. She said this was one of the hardest things to deal with and it caused her to cry a lot in the days following. To be right in front of the person you love and to have them look at you with an angry detachment and hatred must have been horrible. She said there were times when she would get glimpses of the “real” me, my eyes would soften, then I would look at her with a sad confusion, trying to understand what was going on.

“My chest feels really tight. My head really hurts a lot,” I said.

Karen got the doctors right away and said, “What’s going on, he says his head is throbbing really bad?”

The doctor said they were taking me in for a CAT Scan to get a better look. Karen walked with me as I was transported to the exam, then went outside to call my parents to tell them that they should come to the hospital.

After this, she then called her parents to check on our kids.

When she came back into the ER, a doctor stopped mid-sentence with another patient and nervously said, “Mrs. Wolf, your husband is being taken to the Neuro ICU, he has a bleed in his brain.”

Karen said she broke down hysterically upset. She said she didn’t actually cry because she was in such shock, but she covered her face and literally fell to the floor as everyone looked at her. The doctor just stood there not knowing what to say, feeling horrible that my wife was so upset.

I was in the Neuro Intensive Care Unit, and I don’t have any real memories until Wednesday or Thursday of that week. Which is probably for the best, because the stories that I have been told about my antics through this ordeal, leave me both feeling extremely embarrassed and wanting to uncomfortably laugh at the same time. I was the only patient there who was not on a ventilator and because I was so disoriented, I acted like a sociopath with no feelings for anyone else, or grasp of what appropriate social behavior was. I was constantly telling Karen things like, “They’re trying to starve me” and “This is fucking bullshit. I’m going to fucking leave, they can’t keep me here. I’m not a fucking prisoner!”

My wife was in charge of signing all of the forms on my behalf. The doctors told her that I may need blood transfusions and that they were calling in a neurosurgeon because I may need immediate brain surgery. After my initial CAT Scan, they took me for a second one, just 20 minutes later.

My parents arrived and Karen told them what was going on. My mother began crying, but once again, Karen said she was so overwhelmed that she couldn’t even cry. It’s almost as if her defenses made her numb to protect her from the trauma of the news. The two of them just hugged, attempting to comfort one another as they waited for the results of the second CAT Scan. Luckily, it revealed the bleed in my head had clotted on its own, and that I wouldn’t need emergency brain surgery. So the doctors now knew what caused my seizure, but didn’t have the faintest clue about what caused me to have a bleed. I didn’t fit any category of typical stroke victims, and all of the drug tests came back negative.

My wife continued to not only act as my legal guardian, signing her approvals, but also was forced to continue to act as my defense attorney, telling all who would listen that this “cursing lunatic” is not her husband.

“He doesn’t normally act like this,” she pleaded.

The Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde routine continued and I would slip back and forth from confused and in pain, to angry, agitated and mean.

At one point, I was waiting for a transport to one of the tests. Annoyed that it was taking so long, I got out of bed and began pacing obnoxiously back and forth in front of the nurses' station, whistling. The man right next to me was fighting for his life on a ventilator with his wife sobbing at his bedside. I don't remember any of this, but at the time, I was completely oblivious to it all. When a wheelchair finally arrived to take me for one of the tests, I sat down in it and started pushing myself by shuffling my feet along the floor, until an orderly put a stop to it. Where I thought I was escaping to, God only knows?

I was in the Neuro Intensive Care Unit for four days, during which time I was able to determine that they're apparently not too fond of patients who unhook their own IV and try to randomly go for walks. Memories are very strange when you have a brain injury. I remember a small waiting room outside of the Neuro ICU with a set of brown wooden stairs with an attached handrail. I remember looking at this small set of steps each time I went on one of my "unauthorized" little strolls into the hallway, wondering what the hell they were for. My wife would later tell me that, in order to be cleared for release, I had to prove I could walk up and back down these stairs. When I eventually did, the nurse apparently asked me how I felt.

"Do you feel any dizziness," she asked. To which I responded with no hesitation, "No not at all, I feel great. Piece of cake!"

My wife told me that the nurse said, "Excellent, okay, take care," then marked something on her clip board and walked away.

As soon as she was out of earshot, I apparently turned to my wife and said, "Holy shit! I'm really fucking dizzy."

It seems I clearly faked the test and simply lied just to get the "Green Light" clearance to get closer to being released. Karen was less than pleased with me. The weirdest part for me to wrap my head around, is I remember these stairs distinctly, but have zero memory of this event taking place.

I also don't recall pointing at a doctor who was only a couple feet away, and for no apparent reason, loudly announcing, "I don't like that guy!"

From what I was told, I was acting like a complete caveman. My wife said my eyes seemed to undress any female that I looked at, and size up any male that I encountered.

When I was being prepped for my angiogram, they needed to shave my upper thigh, near my groin, where they were going to insert the scope leading up to my brain. The women tasked with this were apparently in their 20s and quite attractive. I have no recollection of this, but was later told by one of the doctors that I was "highly inappropriate." I think it is probably best that I don't know what I said to these young ladies.

My brother Mike was visiting with me on one of those first few days, so my wife took the opportunity to briefly go home to shower. Just as I have been writing for therapy, Karen wrote a letter to me, describing what she was feeling at the time. Karen wrote:

I love you with all of my heart. I will never forget that moment I thought I was going to lose you to death. When I returned home the next day from the hospital, in the middle of the night I checked on our kids while they were sleeping, gave them kisses and told them they were from mommy and daddy. I then walked quietly into the bathroom (never letting one tear fall from my face). I hadn't cried at all yet. Through everything that day, I never cried. I told you your mom and I hugged and cried, but I didn't cry for fear that I wouldn't be able to stop. Maybe it was shock or adrenaline. In the bathroom, I got down on my knees and prayed so hard for God to help us and not have us lose you. I begged him through my tears to not take away my husband. To not take my kids' father away. I just remember saying those words over and over again, through the tears that were pouring down my face. I could

barely breathe. I was on my knees for about an hour pleading to God. I begged him to please help us ...

While she was at the house, Karen received a phone call from Mike saying: “Steve wants you to bring his corporate AMEX card with you, when you come back to the hospital.”

“What?” My wife was very concerned.

Here I am with a bleed in my brain, so serious a neurosurgeon almost had to open up my skull to do emergency surgery, and now I’m asking for my corporate credit card? She was obviously nervous about why I would need this, but was afraid of what kind of tantrum I would throw if she didn’t, so she reluctantly brought it for me. Like most of the rest, I have no recollection of any of this. I apparently had my work cellphone with me and was able to successfully purchase a pair of Maroon Five concert tickets for one of my new customers. I found out after the fact, that I somehow arranged for one of my colleagues to deliver these to my customer for me, and they enjoyed the show. Mission accomplished! The brain is a very strange thing. Although I don’t remember, it seems I was still taking care of business from my hospital bed. Karen took back my credit card and my work phone. She also had apparently reached out to my boss and my colleagues to let them know what had happened to me, and that I would obviously not be going back to work any time soon.

It wasn’t until late Thursday night, when I was released from intensive care into a general hospital room, that I decided it would be okay to remove my IV from my arm. I was surprised by the amount of blood that squirted out when I did this, and was a little frustrated that I got a bunch of it on some pages of my Bobby Orr book, which I was attempting to read at the time. Luckily everything worked out just fine. I’m not sure who was more annoyed the next morning—my wife or the nurse—when I was questioned about what happened to my IV. Not much for lying (at least when I’m lucid that is), I told them the truth, but I guess in retrospect I should have maybe been less forthcoming.

My roommate was an extremely interesting character. He appeared to be in his late 70s. He was a thin man with a scraggly white beard. He had wounds on the back of his wrists which had scabbed over. He very well may have been homeless, because he made reference to being outside in the cold, but I don’t know this for sure. He did tell me that he didn’t have any family. The nursing staff and hospital employees were nice enough to him, but you could definitely tell that they thought he was a bit of a nuisance. At first glance, I could understand why. He did appear to be a bit sketchy or a little crazy, because he was constantly bringing up random conversations or making philosophical references, or mentioning the historical origins and meanings of things. He would also occasionally be seemingly unaware of his hospital gown being open behind him. Of course, he was nude underneath, so his backside was exposed for all to see. His bladder control problem caused him to have several accidents as well, which was not an ideal situation for anyone. I’m not sure of the actual reason for his hospitalization, but as a side note, he did tell me that he suffered from Emetophobia which is “a phobia that causes overwhelming, intense anxiety pertaining to vomiting.” This specific phobia can also include subcategories of what causes the anxiety, including a fear of vomiting in public, a fear of seeing vomit, a fear of watching the action of vomiting or fear of being nauseated.”

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His phobia fell into the last category. He told me how he first acquired this fear when he was a child and how he had been vomited upon. I’m sure he would have lost a lot of people in a conversation right there, but if you actually listened to what he was saying, you could tell that he was logical, genuine and intelligent.

I wouldn’t have been surprised at all to learn that he was a former college professor or teacher. When I asked him what he had done in his life for work, if he had ever had a profession, it seemed clear he was more of a drifter than anything else. He named different manual labor jobs which he

had done throughout his life, but they all just seemed to be stops along the way. It could be that he has, or had, a drug or alcohol problem or perhaps some sort of mental ailment.

While I saw no clear indications of this, the fact remains that he didn't seem to have a stable life. He didn't have any friends or family or a steady job and he may have been homeless.

Socrates also did not have a profession and lived through the help of others. Jesus may have been a builder or "carpenter," but at around the age of 30, I do believe he too was assisted by those Disciples that he philosophized with and taught. Could it be that in today's society, Jesus would have just been another "crazy man" hospitalized, his teachings and philosophies simply ignored? Not a new concept, but still thought-provoking. The man did have a beard and wounds on his wrists, after all! I say this of course, tongue in cheek, but it does make me think about the Bible story of the Sheep and the Goats, or a time of "Final Judgement."

**"Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty or a stranger
or naked or sick or in prison, and didn't help you?**

**Then, He will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to
one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' These will go away into eternal
punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'^v**

I don't know if I believe in a day of reckoning. It would really suck to find yourself at the "Gates of Heaven" and realize then that you should have treated people better than you did in your life. That isn't how I live my life though. To me, a belief in God or a code of conduct "just in case," as a safety net for the soul, is a pretty weak mindset. As far as I'm concerned, whether you believe in God or not is irrelevant. I was raised to believe in treating others well simply because it is the right thing to do.

My brother Joe would come and visit with me and bring me food every night while I was in the hospital. I knew he was on the way, and either he called me or I called him, I can't recall which. The important thing is that I had asked my roommate and new acquaintance if he was hungry and if he would like some food. He thanked me and told me the type of sandwich and drink that he wanted and I relayed this info to my brother.

In hindsight, my wife said "I'm not sure if you should have brought him food, what if he was on dietary restrictions?" While this was a valid point, that didn't even occur to me, I'm still glad I asked my brother to bring him food. I'm also very glad that I have the type of brother that did not hesitate, or think it strange in the slightest, when I asked him if he could buy food for me and for some "stranger" that I just met.

While we waited for Joe to arrive, my new friend and I somehow found ourselves in a conversation about mongooses and cobras and Rudyard Kipling's tale of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*. We spoke of predators and protectors. At the time, none of this resonated with me as having any great significance. It was just friendly banter.

**"He was afraid for a minute; but it is impossible for a mongoose to stay frightened for any
length of time, and though Rikki-Tikki had never met a live cobra before, his mother had
fed him on dead ones, and he knew that all a grown mongoose's business in life was to fight
and eat snakes.**

**Nag knew that too, and at the bottom of his cold heart
he was afraid."^{vi}**

—Rudyard Kipling

My brother arrived with the food and this nice man pulled up a chair beside him at the foot of my hospital bed and the three of us visited and “broke bread” together. While we ate, we discussed all kinds of things. I was still not 100 percent lucid due to the injury in my head and pain meds, so I have trouble remembering all of the specific details. Among the notable moments was the man sharing that he was a virgin. He didn’t come right out and say this, instead, he said that he didn’t believe in “premarital affairs of the flesh,” and that he had never been married. We also discussed the Mayan calendar coming to an end. The man shared that, at the time in 2012, when the world did not in fact end, he was actually disappointed. A pretty sad statement of how lonely and painful life must have seemed to him. He went on to say that he wonders whether all of his current health issues are “God’s way of punishing him for the thoughts he had at the time.”

I don’t recall what I said to this, but looking back at it now, I find myself contemplating the concept and the distinction between thoughts and actions. I don’t feel that Karma, or some sort of judgment from a higher being, would ever punish or reward us for our thoughts. I choose to believe instead, that it is our actions that make us “good” or “evil” in any given moment. At the end of the day, I feel the goal is to not act on bad thoughts, and have the scale tilt more toward good than leaning toward evil.

“What if evil doesn't really exist? What if evil is something dreamed up by man, and there is nothing to struggle against except our own limitations? The constant battle between our will, our desires and our choices?”^{vii}

—Libba Bray

“A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles in this manner: Inside of me there are two dogs. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time. When asked which dog wins, he reflected for a moment and replied, The one I feed the most.”^{viii}

—George Bernard Shaw

Later on the following day, I was finally allowed to leave the hospital. When I think back on this brief time that I spent with this man, I’m filled with sadness, hope and gratitude. Sadness for the despair and loneliness in his life. Hope that he finds peace, and that my brother and I sharing time with him provided him some much needed friendship. Gratitude that I was given this opportunity to gain some perspective at this troubling point in my life. To see how lucky I truly am, and how there are so many others far less fortunate. I don’t know if there is a God. I do strongly feel that we are not alone in the universe. I feel there is some sort of spiritual connection and maybe this is simply just the transfer of energy. Regardless, whether using a scientific approach, or religious or a combination of the two, I still feel it is a man’s actions that define him.

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.”^{ix}

—Galileo Galilei

The following chart lists some of the many names humans have for “God.”^x

God	Yeshua	Jehovah	Messiah	Yahweh
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Ehyeh	Elohim	Adonai	Ilah	El-Shaddai
Adonai	Abba	Father	Sh`angdi	Nkosi
Olodumare	Jah	Allah	Buddha	Khoda
Urdu	Parvardigar	Tasawwuf	Hu	Almighty
All-Possessing	All-Powerful	Wise	Incomparable	Gracious
Helper	All-Glorious	Omniscient	Akai Purakh	Ik Onkar
Nirankar	Satnam	Waheguru	Bhagavan	Brahman
Ishvara	Brahma	Vishnu	Shakti	Shiva
Yazad	Harvesp-tawan	Harvesp-Tavaan	Harvesp-agah	Harvesp-Aagaah
Harvesp-khoda	Harvesp-Khudaa	Abadeh	Abi-anjam	Abee-Anjaam
Bun-e-stiha	Bune-Steeh	Frakhtan-taih	Fraakhtan-Teh	Jamaga
Prajatarah	Parajtarah	Tum-afik	Tum-Afeek	Abaravand
Abarvand	Paravandeh	Parvandaah	An-ayafeh	An-Aiyaaafah
Hama-Ayafeh	Ham-Aiyaaafah	Adro	Aadaro	Gira
Geeraa	A-ehem	A-Chem	Chamana	Chamanaa
Safana	Safanaa	Afza	Afjaa	Nasha
Naashaa	Parwara	Parvaraa	Ianaha	Eeyaanah
Ain-aenah	Aaen-Aaenah	An-aenah	An-Aaenah	Kharoshid-tum
Khrosheed-Tum	Mino-tum	Meeno-Tum	Vasna	Vaasnaa
Harvastum	Hu-sepas	Hu-Sepaas	Har-Hamid	Har-Hameed
Har-naik-farah	Har-Nek-Fareh	Baish-tarana	Besh-Tarnaa	Taronish
Taroneesh	Anah-aoshaka	An-Aoshak	Farasaka	Farsak
Pajohdehad	Pajoh-Dahad	Khwafar	Khvaafar	Avakhshiaea
Afakhsheea aaaa	Abaraja	Abarjaa	A-satoha	A-Satoh

Rakhoha	Rakhoh	Varun	Varoon	A-farefah
A-Farefah	Be-fareftah	Be-Farefah	A-dui	A-Duee
Kam-rad	Kaame-Rad	Farman-kam	Farmaan-Kaam	Aekh Tan
Aokh-Tan	A-faremosh	A-Faremosh	Hamarna	Hamaarna a
Sanaea	Sanaeaa	A-tars	A-Tars	A-bish
A-Beesh	A-frajdum	Afraajdum	Ham-chun	Ham-Chun
Mino-satihgar	Meeno-Steeh-Gar	A-minogar	A-Meenogar	Mino-nahab
Meeno-Nahab	Adar-bad-gar	Aadar-Baad-Gar	Adar-nam-gar	Aadar-Nam-Gar
Bad-adar-gar	Baad-Aadar-Gar	Bad-nam-gar	Baad-Nam-Gar	Bad-gail-gar
Baad-Gel-Gar	Bad-gred-tum	Baad-Gerd-Tum	Adar-kibritatum	Aadar-Keebreet-Tum
Bad-gar-jae	Baad-Garjuae	Ab-tum	Aab-Tum	Gail-adar-gar
Gel-Aadar-Gar	Gail-vad-gar	Gel-Vaad-Gar	Gail-nam-gar	Gel-Nam-Gar
Gar-gar	Gar-Gar	Garo-gar	Gar-O-Gar	Gar-Aa-gar
Gar-a-gar	Gar-a-gar-gar	Gar-Aa-Gar-Gar	A-gar-agar	A-Gar-Aa-Gar
A-gar-a-gar-gar	A-Gar-Aa-Gar-Gar	A-guman	A-Gumann	A-jaman
A-Jamaan	A-Khuan	A-Khuaan	Amast	Aamasht
Fashutana	Fashutanaa	Padmani	Padmaanee	Firozgar
Feerozgar	Khudawand	Khudaaavand	Ahuramazd	Ahur-Mazd
Abarin-kuhan-tawan	Abreen-Kohun-Tavaan	Abarin-nao-tawan	Abreen-No-Tavaan	Vaspan
Vaspaan	Vaaspar	Vaspaar	Khawar	Khaavar
Ahu	Avakshidar	Avakhseedaar	Dadar	Daadaar

Raiyomand	Rayomand	Khorehmand	Khorehomand	Davar
Daavar	Kerfaigar	Kerfegar	Bokhtar	Bokhtaar
Farsho-gar	Frash-Gar	The Light	The Way	Master Creator

I included this list in an attempt to symbolize how many possible or varying beliefs people can have. I don't feel it matters what name you choose to call "God," or how each person defines what "God" is/isn't, or what the concept of "God" means to them. I think that Swami Vivekananda, a man who helped introduce the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world, was right when he said: "You cannot believe in God until you believe in yourself."^{xi} At the end of the day, I feel our lives can be fuller and more enriched if we try our best to give more than we receive. In order to accomplish this, we must first be able to believe in ourselves.

Sometimes in order to believe in ourselves, we must be tested. Whether we pass these life tests or fail is completely up to us. We can get help, but we must first be strong enough to ask for it. For many people, this is where God enters the mix. That entire first week, the headaches were terrible and the dizziness was frequent, but my family was there with me every step of the way. The first few days, my wife was by my side for basically every moment. Apparently, I didn't want to sleep without holding her hand. Thankfully, my parents, Joe and Joan, and both of my older brothers, Joe and Mike, were also basically camped out at the hospital in shifts to try to support us through the situation. My father-in-law, Lou, came to visit me with my oldest son, Brian, which meant so much to me. My brother-in-law, Paul, and my old work friend Everett came to visit me. I had countless text messages, e-mails, Facebook messages, phone calls, get-well cards, fruit baskets and gift cards for restaurants, so Karen wouldn't have to cook. I will be forever grateful for all of this. It has truly warmed my heart knowing that I have so many people in my life who care about me and wished me well.

I think about my roommate as a polar opposite. He had no one to support him through his troubles. At the time, I thought about funerals and how I wondered if the departed can see all of their grieving loved ones who came to show their respects. I'm obviously glad that I don't know the answer to that question yet. Although, I felt, in a weird way, that I got to experience what this would be like. I was given a true gift to see, through my near-death experience, how many peoples' lives I have touched and how many people genuinely care about me. My roommate was alone in his sickness, and unfortunately, it appears that he will be alone at the time of his death.

When I finally got home from the hospital, I looked over my body to find bruises and needle marks and an incision in my upper thigh and groin area from the scope of the angiogram. I'm glad to be home. It's hard to get rest in a hospital with all of the poking and prodding, IV drips, CAT Scans, MRI's, the constant drawing of blood, the Tetanus shot and shots in my stomach (whatever the hell they were for), etc.

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March 17, 2015

Top of the mornin' to ya! I have gotten to a point where the headaches have lessened tremendously. The dizziness is rare and extremely mild. I thank God I never lost any speech or muscle control. I'm having difficulty with the left side of my lower body from my hip down to my toes. I have a tremendous amount of pins and needles and discomfort in my left leg and foot. For the first week out of the hospital, I walked with a cane because I was uneasy on my feet, but I am walking completely fine under my own strength now.

**“Every obstacle presents an opportunity to
improve our condition.”^{xii}**

—Unknown

**“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters
compared to what lies within us.”^{xiii}**

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

I feel truly blessed. I don't sit and fret and say: “Oh God, why did this happen to me?” Instead, I find myself asking God “Why did this happen to me?” I told my friend Tim from work that I started going to Church again. Tim wrote to me that “Miracles happen in all forms.” He then shared that he had become much closer to God after he was sick as well.

I'm not sitting here attempting to preach, although I feel blessed to be alive. I was told that I had around 40 CC's of blood loose in my brain from the hemorrhage. The doctor said this was equal to around an ounce to an ounce-and-a-half of blood. “This may not seem like a lot,” he said, but to provide some perspective, he explained that it was lucky that my brain started to clot, because at 90 CC's, I would have been brain dead. I feel that I have been given the chance to see how precious and impermanent life can be. I have every intention of doing everything I can to fight to get better and become a better man because of this situation.

I believe, and the doctors mostly believe, that the situation with my left leg, foot and hip are more the result of a slipped disc and pinched nerves in my lower back and are physical issues, rather than neurological issues. I still need to go for an MRI of my spine and an EMG (which is some sort of testing supposedly similar to acupuncture, where they put a bunch of needles in my leg) to confirm that this is not due to my stroke. The right side of the brain can affect the functioning of the left side of the body as well, apparently. I was having trouble with my back before the stroke. It had been acting up from shoveling snow. I think being unconscious on stretchers, gurneys and a hospital bed for a week, just pushed my hip and lower back too far.

I have been getting multiple adjustments each week from a chiropractor, and will begin physical therapy twice a week starting next week. I try not to just lie in bed all day, which is horrible for my back, but I also have to rest my brain so it can heal, so I am caught in a bit of a frustrating cycle.

I have the sleep patterns of a newborn and get tired very easily. I am trying to rest my brain so it can heal, but at the same time, I feel it is crucially important to keep my brain active. I would like to get to the point where I can watch movies or the hours of DVR'd shows which are piling up, but so far, I have found that TV cannot hold my attention. I either fall asleep or get restless, almost like “What's the point?” I have been trying to read as much as possible and have been keeping myself busy with things like Facebook and planning future vacation trips to hockey arenas that me and my boys would love to go to across the U.S. and Canada. I find this therapeutic. It keeps my brain active, while at the same time, it acts as a form of future goal-setting.

I have always believed the best way to succeed or accomplish anything is to start by setting short-term and long-term goals. This family vacation and hockey trip planning represent hope in a future that I want to work towards each day.

**“Failure is not a single cataclysmic event. You don't fail overnight. Instead, failure is a few
errors in judgment,
repeated every day.”^{xiv}**

—Jim Rohn

**“Success is the sum of small efforts
- repeated day in and day out.”^{xv}
—Robert Collier**

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March 21, 2015

The neurological surgeon I met with last week said to me, as I walked next to him in the doorway leading to his office: “You’re as big as I remember.” He looked at me with what seemed to be a little hesitation or fear. I found out this was because the first time I met him (which I completely do not recall) was in the hospital where he had difficulty performing the angiogram of my brain. He proceeded to tell me about how I was restless while under sedation, moving around, and worse yet, when I was coming in and out of sedation, I was swinging and throwing punches as if I were “reenacting a bar room brawl.”

At this point, I apologized and explained I was probably afraid: “Fight or Flight.”

He then said it was completely okay and “There are reasons why we are wired the way we are.”

He said, “A bear comes into your cave, some people run, but you stand up and say, ‘Why the hell is there a bear in my cave?’”

Basically, my instincts prepare me to hurt the bear before the bear hurts me or my family. Maybe this is why I scream like a bear when I go into “attack” mode? Transforming from prey into predator, or perhaps like Riki-Tikki-Tavi, I like to think I transform into a “Protector.”

I went on to express my most pressing concern currently, which is my inability to hold back impulses, especially when I’m tired. The doctor proceeded to tell me that this is fairly common with brain injuries and that he noticed my behavior in the hospital was, in his words, “highly inappropriate.” So basically, at times, I feel like I have become a caveman that acts on knee-jerk impulses.

I have always pushed the envelope and joked a lot in my personal life, often approaching the line of what is generally deemed acceptable (always well-intentioned), but now that my self-monitoring filter is short circuiting, I frequently find myself crossing that line. For example, I am often irritable and have been cursing a lot, even in front of my children, which I never would have done in the past. At times, I have found myself snapping at my wife and kids, with no patience, in a way that I would never have done before. It’s frustrating, embarrassing and a bit scary.

The doctor explained that if I had lost my arm, people would see that I’ve clearly lost an arm and to the extent that it negatively impacted my ability to function normally, people would understand. But the problem with a brain injury is that no one can see it, and if it causes me to act abnormally, people will just think: “He’s an asshole.”

Down the line, he explained to me that I will be working with a neuropsychologist on ways to overcome and cope with this and to prepare me to better handle the world in a way that society deems acceptable.

“Acute distress may be caused by life-threatening illness, real events and medical procedures in critical care, or by frightening psychological experiences ...”^{xvi}

“Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is triggered after experiencing one or more traumatic events. A debilitating disease, PTSD is a common complication of admission to ICUs. With a prevalence of 5% to 64% among patients discharged from the ICU, this figure rivals the chance of developing PTSD after surviving cancer (1.9% to 39%) and a terrorist attack (30% to 40%).”^{xvii}

He went on to explain that I had a considerable bleed in my head, so much so that they cannot see the right side of my brain in order to determine the root cause of the issue. It's not until my blood reabsorbs into the brain that they can hopefully get a more clear picture and diagnose the situation further. I have the next MRI of my brain and an EEG in the beginning of April, after Easter.

They said they have no reason to suspect that a tumor is the cause, but with the amount of bleeding, they just can't see enough of my brain through the testing to be able to say for sure that I don't have a tumor.

Other possible theories, or scenarios, which could have caused me to have a stroke:

- I. While I was in the hospital, my oxygen level would drop down significantly while I was sleeping. If I had some sort of sleep disorder like sleep apnea, this could have caused my oxygen to drop and my blood pressure to rise, ultimately leading to a stroke, which then caused a seizure. I'm going next week, I believe (once again, what would I do without my wife who has been an indispensable part not just as chauffeur, but as scheduler and manager of all of my doctors' visits and procedures) to be monitored overnight at a sleep clinic to determine whether I have a sleep disorder.
- II. I could have been born with an AVM. "A brain AVM (Arteriovenous Malformation) is an abnormal connection between arteries and veins. An AVM is usually congenital, meaning it dates to birth."^{xviii} This AVM could have just decided it was time to burst. If this occurred, it could have possibly fixed itself. I'm really hoping this is the case.
- III. If it turns out to be an AVM that's not fixed and they do not go in to do surgery to plug the hole, then I have something like a one in 10, or a one in 20 chance of having another stroke. Unfortunately, there are also strong odds that surgery could cause another stroke, but at least I would be with the surgeons in a hospital when it occurs in that case.

Regardless of the scenario, I hope it's not cancer, I hope I don't need to have my brain drilled or plugged, but whatever has to happen will happen, and I will handle it calmly and gracefully and do my best to overcome whatever road lays before me.

**"A man's character is his fate."^{xix}
—Heraclitus**

I vow to my wife and loved ones to listen to the doctors and that I will not do anything to jeopardize my recovery or put myself in harm's way. At the same time, I will make it my daily goal to do something positive and better myself through reading, writing and eventually through physical activity.

**"I'm a great believer in luck,
and I find the harder I work the more I have of it."^{xx}
—Thomas Jefferson**

Life is so crazy and hectic. We can get so caught up in the day-to-day happenings that we forget to start focusing on things which matter, or should matter to us. Like many parents, I got so caught up in taking care of my children and taking care of my career, that somewhere along the way, I

started neglecting my marriage and I started neglecting myself. I'm an excellent father, but I don't think I have been an excellent husband. Perhaps not bad, certainly not excellent though. I also haven't been a bad person, but have I been an excellent person? If we do not first love and take care of ourselves, physically, mentally or spiritually ... how can we ever truly expect to love and take care of others? As cliché and cheesy as that sounds, the reality is we can't, because at the end of the day, we can be so worn down by life that we forget to live it. I'm ready to try to start living again!

**“Man ... sacrifices his health in order to make money.
Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health.
And then he is so anxious about the future
that he does not enjoy the present or the future;
he lives as if he is never going to die,
and then dies having never really lived.”^{xxi}
—Dahlia Lama**

**“We just don't recognize life's most significant moments
while they're happening.
Back then I thought, 'Well there'll be other days.'
I didn't realize that that was the only day.”^{xxii}
—Dr. Archibald “Moonlight” Graham**

I have made a deal with God:

**“Lord, if you give me the strength to get through this,
I will do everything in my power to share that strength
and inspire others to appreciate how precious every moment of life we are blessed with,
truly is.”
—Stephen Wolf**

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