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The Things We Tell Each Other

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The Things We Tell Each Other

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by
AJ LaPierre

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2022

To my Zaida, Robert Auerbach.

Thank you for always believing in me and always being there for me. I couldn't have done this without you. You will always be in my heart.

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Preface

It was the day I lost myself. It was the moment I lost.

Lost can mean many different things. It has a long etymology and different origins. In c. 1300 the word lost meant “wasted, ruined, spent in vain.” In c. 1500 it also meant “no longer to be found, gone astray.” In the 1640s lost meant “spiritually ruined, inaccessible to good influence.” It also comes from battles and games. In which one has been defeated. Like *Lost Cause* in reference to the bid for independence by the southern states of the U.S. *Lost Generation* is in reference to the youth that came of age when World War I broke. It was first attested in 1926 in Hemingway’s “The Sun Also Rises,” and he credits it to Gertrude Stein. In 1907, *Lost-and-Found* is the name of a department where misplaced articles are brought or sought to.

In this memoir though, the word lost consists of many things. It has to do with being lost, feeling lost, losing something that you can never gain back, and it is a metaphor as well. My parents felt lost, I felt lost, we all lost something that day. That day on April 15th, 1999.

Did we find what we lost? I don’t know if my parents did. I have found some of it but not all of it. The question remains, will I find all of it? Or will some of it still be lost forever?

We shall see.

Prologue

I could begin in the middle, and it would make sense. I could even begin at the end and go backwards, and it would still make sense. But, instead, I am going to start off with a question.

The question I asked was to a lawyer who came to speak to everyone at a college summer program at Amherst. You should know first that I am very shy. And that I don't ask questions at all, especially in front of about one hundred to one hundred and fifty people. I was talking to one of my friends when I realized I should ask him the question I have been wanting to ask someone professional since I was seven years old. I didn't want to ask, I was scared. But my friend picked up my arm and raised it for me. I was raising my hand for about ten to twenty minutes until finally he picked on me, his last question.

The question I asked was, "In your opinion, if a couple were on trial for neglecting and shaking their fourteen-month year old child, would you suggest signing a plea deal saying they were guilty and be on the registry for their lives, or keep going with the trial?" The lawyer didn't know what to say. He wore a blank face. He explained how he couldn't answer the question because he needed to know the details of the case. I stumped him. He didn't have an answer for me.

And once he answered my question like that I was stumped as well. Also mad, upset, and just pissed off. I have been trying to find the truth and connect all these stories and puzzle pieces together. And for what? For me? To just figure out or find the truth so I will be happy? So, I can stop stressing? Who the hell knows why? I don't. This lawyer doesn't. So, who does? Anyone want to answer? Anyone? Anyone at all?

Well, I guess that's a no. No one can answer. Does that mean that I must answer it? Does that mean that I am the only one who can answer? But where do I begin? How do I start?

****LOST****

I felt alone. Empty. No one to save me. Where was I? I could hear mom crying. Hear the doctors arguing with my grandparents outside of the door. Yelling what's right and what's wrong. While my dad was sitting next to me in a chair, I think. Not talking. But I could hear his breathing. *What was he thinking? What was on his mind? Does he know that I am still here? Still alive? Or does he think that I am fading away, slowly, quietly?*

I can't speak. There is a tube in my mouth. I'm asleep, but I am not asleep. *Where is Sophie? Where could she have gone? She couldn't-wouldn't leave me. Would she? Is she even capable of that? Leaving the child that she has been taking care of since I was nine months old?*

Why can't I move? Am I trapped? My left side of my body feels numb. Frozen. Broken. I feel weak. I can't open my eyes. *Why can't I open my eyes? What is happening?*

I still hear mom crying, screaming even. And then my grandparents arguing and yelling right outside the door. I mean, I think it's a door, or a window, because it's all a little bit faded. Everything is a little faded because I hear this ringing, or is it buzzing? It's very loud in my ears. I still hear dad. It must be. I know his breathing. I know all these voices. I just can't open my eyes and talk. It's all a dream, a daze. *What is going on?* I can't move. I can't feel. I can just hear. I am dreaming. I must be. This can't be real. It must be a dream.

It's all black. All I can see is just black. But in this black, there is this white light. It's far away at first. But it's getting closer. *What is happening?*

I feel alone. No one to save me. No one to help me.

****LOST****

Is something wrong with me? I always wondered as a kid. Why are the teachers talking about this and how is it connected to that? I didn't know the answer, but all the other kids did, and their hands waved up in the sky like balloons. Was I the only popped balloon?

I grew up thinking like that. Wishing that if I just spaced out it would all fast forward like a movie. Watching the teacher talk, how their mouths move to make these words, and how the words then became sentences. And then how those sentences became lectures as I got older into

high school. I was that loner in the corner of a dance party jumping up and down with my forefinger in the sky. That was me. And that would always be me.

But there was something different about that no one else knew about. I wrote. I wrote short stories and poems. I wrote every day and I loved it. It was my passion. The one thing that came easy to me. The one thing that I could do without asking for help. The one thing that other kids needed help with. They would ask how to spell words that to me were easy to spell, or if this was a sentence, what is a subject and a clause, what is a noun, verb, adjective etc. I knew all of that. I didn't need help with that. Words just flew from my hand to my pencil onto the paper. It flowed and I loved it.

And the funny thing is I think I am a better writer than a talker. And that seems crazy to me. Because there are some kids out there who can write, but don't like it, and instead of writing, they ask me to write their papers and essays instead.

I remember in third grade that my favorite teacher of all time, Junellen Tiska, couldn't get me to write. I just didn't write in the beginning of third grade. And by the end of third grade, I couldn't stop writing. And Junellen is still in my life to this day, still being my mentor and my role model like she did when I was in third grade.

****LOST****

Every family has traditions in their family. It may be lighting candles on Hanukkah, or telling stories around the dinner table, or watching a movie, or doing game night once a week. I have had a tradition with my mom every year on the same day since I can remember. It probably started in first or second grade. She started this tradition. It was her idea but my plan. I would play hooky from school from April 15th to April 16th or 17th sometimes. When I asked why we were doing this she said we are celebrating your life. She would say, "April 15th was the day you got out of the hospital." So, every year for those two-three days we would do something fun. I got to choose what we did. If it was going to the skateboard park, or a movie, or a Broadway show. We would sleep in a hotel or an inn for a night or two while we did this. Just the two of us.

No one else knew what we did. Friends would ask and I would either say I was sick, or I had a family obligation.

LOST

Do you ever feel like running away? Like when you are about to speak in public to about one hundred to two hundred people, and you hate speaking in public. Or when the teacher calls on you for an answer to one of the questions and you are the only one who does not know the answer, but the teacher called on you. That's how I felt on April 16th in the year that I turned thirteen. That was the year that she told me her side of the truth. Her story of what happened.

She gave me facts about what happened and then she gave me her opinion on what caused it all. A virus. Just a virus. A virus had made me have seizures and I had a subdural hematoma and retinal hemorrhages. She said that I had had a stroke and I had left side weakness on my left side. She told me I was paralyzed on my left side as well. She had said that I was in a coma and that I had a tube in my ventricle that would relieve the increasing pressure. I had a shunt in my head. She said I was in a coma for a couple months.

She started to tear up and cry, so I did too. After we cried a little, she wanted a hug, so we hugged for the longest time ever. That was the moment I didn't want to run away anymore. I didn't like what she had said but I needed that hug as much as she did. I knew that that was only one side of the story though. I knew there was more. I didn't know how much more there was, but I knew it was more than she had said. I could tell by her face and her eyes.

LOST

Junellen is an amazing teacher. She is a bit on the big side, and short. She has short red/orange hair with lots of freckles. She also has a unique pair of reading glasses. She was the first person out of my family who understood me. She understood how I learned. She was the type of teacher that when everyone else was at Spanish class I was with her learning or rather relearning and going over what we had already gone through in class. For example, we were learning about moss and where and how it grows on trees. So, she took me outside, and we found some moss and took it back to the classroom where I touched the moss and smelt it. It was soft and fuzzy. It was a bright green with dirt on the bottom of it and a little wet. It smelt like rain too, the nice cool rain smells right after it rains. She was also funny. She knew how to understand each student. She also knew who were the students that made trouble, and the ones who didn't. If a student wasn't paying attention, she would ask another student to give her an eraser, then she would throw the eraser right in front of the student who wasn't listening to get their attention. She had a fly swatter in the room as well. Whenever there was a fly near her, she would tell the class to all be as quiet as possible so she could get the fly with the swatter. I had fun in her class and learned more than I ever could as a third grader.

****LOST****

I keep thinking about how to put my story out into the world. How I want to write it. How I want to tell it. I know what I want to say, I just don't know how to get started.

I want to say this though, "From what I have woven together I am a survivor of a traumatic brain injury. I believe I was dropped three times. I believe that I was lied to since I was a child. I believe that things were put in place to help me. I believe all of this has made me who I am today. And will continue to guide my teaching. But in the end that all doesn't matter. None of that really matters. Because I am me. And I could be me without all this happening to me. This is the end. Not the very end, Just the end of the baby's first chapter in her story. Because this is of course the baby's story. It is not the mother's, or the father's story, or the rest of the family's story. It is Alex's first chapter in her big story that she will write someday. It might take years

and years of physical, occupational, speech and language therapy but one day this baby that has gotten a second chance to live, a miracle, will write her story one day. And everyone will be able to read it. It's her story to tell. Her story to share. And I am finally ready to share it with the world.”

****LOST****

The camera flashes. I am sitting with my friends at Ross, my high school, in the Lecture Hall, where my senior project is being shown right at this moment. Everyone came to see it. Friends, teachers, and family. They all want to know what I have been working on for the past nine months. The past nine months of my senior year at Ross. The one thing that matters to me the most. The one thing that I have been thinking about since forever. The one thing that matters most to me at this moment in time. My documentary. My movie about what happened to me.

My mom and dad are sitting in the front on the left side of the room. Next to them are my younger siblings Owen and Toby. They are too young to understand all of this, but they still came. They are only eleven. Next to them is my grandmother. I decided to sit with my best friends in the way back of the room.

The room is packed. Every seat is taken. People are standing in the back and on the sides of the room against the walls. All my friends are there near me. All my teachers from middle school and high school are there too.

Chapter One: A Bond That Will Never Be Broken

When a child is born, they are put into their mother's arms to be held. To be loved. I was held by my mother, my father, my Nana, and my Zaida. It was a cold snowy day. My dad had driven to the hospital while videotaping my mom in the passenger seat. My dad really enjoys making memories.

My mom always wanted three children. Before my parents got married, they talked about raising their kids in a Jewish household, going to Montreal for Christmas with my dad's family, and having three children. My mom had me when she was thirty-two years old. She loved singing *Cats and the Cradle* to me every night. My dad adored me and loved it when I fell asleep near him while he read the series *Narnia*.

Before I was born, they got a golden retriever that they named Hudson, after the Hudson River. And a couple of years before I was born, they adopted a cat that they found in the street with a broken paw. They took him to the vet, and he got better. They named him Ramsey. I grew up with Hudson and Ramsey.

Hudson helped me learn to stand and to walk. He would stand up and I would pull myself up by grabbing onto his fur. I learned to walk by him taking one step and then I took a step and we kept walking together. I know it sounds fake and maybe even from a movie like *Cheaper by the Dozen* or *Yours's Mine and Ours*. But I swear that it's true.

I loved growing up in Syracuse. My pre-K and Kindergarten were connected to Mom's university and when I was done with school for the day Mom would sometimes pick me up and take me to her sculpture studio with her students. There were lots of scraps of toys, metal, and junk that they would use to make their artwork. I loved playing with these scraps. There was a baby doll's head and a small truck that I played with all the time. I also went to school with my

best friend Sophie May. We used to be inseparable. Then there were Tamar's kids, Tal, who was only nine months older than me, and his younger sister, Maya. We were like family, still are. We three call each other cousins or "Cuz".

There were two houses I lived in while we were in Syracuse. The first house we rented. It was brown with green shutters. I called it the "Green House" though because all I remember are the green shutters. This was the house we lived in during the time I was in the hospital and when I came back from the hospital. The other house we bought. It was a big brown house with some detailed dark brown shutters on the outside and a garage at the end of the driveway. We had a medium sized backyard with a swing set and a miniature house that was my playhouse. It had two floors in it, and it was big enough for adults to come inside. The main house itself was cozy. It was home to me for five years.

We went to visit my great grandparents, Mum, and Pop, in Southampton New York a lot. They lived in their small little cottage with lots of forest surrounding them. They would let me sit on the pool table and I would play with the balls. Letting them roll and fall into the holes at each end of the pool table. I had a wooden duck that had wheels on it, and we would take walks down the quiet road. Mom walked Hudson while I pushed my duck.

My parents wanted more kids, but Mom couldn't get pregnant. When I was about five and a half Mom started doing IVF. She had done two rounds of it already and had not gotten pregnant yet. She had told her doctor that she would try one more time and if it didn't work that would be it. I remember watching from behind a wall while Dad helped with the needle. I remember cleaning up with Dad when my mom got sick from the IVF side effects too. In the third round though, she did get pregnant. She was forty.

The only problem was that my mom didn't want to have another child grow up in Syracuse. She wanted to get away from all the bad horrible memories that tortured her with her PTSD from what happened to me. So, we decided to move.

****LOST****

Mom has a lot of guilt from what happened to me. She had already been diagnosed with dissociative disorder, anxiety, and narcissistic personality disorder. After what happened to me, she started to have PTSD. She couldn't stand sirens or being in hospitals. She would have horrible flashbacks and some things just triggered her. This still happens.

Mom's side of the story of what happened to me is different from what other people say about what happened. Mom admits that there were three falls. Two from the kitchen island to ceramic flooring and one with my dad at a Starbucks changing table. She has told me that the fall with Dad wasn't really a fall because he caught me before I fell. Would there still be some impact?

She doesn't believe that the falls had anything to do with what happened to me. Apparently, I was sick around the same time I went to the hospital on April 15th. Mom says, "As it stands to this day most medical people who have been involved in the case believe that a virus caused a stroke, and that Alex has survived a near death experience."

My question to you and all medical staff that were involved in my case is, how can a virus have the same side effects of Shaken Baby Syndrome? How can a virus paralyze half of my

body and put me in a coma for ten days? How can a virus cause the doctors to put a shunt in my head?

Yes, I did have a stroke. I did have seizures. I did have a hematoma. I was paralyzed on the whole left side of my body. And I was in a coma on full life support with a shunt in my head. But how can only a virus cause all of that? No one has an answer. Well, that's what I thought.

****LOST****

I had two doctors when I was in the hospital. Or at least, I started with two doctors. It was a teaching hospital and every two weeks the attendings would switch. The first doctor called CPS to come interview my parents while I was in the hospital. The next day a different doctor came and sent CPS away because he thought that it was a virus. My grandparents had come down to be with me and my parents. They were doctors and they took their own notes about what was happening. From the first day in the ICU, they were all told by the physicians that CPS was notified at the time that I was brought into the ER. The pediatric intensivist, Dr Rogasta, who had the most contact with me, told them that because they were all middle-class white professionals CPS would come down very hard on them. But no one had processed that information because their only concern was for me.

What happened next was my family's worst nightmare. They got a lawyer from a close friend. And they went to court. On May 5th there was a CPS hearing at 2:00 PM. My grandparents took a plane out and they got there in time, but they were not allowed into the courtroom. What was going on in the courtroom was the nightmare. The judge said, "Petition

granted.” And mom was crying out, “You can’t take my baby away!” I had been officially placed in foster care. My parents or their lawyer weren’t allowed to say anything during the hearing. Not one word.

Somehow then though, maybe a couple days after, I am not sure of the timeline really, my grandparents had gotten custody of me. I lived with my grandparents for about a year or so with the help of my mom’s nanny, Ada. My parents could see me, but someone had to be in the same room when they did come to see me. Finally, after a year or so, my parents got custody back. Every now and then though CPS would visit randomly to make sure everything was okay and that I was doing okay.

The only way my parents got me back was they had to agree with the court. Their names had to be put on the child abuse registry. By doing this, I would be able to live with them again. If they didn’t do this, then I would be put into foster care for the rest of my life and my parents would go to trial.

So, we decided to move.

My great grandparents passed away within six months of each other. First Mum passed and Pop passed from a broken heart. Or at least that’s what mom has told me. The cottage was put into Mom’s and Uncle Steve’s names. Uncle Steve and his family lived in New York City and liked it there so mom, dad, Hudson, Ramsey, Copper, and Daisy, (the twin cats that I got for my fifth birthday), and I, moved to the little cottage in Southampton. I was six when we moved. I started going to the Morris Center School in Bridgehampton. I was going into first grade. I had to get a new speech therapist, a new occupational therapist, and a new physical therapist. Shirley was my speech therapist that I had until the end of eighth grade. Peggy was my occupational therapist until I switched to a different occupational therapist when I was in ninth grade. Faith was my physical therapist for only a little bit. When I switched my occupational therapist in

ninth grade, Molly became my occupational therapist, and she did some physical therapy with me too until I graduated high school in 2016.

My siblings were born in 2005. We couldn't all fit in the cottage, so my parents decided to move again. This time just a couple towns over to Sag Harbor. Sag Harbor isn't really a town, it's more like a village. A very cute and small village. We lived in one house for about two-three years until Mom and Dad said they wanted to move again. But they wanted to stay in Sag Harbor. So, they put the house on the market and my grandparents decided to buy it. They wanted to be closer to their grandchildren. They made a deal with mom. If she drew up plans for a renovation of the house and was the architect, then my grandparents would buy it. That's exactly what happened.

We then moved to a rental for about nine months. It was a big white house with a red door. There was a saltwater swimming pool, an in the ground trampoline, a pool house, and a tree house just for me. It was a very nice nine months. While we were there though, my parents found the perfect place to live. It was sort of on the same street as the rental. Well, the property goes to that street. The house itself was small. At that time, Hudson had passed away, so we had gotten another Golden Retriever named Gus, and a Leonberger named Caleb. Caleb in Hebrew means "dog". We also still had Copper and Daisy; Ramsey had passed away after Hudson did. Copper and Daisy were twins. They were bright orange. Daisy was skinny with some white spots. Copper was fluffier and he looked fat. They were my fifth birthday present. We had adopted them from a shelter. I was only supposed to get Copper, but he wouldn't leave without his sister. When Mom found out she was having boy and girl twins she thought that Copper and Daisy were gifts from God. She still thinks that sometimes.

We had a big family you could say. It was a small house with five people and four animals. The property though is huge. A big backyard with a swimming pool and a cottage

where people could live and sleep. It is a two bedroom with a living room and kitchen. With two bathrooms and one big shower. Attached to the cottage was a garage and a driveway. The main house is on Madison Street and the property went all the way to the next street, Suffolk Street. The cottage has its own address too. We still live there today except my parents did a big renovation on the main house. There is more space, and it is beautiful. We have a trampoline in the backyard and a new driveway for the main house. There is a nice patio looking towards the backyard. We have a fire pit there and a table out there to eat at in the summer. It's very peaceful and quiet in the back.

Mom had been going to therapy since my hospitalization and her PTSD was better. She still had some episodes but not as many as she used to when I was younger. Whenever she did have an episode, I helped her. If she was crying in bed or locked in the bathroom with the lights out. I helped her through it. It was good that her PTSD was better, but she still had anxiety, narcissistic personality disorder, and dissociative disorder. When I was in seventh grade, she had a dissociative episode.

**** LOST****

It was a regular Tuesday morning. Mom had gotten up early to go to New York City to see her client while Dad was already up with Owen and Toby. He was getting them ready for school or rather getting them ready for kindergarten. I woke up around 7:00 am so I could catch the bus to school by 7:30 am. I was thirteen and in seventh grade.

2011 was a big year for me. My main teacher for English and History didn't really understand my disability and I had already talked to my principal about it, and he was going to

talk to her about it more. I was getting a Bat-Mitzvah in early March, and it was already February. I was practicing my Torah passage, the prayers, and the songs that I would have to sing and chant during the day of my Bat-Mitzvah. I was also doing my Mitzvah Project. My Mitzvah Project was working with low-income children at a local community center after school. I was doing a journaling project with them. I was also donating one hundred books that were my favorite books from the ages of zero to thirteen. I had a lot going on and was focused on all these things.

3:45 pm came around and I caught the bus home to make Dad's life easier. Mom usually got home around 7:45 pm so she could put the twins to bed by 8:00 pm. When I got home, I did my homework at the island table and then went off to go read in my bedroom. At around 6:00 pm Mom called Dad and told him that she was lost in the city. I was there when he got the call, and I was very confused by it all. How could Mom be lost in the city that she was born and raised in? I was too scared to ask so I didn't ask Dad. When he was done talking to Mom, he brought me to the side and told me what was going on. He explained to me that Mom was having one of her dissociative episodes and that he had to drive to the city and pick her up and then he would drive her back to Sag Harbor. He told me that I had to make dinner for the twins, bath them, and put them to sleep. He said that he would text me when he got to the city and when he had Mom and then he would text me when he was on his way home.

I was scared and nervous about Mom, but I had been taking care of my siblings since they were born. I had done all of this many times before. Dad said goodbye to the twins. He told them that he was going to pick up mom. He told them that I was in charge and to behave and not gang up on me because that's what usually happened when I babysat, especially because they were getting older, and they didn't want to listen.

I put a pot of water on to boil and grabbed two boxes of Annie's mac and cheese. I took out some carrots, cucumbers, and ranch dressing. This was the easiest and most basic dinner that they loved the most. When the pasta was done, I had to stir in some milk and the cheese packets that the mac and cheese boxes came with. This was the most annoying part of the process though because Owen loved his mac and cheese milky while Toby didn't like it that milky. You know how twins are. They are the opposites of each other most of the time. When dinner was finally ready, I set them up in the family room in front of the tv so they could watch their own show together. I sat in the kitchen with my laptop and watched my own show while I ate dinner. Dad texted me to see how everything was going. It was nice that he was checking in with me because he knew that I was scared and how I couldn't talk about it with anyone because the only people around me were six years old. After dinner Toby took a shower and then Owen took a bath. I let them watch a little bit more of tv while they had dessert. It was around 8:00 pm when I told them it was ready for bedtime. They loved it when someone read them a book before they went to sleep. They especially loved Dr Suess books. I grabbed *Fox in Socks* -by Dr Suess and sat down on the floor near Toby's bed. Owen came over and put himself right in front of me, so he was cuddling with me. One reason they loved this book and Dr Suess books so much was because whenever I read it to them, I used different voices for each character, and I tried to read the rhymes as fast as I could without messing up. They would always laugh and giggle when I did. To me, these were memories that I would cherish the rest of my life.

I tucked Toby in her bed with her blankie and purple bunny. I went over to Owen's bed and tucked him in with his blankie and Freddy the elephant. It was around 8:30 pm when I left their bedroom. I texted dad that they were going to sleep and went in the family room to watch tv. Dad texted me around 9:00 pm saying that he had Mom and was going to get some food then they would be on their way home. I checked if the twins were finally asleep by poking my head

into their room. The noise machine was on, and Toby was snoring. Owen was fast asleep too. I went back to the family room for a bit then around 11:00 pm I went to my room. It was a school night so I wanted to go to sleep on time, but I couldn't because I was too scared about Mom.

I knew that she had dissociative disorder, but I had never experienced an episode like this before. Yes, she had had episodes in the past, but they were much smaller ones like she would forget how she knew someone and forgot their name. When this would happen, I would just remind her who the person was and how she knew them. After my hospitalization I had severe separation anxiety about Mom. So, when this happened, I didn't know what to do or feel. All I wanted was Mom. I just wanted a big hug and her to tell me everything would be okay. I wanted her to come home and be okay. I wanted the episode to end.

I couldn't show my true feelings because I had to be strong for Owen and Toby. I had to make sure they were okay too. When I knew they were finally asleep I could show my true feelings. I got all tucked in and comfy in my bed and put my head under the sheets to watch tv. I was watching *Friends*. I had watched *Friends* all the way through about twenty times by thirteen, but I always go back to it because it makes me feel better. It helps relax me and not think about what's going on in my life at that moment.

At around 1:00 am Dad texted me and said he would be home soon. He also told me that he was going to drop Mom off at my grandparents' house in Sag Harbor. They had a summer house that was a two-minute drive from my house. When I asked him why she was going there and not home he explained to me that for her to get better quicker she needed rest and quiet and our house was never quiet or relaxed.

When dad had finally dropped off Mom at my grandparents he came home. That was around 1:45 am. He came to my room to update me and make sure I was okay too. He told me I

could see her tomorrow but that I could only talk about positive things and what's going on in my present life. I wasn't allowed to talk about the past, the future, or anything negative.

After school the next day I went to my grandparents' house. Mom was sitting up in bed. She looked tired and a little disoriented but when I walked in the bedroom her face lit up with a smile. I gave her a big tight hug and she held me and squeezed me like I wanted her to do the night before. I sat down across from her, and we talked about what happened at school, how my classes were, how my friends were doing, the gossip going on in eighth grade, what book I was reading, and how Owen and Toby were. We talked for a couple hours and had some tea. She told me that she was going to stay at my grandparents' house for about two weeks to recuperate.

When I asked her how many times I was allowed to come and talk with her she replied by saying, "You can come by whenever you want. You can walk here and spend time with me after school and then walk home." I was happy about that because I needed Mom. When I asked her when the twins could visit her, she told me that they would come see her but not as much as me because they were too young to keep the conversation going and only talk about happy things and the present.

Chapter Two: The Lie I Told Myself

Have you ever lied to yourself? Like lying to yourself so you can feel better. Convincing yourself that something is true when really it isn't. Making up fake memories to make yourself feel better or doing it because of all the trauma you have been through. Well, I have. It soothes your body and calms your soul. Because once you start convincing yourself that it's true then you can relax and take a deep breath and you feel better. It's not a bad thing to do. I promise. Just try it sometime. I did and it worked.

When I was about seven or eight, I decided to come up with a story about what happened to me. I convinced myself that this was the story of why I was the way I was. I would tell my closest friends that story if they asked what had happened to me. When I look back on it now, I think that it's the simplest and stupidest story a kid could make up about why they had had a traumatic brain injury and what caused it. I just wanted the truth from someone, and no one was giving me what I wanted so I did it. *Is that so bad though?*

The story that I made up to make myself feel better was this: when I was fourteen months old, I was walking, and I hit the corner of the large wooden dining room table with my head. That's why I was in the hospital for almost a year and why I have a scar on the left side of my head, and why my left side is a lot weaker than my right side. I put it all on the fact that I, yes me myself and I, walked into the corner of a table. I blamed myself. *How was I supposed to know anything else?* I was too young. No one told me anything at all. And I needed answers. But no one wanted to talk about it back then. And Owen and Toby were just born, and it was all about them at that time.

****LOST****

The camera clicks.

I was in line for the cafe with my black slippers on with my best friend Emmy. She was asking why I had to leave in the mornings and go with these random women. “These random women” she called were my occupational therapist and my speech and language therapist. I have known them since I was in first grade. Once a week each of them would come to campus and from 7:30 am- 8:00 am, I would sit at the Asian Tables with them above the gym and work with them to make myself stronger or to learn synonyms, antonyms, idioms etc. I would also do the “W Circle”. The “W Circle” was a picture I had to draw of a circle and inside it was a house, a dog, a person, a tree, and a question mark. Each one represented the “W” words. “W” words are the words that make up a story. These words consist of, what, where, why, who, and how is included with them. In the drawing the house was the “what”, the dog was the how, the person was the who, the tree was the where, and the question mark was the why.

I explained this to Emmy in a whispery voice. I told her that it was a secret. She asked what happened to me and I told her that I had walked into the corner of a table and then began to have traumatic brain injury which caused seizures, a stroke, a hematoma, a coma, a shunt, and paralysis on my whole left side of my body. I continued to tell her that I don’t have peripheral vision on my left side and how my feet kind of turn in while I walk. I also told her that I process everything differently and slower than anyone else. When I was done telling her everything, she gave me a big hug. We then continued in the café line until we got plates and food. I felt happy and safe that I had told someone about what happened to me. Emmy was the first person I told that to.

LOST

Do you remember when you were young, and lice was a big thing? Like if you had lice then no one would talk to you or be near you? You were the kid that had these tiny bugs in your hair and the kids would scream and run away from you. Or their parents would tell them not to talk to you until you got those creepy crawly tiny bugs out of your hair. You would tell your friends that, “Yes, I do have lice, but did you know that people with lice have the cleanest hair?” or, “Yay I have lice! Now I get to go home!”

I got lice a lot when I was in middle school. I got it from my siblings. There was this one time in eighth grade where I was in English class and my name got called over the loudspeaker saying, “Alex LaPierre please come to the nurse’s office.” When I got there, she said that the Lower School had called and said that my younger brother had lice and that they called her because if he does then I might too. So, she was going to check just in case. I wondered why only my younger brother had it and not my younger sister. They are twins and they share a bedroom, toys, books, and friends.

This wasn’t the first time I was being checked for lice. I had lice in fifth, sixth, and seventh grade more than once. This time was different though. She started on the left side of my head and was using the comb and her lice tools to flip small pieces of my hair over. I was sitting with my face looking at the ground and my hair flipped in front of my face when suddenly, she said, “Oh!” I got nervous and responded saying, “What?! Do I have it?!” she said, “Well, yes you do have lice, but did you always have this scar on the left side of your head?” I completely froze. How has she been checking my head for all these years and hasn’t seen my scar? This was

the same nurse since fifth grade. Was she just not paying attention before? Not looking for anything else except for lice. I responded to her question, “Yes, I have always had that scar. It’s from my traumatic brain injury.” And there was no more to it. That was it.

She started to call Mom and tell her that I had lice and needed to be picked up. I went upstairs and waited in the front of the Center for Well Being, the CWB was what we called it for short. Ten to fifteen minutes passed and then I saw Maybell come out of her car with the Lice Monster, also known as Owen or Blondie to me. She came over to me and told me that Mom was in the city and that Dad was up island at work so her and her cleaning friends would take us home and clean us up from the lice.

Maybell was our cleaning lady, but her younger sister Alex was our nanny. There were five sisters in total, and they were all born and raised in Costa Rica. I only knew three of the sisters though. There was Maybell, Alex, or Big Alex like we used to call her, and the youngest sister, Daniella, or Dani, who babysat one of my siblings’ friends.

As we were leaving Ross I was complaining and yelling at Blondie because he gave the lice to me. I went on and on about it until Maybell told me to stop. Once we got home Maybell’s cleaning friends, who were also Costa Rican, had already stripped our beds and grabbed all our stuffed animals and put them in the wash. I went to go take a shower because it’s easier that way for them to comb through my hair and get the creepy crawlies out of it. When I returned to the kitchen, they had two chairs set up at the island table. Blondie and I sat down while Maybell and her friends combed through our hair while talking in Spanish the whole time. They went on and on in Spanish. Sometimes their voices became louder and sometimes softer. They never asked how we were doing or anything.

After about fifteen minutes they told us to go take a shower with shampoo and conditioner. Then they would comb again and see if they got all the lice. After that we could do

what we wanted because we were not going back to school that day. I went to do some homework and then I read a book. Owen went upstairs to his room and played with his toys. It was a fun but crazy day. I wouldn't want to live through it again though.

Chapter Three: The Au Pair I Wish I Knew

We are taught at a very young age to trust and believe in our parents. They teach us what is right from wrong, what is good and what is bad, how to behave and not behave. Our parents are people we look up to. They are our role models. Or they are supposed to be. They are supposed to be the two people that we can trust and believe in the most. They are supposed to be all these things. Sometimes though, they aren't.

Sometimes something very traumatic happens and it changes them. It can change them in a good way but also in a bad way. I trusted my parents to take care of me. To keep me safe so no monsters or boogeymen could get to me. But what happens when they are the ones who scare you? What happens when they make a mistake, and everything falls apart? Or at least, that's the way it looks?

I grew up with amazing loving parents. I know that and I can admit that. But everyone has a breaking point. Mom's breaking point occurred when I was fourteen months old. My father's breaking point happened when I was eighteen years old. What happened you ask?

****LOST****

Mom was born into a family of Jewish New York City doctors. My grandfather's parents came to New York City from Russia on a ship. My grandfather, Zaida, went to medical school and worked as a resident in a hospital. He then went on to work as a dermatologist. Him and his

friend made their own practice. He married my grandmother, Nana, before starting medical school. My grandmother went on to become a geneticist at Rockefeller. My mom and my Uncle Steve grew up going to visit my great grandparents in the Bronx. They grew up with my great grandparents speaking Yiddish and some English. They also grew up visiting my grandmother's parents in Southampton, New York. Pop, my great grandfather, taught my mom how to play pool. As for my Uncle Steve, he grew up and followed his parents' footsteps and became a doctor as well. He now works for the CDC.

My dad, on the other hand, was born into a Protestant family in Montreal. My grandmother, OJ, was an English Professor while my grandfather, Grandpapa, had many different career paths. He was a broadcaster on television, a professor, an author, a journalist, and the first gay Canadian Senator. My dad has a younger brother, Uncle Thomas, or T for short. My dad's parents got a divorce when my dad was ten. He didn't really grow up with his dad though. When my dad was in high school, he got closer to him. A couple of years before I was born Grandpapa found the love of his life, Harvey. I was lucky enough to grow up with three grandfathers. My Uncle Thomas also followed in his father's footsteps and became an author. He writes novels and has written for Paddington Bear.

My parents did not follow in either of their parents' footsteps. My mom went to Cornell and then went to Yale to become an architect. My dad left Montreal for college and went to Middlebury. He then continued to Yale to become an architect as well. My dad was two years above my mom at Yale. That's where they met and fell in love. Or that's what the fairytale version of this would say. They moved to Brooklyn and got married in October of 1994. They moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, and I was born on February 21st, 1998. I was born on my due date with my eyes open.

****LOST****

When I was seventeen, I was working on my senior project for Ross. My senior project consisted of me making a documentary about what happened to me when I was fourteen months old. I had compiled a list of people who I wanted to interview, who I knew were part of what happened. On this list was my Au Pair, Sophie. Back then, I didn't know much about Sophie. I didn't even know her last name. I hadn't talked to her since she left. I barely remember her at all because I was so young. I didn't know how to find her, but I knew I needed to for my documentary.

Nana had given me home videos and papers that she and Zaida had kept that stated what happened at which day and time and who was watching me. It was like their own record of everything. In all this paperwork though, they had a police statement. The police statement was Sophie's statement she had given to the police when I first got to the hospital.

I already knew a detective at the police station near me on Long Island and I contacted him. A few voicemails later from me to him and him to me, he found a picture of Sophie and sent it to me. I couldn't remember what she looked like, so I sent it to one of my mom's best friends, Tamar, who lived in Syracuse at the time. She texted me back saying, "Yes that is Sophie. Just a few years older than when she was with you." I thanked Tamar and told her not to tell my parents. I then created a Facebook and found Sophie on there and messaged her. It took four days for her to respond. But she did! She responded at 3:00 am. We texted a bit and she told me, "Of course I remember you! I think about you every day!" I asked her questions about what happened on April 15th, 1999.

This is her side of what happened...

****LOST****

When I was about seven months we moved to Syracuse because my mom had gotten a great job as a sculpture professor at Syracuse University. My dad found an architecture firm in the area too. They hired Sophie, to live with us and take care of me during the day and then she went to school during the evenings. She was only twenty-three.

On April 15th, 1999, was when everything started to change. Sophie came back from her evening classes and asked if my parents were okay. I was already fast asleep in bed. Mom told Sophie that I had fallen from the kitchen island onto ceramic flooring. My mom had called Uncle Steve and my grandparents immediately. They told my parents to check if I was able to stand and walk. I could do that, so they said that I was okay.

But really, I wasn't. The next day when I woke up from my nap Sophie immediately saw that something was wrong. She saw that half of my face looked paralyzed and that my voice had changed. Fortunately, my dad was home taking a nap. Sophie ran upstairs and explained to him what was wrong. They then took me straight to University Hospital and Mom met us there.

Before we got to the hospital Sophie had called her agent back in Paris who said she should come home immediately. So, after Sophie had given her police statement her plan was to hop on a plane and fly back home to Paris.

At the hospital Sophie heard the doctors asking my parents if I had ever fallen before. My parents answered by saying it had already happened twice before that night. They explained to the doctors that the first fall was not too long after I was born, and the other fall was when I was with my dad in a public library, and I fell from a changing table.

Before Sophie left though she wanted to say goodbye to me. My parents were all over the place. They were scared, worried, mad, and every other feeling a parent should feel when their child is in the hospital, and they didn't know what was wrong or how to help. By that time most of my family was there too.

When I interviewed my Uncle Thomas for my documentary, he told me that Sophie wanted to say goodbye to me, but my parents wouldn't let her, so he snuck her in so she could say goodbye. After that she got on her plane and left to go home to Paris.

Sophie now lives in Paris and is happily married to her husband. She has two children. A daughter and a son. She is a teacher at a school too. She is very happy. We text every now and then to catch up or wish each other a happy birthday. I have a plan that when I am done with my masters, I want to travel to Paris to meet her in person and meet her family. We have talked about this, and she can't wait to see me again and I can't wait to meet her again officially.

Chapter Four: The Christmas That Changed Everything

My life changed in December 2004. I was six years old. I was in Montreal with my parents visiting my grandmother OJ, Uncle T, Aunt Cary, and my cousins Paige and Georgia. We were staying in OJ's apartment. There is an extra bedroom where my parents sleep while I sleep in the living room with the Christmas tree, the fireplace, tv, and a couch. When I was younger, I used to love it there because I knew that Santa Claus would come down that chimney near me and he would sneak around me to put the presents under the tree and fill up my stocking. He would also eat all the cookies and milk we left for him. He would take the carrots up the chimney to the reindeer when he was all done.

I thought it was like any Christmas, so I woke up early and ran into my parents' room with my heavy filled to the brim stocking. Every Christmas I would wake up early and bring my stocking into my parents' room so we could open them together. I would usually dump mine on the bed and sort through the stuff I wanted to keep and the stuff I wanted to trade with my parents. My parents would then do the same with their stockings as well. That didn't happen in 2004.

Instead, my parents told me to wait because they had something special to tell me. I sat up in the bed and they explained to me that Mom was pregnant with twins. They said that I would either have two younger sisters, two younger brothers, or one of each. I remember being so excited and happy about this. Even though I loved being the only child I got lonely some of the time. After they told me the big news I got to dump my stocking on the bed and trade with them too.

**** LOST ****

We moved to Southampton, New York before the twins were born. Mom didn't want to live in Syracuse anymore because of the bad memories that she had from what happened to me when I was younger. We didn't have our own place yet, so we were living in my great grandparent's cottage in the middle of the woods. It was very small, but I enjoyed it. Hudson, Copper, Daisy, and Ramsey were there with us too.

I have memories of listening to and feeling the babies on my mom's stomach. I would lay down and put my ear up to her belly button. I would sing to them too. I remember that Mom wanted to take professional maternity pictures on the beach with dad and me. It was lots of fun. We just walked along the shore while the photographer shot the pictures. Sometimes she would tell us what to do, other times she said to just be ourselves. There are pictures of the three of us smiling at each other, holding Mom's stomach with two hands, listening to the babies, and just walking on the beach. There are a few pictures with just Dad and I too. Some are of me on top of his shoulders, or him giving me a piggyback ride, there is one where he is holding me upside down and I'm laughing so hard while he is smiling too. We had fun making those pictures.

On July seventh, 2005, was the day my siblings were born. I remember this day like it was yesterday. Nana and Zaida picked me up early from summer camp and we drove to Stonybrook Hospital, which is about forty-five minutes to an hour away. My mom and dad were already there. This hospital has many buildings and is a bit confusing to get around. I had been going there to do some "Big Sister" classes for the past few weeks, so I knew where to go. My grandparents didn't. I remember being in the backseat with them. Zaida was driving and Nana was in the passenger seat. They were arguing and yelling at each other about where to park and

which building it was. Finally, Zaida turns around and asks me which building I think it is. I pointed and said at the same time, "It's that big, tall building."

After we got inside, we went to the waiting room. They gave me two twin baby dolls from American Girl. The boy had blue eyes and blonde hair while the girl doll had brown eyes and brunette hair. I played with them while Mom went into labor.

The way we tell the story of my siblings being born is a funny one. Once her water broke, they were pushing the gurney to the OR. While they were pushing the gurney though my mom was yelling, "There is a baby coming!" The doctor jumped onto the gurney and caught Toby before she landed on the gurney. We always say, "She flew out like a football." After that though Owen realized that there was more room for him to move around. He moved into a bad position though where he was coming out butt first. The doctors tried rotating him inside my mom but that didn't work. They asked if they could do a C-Section, but she said no. After eighteen minutes of everyone freaking out. He finally came out breached and was immediately put into an incubator.

Once my mom got settled back into her room, she told my grandparents that she just wanted my dad, me, and her in the room alone to meet my baby sister, Toby. I was the third person to hold her. She was so tiny in my arms. She grabbed onto my finger and squeezed it tightly. I looked down at her and smiled. I will remember that moment forever.

After a few minutes with Toby and my parents we decided to go see my baby brother, Owen. Mom was in a wheelchair and Toby was asleep in her arms. When we got to the room with the incubators I stopped at the door. I was too scared to go in and see him. I was sad and worried for him. Finally, Mom convinced me, and I went up to the incubator and put my right hand on the side of the glass to let him know I was there. A few moments passed and then he raised his arm

and put his hand against the side of the glass near my hand. It was like we were high fiving.
Owen had to stay in the hospital for an extra nine days, but mom stayed with him.

****LOST****

There are lots of cute memories I have when they were younger. One memory is when we took the picture for their baby naming. I was sitting on the couch pretzel style while each baby was on one of my legs. My hands were crisscrossed, and my pinkies were in their mouths. There is also the memory of the three of us playing on the blanket. Toby is holding on to my arm while Owen is attacking my leg with his tiny arms and big head. I have memories of me playing with them in the sink and in the bath as well.

When they were about three, we were all in the same school. Every time they saw me pass by them in school, they would run over to me and give me a big hug. Every Halloween Ross would let us dress up in our costumes and we would do a parade in the gym. The whole school would be there, and parents were invited too. You would walk with a friend or two and do a pose and then everyone would clap as you walked away. It was kind of set up like a runway. During Halloween one year we decided to go together. I was Cat in the Hat, and my siblings were Thing One and Thing Two. Yes, the blue crazy hair and all. I was in the middle and each one of them was holding my hand as we walked to the runway. Everyone started clapping and cheering. They were very cute in their costumes, and I think because I went up there with them it made it even more cute.

When they were seven years old, they had a combined birthday party at a gymnasium. I remember helping clean up the place after the party. I was bringing stuff to the car. They were both in the car pretending to help but really, they were teasing each other. I overheard them talking and instead of saying it “buck it” they said “fuck it” to each other. I stopped and tried to find a way to explain to them that that is a bad word, but they just sat there laughing at me and not listening at all.

There was one time where we went to the beach, and it started to rain hard. We went to find shelter and waited out the rain. Owen was wearing my raincoat because he didn't bring one. Toby was wearing hers. They started to dance and sing to *Singing in the Rain* with an umbrella above their heads. There was another time where we walked to our favorite toy store in town just the three of us. I remember turning around to talk to the cashier who has worked there for years and knew our family very well. When I turned around to look at what they were up to I saw Toby wearing a big, tall beer hat. She started to giggle and laugh. She wanted a picture, so I took one for her.

There was one time when they were about six where Owen had learned to do the moonwalk. He was doing it from the kitchen into the dining room and then stopping when he arrived at the living room. He did it with all the sass and smiles anyone could put into it. After he did the moonwalk, I picked him up and twirled him around. We landed on the couch and started to cuddle, I wouldn't let him go as I kissed his head and tickled him so the space where his two front teeth usually would be were empty because he was missing them both. He laughed so hard that he started to snort. There was another time when we were out to dinner and each one of them was in their own highchair. Toby was looking over at different tables while smiling and basically flirting with older men who just thought she was cute. While Owen was in his highchair with his eyes closed, mouth wide open, head back, and snoring.

One time I promised Toby to take her out for frozen yogurt in town. On the way to town, she starts explaining to you that she has a crush on a boy in her class. She tells you every little detail, like each one is so special and important to share with me, her older sister. She even started to explain that she eavesdropped on her crush and his friend. She tells me that they were talking about her. Finally, we arrived at the frozen yogurt place, and she is at the end of her long marathon of a story but before we walk into the store she stops and tells me to promise not to tell mom. Ever. Of course, I say I won't. And I never did.

Toby used to do ballet like me, and I was backstage helping when I saw her standing in the corner of the room with a pillow over her head. I went over to her, and she started explaining to me that she is having friend problems. She tells me that her friends are gossiping to one another, but they weren't telling her what they were gossiping about. And then there I was in the past again, back to when I was eight and having the same problem.

****LOST****

When I was younger before I went to sleep, I imagined a life without my twin siblings, and I realized that there is none. There is no life without them. I may fight with them, and they may piss me off, or gang up on me, but at the end of the day, I realized there is nothing without them. And I smile to myself because I can't wait until they are old enough to talk to me like real siblings do.

****LOST****

I was so many things for them. Their second mother, their older sister, the person they hated and the person they loved, and sometimes I was even the tooth fairy for them, too many times to count. One time we were walking to town to meet my parents for dinner and Owen stopped in the middle of the sidewalk. I turned around to see what happened and he told me he just lost his tooth. I asked if he accidentally swallowed it and he said he didn't think so. So, we spent about twenty minutes looking on the sidewalk for a child's tooth. We finally found it and he was so happy. He thought that the tooth fairy wouldn't come if he lost it. There was another time when my parents were out of town, and I was watching them overnight. Toby had lost her tooth and I was supposed to put some money under her pillow after she fell asleep. I went up forty minutes after I put them to bed to check on them and slip five dollars under her pillow. She almost caught me because she woke up, but I hid the money quickly into my pocket before she could see it. Later in the night I went back up and put it under her pillow.

There was one time where Dad bought Mom a bullshit button and Owen fell in love with it. He would bring it everywhere with him. Every time he pressed it; he would copy what it said. One day it broke, and he cried so hard for so long.

When Toby was nine years old, she came into my room one day holding a tampon. She asked me if I needed one and said no. She then just stands at my door and starts to take the tube out of the wrapping and holds the tube part in one hand and the cotton part in the other. I started laughing and tried to tell her to throw it away because it was useless now. All she said to me was, "But I want to see how it works." She then asked me about shaving and how that works too. There are so many cute and funny memories of them that I have stored in my memory. The funny part is, they probably don't remember any of them because they were too young to remember.

****LOST****

We never explained to them what happened to me. We thought they were always way too young to understand. So, we never did.

There was one time where I was doing my homework at the island table. Toby was in her phase of ballet. She was standing on my left side. She asked if I could watch her do her ballet exercises. I said I would, but really, I didn't turn my head at all. I just kept doing my homework. A few moments passed and she asked me how she did. I replied to her saying, "Beautiful! Great job kiddo!" she smiled and skipped away with happiness. She didn't realize that I didn't see her do it because she was on my left side where my peripheral vision is cut off. Years later when I tried telling them about my vision, she remembered that exact moment and asked me about it. I didn't know what else to do except tell her the truth. So, I did. She got very upset at first but then she came to realize that I was different from her and everybody else and she gave me a big hug and apologized for getting so mad at me.

They are sixteen now and they still don't know the full story, but they know a bit about what happened to me. When I am ready and when I think they are old enough to understand I will tell them my side of the story.

Chapter Five: The Best Nana Anyone Could Ask For

Grandmothers and granddaughters have a bond that is different from grandfathers and granddaughters. A recent study shows that when a grandmother looks at a photo of their grandchild there is a part of their brain that is associated with emotional empathy. If the grandchild is the same gender as the parent, usually the grandmother's own child, there is more activation in areas of the brain that are linked with cognitive empathy. The difference between emotional empathy and cognitive empathy is quite interesting. Emotional empathy is feeling the emotions that another person is feeling. While cognitive empathy is more like understanding at a cognitive level what someone is really thinking or feeling and why. (Jacoby).

I am the second oldest grandchild on my mom's side of the family. My older cousin, Anya, is a year older than me. When she was born, my grandmother was attached to her. She was her favorite grandchild and has been for many years. Ever since Zaida passed away though, Nana has been getting closer to me because I am still around in the area. I check in with her to see how she is doing, and I make plans to see her often. When Zaida passed away Nana started taking me to the Strand for my Hanukkah present. She would also take me to a Broadway show just the two of us. I would pick a show out and we would go just to the two of us to see it. Before we went to the show, we would grab some dinner out. It would usually be Chinese food or Japanese food. We still do this to this day.

Nana and I now have a special bond. It is a different bond than Zaida and I had, but it is still special. Nana is on the spectrum just like her son and his son. She usually talks about what is on her mind, what she has done that day, or anything related to her. Sometimes she will ask me questions about my life but not all the time. She is a bit socially awkward, but I don't mind. She has done a lot for me in my life, and I am very grateful for everything she has done.

****LOST****

A few years ago, when I asked her about what happened to me when I was younger, she told me the facts. She said I did fall twice with mom from a kitchen table to ceramic flooring and once with dad at a Starbucks changing table. She then explained to me that even though I fell, I was also sick during that time with a cold. I was coughing and sneezing a lot. I had been sick for two weeks before I went into the hospital. She explained to me that I had fallen because I was sick.

To me, that makes no sense. How is it my fault that I fell and hit my head three times? I was only fourteen months old. It's not my fault. Maybe I did fall because I was sick, but why was I on the kitchen table with no one watching me? Why did that happen TWICE? I understand if it was an accident the first time. I mean I was the first born and my parents were new to parenting, but after the first fall why weren't they more careful the next time or the third time it happened? I will never understand that.

Years ago, before I knew all I know now about what happened to me, Nana sent me a New York Times article about Shaken Baby Syndrome. It was called, "Shaken Baby Syndrome: A Diagnosis That Divides the Medical World". The article was basically about a Shaken Baby Syndrome case in Boston in 1997 where a young eighteen-year-old British nanny, Louise Woodward, was on murder trial. She was accused of shaking and killing an eight-month-old boy. But the baby boy, Matthew Eappen, had injuries that predated when Ms. Woodward joined the family in Boston. The focus of the trial was the triad of symptoms. Ms. Woodward insisted her innocence from day one, but a jury had found her guilty of second-degree murder. She was

sentenced to fifteen years to life in prison. But within a few days, the judge called the murder conviction an injustice, so he knocked down the charge to involuntary manslaughter. That reduced her sentence to time already served 279 days. After this, she was free to go back to England. Many people in Massachusetts were outraged and the headlines were calling this the “Nanny Murder Trial.” (Haberma).

The article continues to explain the statistics of Shaken Baby Syndrome and child abuse. They also had a key witness who was a neuroradiologist, Dr. Barnes, at the Children’s Hospital in Boston who was adamant that it was shaken baby syndrome. After the trial though he rethought everything. He is now convinced that shaken baby syndrome has been referred to too readily in criminal cases and that there are other causes that might explain any bleeding and brain swelling. This can include infections, earlier injuries from accidental falls and sometimes strokes that occur in utero. There are other doctors who agree with him and question whether just shaking an infant could produce the triad symptoms. (Haberma).

Dr. Barnes does say that abuse exists and, “It’s our duty to protect children.” But families also need protection. He says that if he could testify again for the Woodward trial, he would say that “The medical findings do not confirm abuse and that the baby’s injuries ‘could have been accidental.’” The article continues with more doctors telling what they think and facts about shaken baby syndrome. (Haberma).

After reading the article I didn’t know what to think. I was more confused than anything else. But I didn’t tell anybody about my confusion or my questions. I just kept having them. They just kept piling up in my brain. Was it an accident, or was it child abuse, or was it a virus?

That article was published in 2015 about a 1997 case. To this day I think about all the other articles out there that told the same story. I think about all those kids who have died or have disabilities because of something that could either be child abuse, accidental, a virus, or

something else that doesn't exist yet. All those innocent parents and nannies who have spent years in prison for something they didn't do. All those families that will never get a real answer.

****LOST****

Nana was very helpful though and I was grateful for it. She had given me excel files of what occurred on what date, she transferred all the VCR home videos onto CDs for me too. She also gave me all Zaida's written notes about what happened to me. I read everything she gave me, and I watched the home videos. I wanted to see if I acted differently after what happened. I knew that I looked different after I got out of the hospital because I was always wearing a hat, or my hair was clipped to the left side because of the scar on the left side of my head. But I always wondered how I acted. There are a few videos where I could see some differences, but I had to watch very carefully.

I will always be thankful for everything that Nana has given me and helped me out with. I love the times I get to spend with her. I love doing things with her, even if it's just staying inside and drinking tea and talking. I love the stories she tells me about the patients she has helped, or the places she has traveled to, the books she has read, the stories of when she was young and just met Zaida, and the stories of their life together. I love visiting Zaida with her too. I look up to her and to him. I look up to their love together and their life together. I want a love like they had and still have forever and always.

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Chapter Six: Our Voices Matter

Teenagers think they know everything. They feel like they are on top of the world sometimes. That wasn't me. I knew I didn't know everything. I knew there were lots of things that I couldn't or wouldn't be able to do. And I didn't feel on top of the world.

I struggled with math, with science, multiple choice questions, asking questions in class, and my short-term memory was horrible. I barely have a short-term memory. It might not even exist.

I couldn't learn a second language. I had two study halls every day because that was when my class had their Mandarin or Spanish class. I just sat with some other students who were having trouble too. It was all boys. And me. There were four of us. Tommy, Sam, and Hunter. (Even though I had my struggles I was great at English and Cultural History. I learned how to be organized at a very young age too.)

We went to the Special Ed study halls. It was a classroom. There were two Special Ed teachers. One for middle school, Mr. Strong, and one for high school, Ms. Gillespie. I had known Ms. Gillespie since I was six years old. She knew everything about me. The good thing was, I already knew what to do.

I would sit in the back of the classroom and pull out my planner. I would write down all my homework that I had received so far throughout the day and put the due dates in the planner as well. I would then take out the homework I knew that I could do myself and start on that. While I was doing that Ms. Gillespie helped the boys. They had only one study hall while I had two. So, the harder homework or projects that I needed help with I could do later in the day when I came back to see Ms. Gillespie.

Before Ms. Gillespie I had Mr. Strong. Mr. Strong's classroom was right next to Ms. Gillespie's classroom. Sometimes when I was in high school, Ms. Gillespie needed to talk with the boys in private or it was too loud for me to work in there. I would go next door to Mr. Strong's room and sit and do my work there. He always offered to help if I needed it, sometimes I did, sometimes I didn't.

Mr. Strong knew that my middle name started with a J, but he would always forget what it was, so he made one up. Every time I would see him on the path, in the café, or when I would walk into his classroom he would say "Hello Alex Jane LaPierre! How are you today?" Or "Good morning, Alex Jane!" and even, "Good afternoon, Alex Jane! How are you on this fine afternoon?" My middle name is not "Jane" it's Joelle, after my great grandfather Joseph. But it was our little joke.

Anyways, when I was in high school, and I would sit in his room instead of Ms. Gillespie's room and he had other students in there he would go on and on about how I was one of his best students. How I never dilly dallied. He was also one of the only teachers that asked how my parents were and what had my siblings done this time. His mom Mrs. Strong was my fifth-grade math and science teacher and his sister, Ms. Strong, was my eighth and eleventh grade science teacher. When I was in eighth grade Mr. Strong would always ask me what his sister was up to and if I knew anything about her life or who she was dating.

At Ross, students weren't numbers. Every teacher, even if you only had one class with them, knew not just your name but who you were as a student and as a person. If the teacher was amazing, like most Ross teachers were when I went there, they would sort of become your friend and gossip or share personal things with you. They thought that if they did then we the students would feel comfortable talking to them about anything. It could be school related or not. Ross was a family. When I was a junior in high school something changed within me though. I would

get severe stomach aches, dizziness, camp in my abdomen, pain in my abdomen, and I would always have to be near a bathroom. The first sign that something was wrong with me was when I fainted while taking a shower and my mom had to help me get out.

I didn't go to school for a bit and was in bed for days. I went to doctors on Long Island and then my grandparents told my mom to take me to New York City to see a specialist. By the second trimester of my junior year, I was only going to school from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. I had been officially diagnosed with IBS. IBS is very difficult to diagnose. It took about five doctors until the specialist in New York City diagnosed me.

****LOST****

Ross was very understanding about all of this. I only went to my main four classes then I would be picked up and taken home to relax, sleep, and do my homework. I didn't take any electives. Because of that, I came up with my own elective. The seniors that year who oversaw the Student Arts website had put me in charge of it because they were graduating. No one wanted to contribute to the website though and Ross didn't have a literary arts magazine or a newspaper. I decided to make a literary arts magazine for Ross. I worked one on one with my favorite English teacher. I asked some of my friends if they wanted to contribute to the magazine and they did! Some of them wrote poems, short fiction, reports about what's going on in the world, paintings, drawings, and news about Ross. It took a while but after everything was done, I put all

the pages together. The school had given me some money so I could get them printed. Near the end of my junior year, I had created *Voices*, the first literary arts magazine at Ross.

We ordered about five hundred copies. The day they arrived I was so happy. I walked into Sam's classroom, my English teacher, and I asked if they had arrived yet. He dove underneath his desk and popped back up with a big box. As he opened the box, I got so nervous. I knew what it would look like. I came up with it. The name was my idea, I got a student to draw doodles on the cover and back and throughout the magazine as well. Finally, Sam handed me a copy. It was red with the word *Voices* on the front page. Inside the cover page was the contents with titles and the authors names. One of the first pieces was a short story I had written called *The Ocean*. The last page of the magazine was the credits page. My name was under creator and editor in chief. Some of my friends' names were there too. The next day, we went around campus putting the magazines out for students and teachers to read and look at. We also posted a pdf file of the whole magazine online.

I was happy that I had completed something that I thought the school needed for years. I had done it. It was my idea. I brought some copies home for myself, my parents, and both sets of my grandparents. We celebrated but my IBS didn't go away.

Back in tenth grade I was put into the slower math class. It wasn't the stupider math class, just slower. There were about five of us in the class. A mix of tenth-twelve graders. We were learning the same math that the other students were learning but just at a slower pace. It was actually very helpful to me. When I got my IBS though, for some reason I would always get nauseous during class, I think it was from looking at numbers and letters together. I would sit on the floor with a pillow during math and do the work there. It was only during math that I did this. The teacher was Ms. Gillespie, and she didn't mind. She wanted me to be comfortable and be able to do the work too.

Chapter Seven: A Saint or a Sinner?

I always thought of my dad as a saint not a sinner. He never left. He stayed. Even when I was in the hospital and my mom was in a mental health unit because her PTSD was new and triggering her too much. He stayed. He didn't get a divorce or leave to go back to Montreal. He was just there waiting for my mom and me to get better.

When I was younger, before my siblings were born, I was a Daddy's Girl. I thought the world of him. He was my superhero. My protector. My daddy. The one person that could save me from anything and everything. I knew he wouldn't leave me.

Dad was like all other dads. The cool one, the fun one. He would do the craziest and most fun things. He would read me *Narnia* before I went to sleep every night. When I was sad or upset, he would make me my favorite dinner, homemade mac and cheese with breadcrumbs on top, or nachos, or lollipop lamb chops with mashed potatoes. When he picked me up from school or when I had nothing to do but drive with him and do errands, he would buy me coffee or tea. We watched romantic comedies, scary movies, romantic dramas, really any show or movie I was interested in we would watch together. It was always my choice. We still watch tv shows to this day. Usually, it's a detective or cop show like *Psych* or *Wallander*. But still, it's always my choice.

Dad was and still is very much into Halloween. It is his favorite holiday. I think one of the reasons it's his favorite holiday is because I grew up in a Jewish home and him being Protestant, we always went too crazy with Halloween. My costumes were always homemade by him. The Halloween costumes that stick out to me over the years when I was younger are, a blue butterfly, a zebra, a bright feathery flamingo, and a Furby. He would cut out black cats and bats and stick them on the walls inside the house. On our white picket fence in the front, he would

wrap a white spider web across the fence and stick small different colored spiders and other insects in it. Then he would wrap orange lights around the fence as well and all of Halloween weekend the lights would be on. There would be this big black spider with orange stripes attached to the front door with a skull or skeleton guy that would make creepy noises or talk to you in a scary voice when you walked up to the door. Kids would jump and get scared right before they knocked to get their candy.

A week or so before Halloween we would go pick out pumpkins in a pumpkin patch. We could pick any pumpkin we wanted. That weekend before Halloween we would have a pumpkin carving party. A few of my friends, my parents' friends, and then my siblings' friends would come over around 5:00 pm on a Friday or Saturday night and we would order pizza for everyone. The dining room and living room would be covered with garbage bags and newspapers. Everyone would bring their own pumpkins and find a spot and carve their pumpkin. There would be scary music going on in the background and appetizers in the kitchen. At the end of the night when everyone would leave, we would put our family carved pumpkins in the front of the house. All lined up next to each other.

Before my siblings were born my mom surfed. The three of us and Hudson would go to the beach with three chairs, a book or two, a surfboard, and sandcastle toys. Mom would run out into the cold swishing waves with her surfboard and Hudson would run after her into the waves. Dad and I would start building sandcastles then. We would start from the middle and go outwards. In the middle would be a big sandcastle and around it a moat and then smaller sandcastles around the moat. We would walk and look for jingle shells, pretty rocks, and seashells to decorate our sandcastles. When mom came back from surfing, Hudson panting like crazy, we would sit in our chairs and read. Dad would continue to read *Narnia* while mom read her own book. It's these days that I remember and look back on.

When I turned thirteen, I had my Bat Mitzvah. We had a huge party afterwards with lots of dancing and getting lifted into chairs. We had amazing, delicious foods like bagels and lox, noodle kugel, mudpies, a chocolate fountain that people could dip fruit or anything they wanted in it, and lots more flavorful foods. There was a cake that had thirteen candles on it and each candle someone special who I had picked out would come and light the candle and say a few words about me or to me. Before any dancing though, there is a father daughter dance, just like at a wedding. I had chosen a song that reminded me of my relationship with my dad when I was younger. The song is called "Cinderella" by Steven Curtis Chapman. It's about a father and daughter dancing throughout the years until she gets engaged and married. The daughter is his Cinderella. I am my dad's Cinderella.

He was there for me when I went to my first prom. Mom had to go to Paris with my nana because she had to go to a conference and make a speech, but she just had her hip replacement and needed someone to push her wheelchair for her, so she wasn't there. She bought me gold sparkly heels for the occasion though and got my hairdresser to come to the house to do my hair and my makeup. I did the thing that all girls in movies do when their date arrives to pick them up. I walked down the stairs wearing my white one shouldered dress with my gold sparkly heels, my hair curled but not too curled. After my date gave me my corsage and took photos of us, his parents took photos of dad and me. We looked so happy. After prom instead of going to an after party all I wanted was to go home and watch a romantic movie with dad and have some homemade chocolate chip cookies. That is exactly what happened.

****LOST****

My dad has never really talked about his side of what happened to me. He has stories of what he was thinking during the time but that's all. It's like he has repressed or has been traumatized to the point where he can't find the words to explain what happened. There are two stories that he has told me which are very sad.

One of them is about my burning finger. While I was in a coma, I had a shunt in my head and all these wires and tubes around me. I had something on my finger that was burning it. He has told me, "I was focused on the burning of the finger and the scab that would happen on the finger. But in the meantime, there were all these more important things going on, like you were coming out of the coma, people would not know how you would recover, if you would recover, and I was trying to understand all of it, and it was hard to understand. And I remember focusing on this little, tiny red bulb, like a Christmas tree bulb, even smaller than that. That was on your finger, that was burning your finger. That was what I was focused on."

Another story that he has told me is about him talking to one of my doctors about my vision. The doctor had just told my parents that I wouldn't have any peripheral vision on my left side. Dad was more worried than Mom. He kept asking the doctor all these questions about it. He asked the doctor, what if I became a tennis player, (I did play tennis for a bit in elementary school and middle school), the doctor told him that I would never be able to play the game. My dad continued and asked if I could play the piano. The doctor said no I wouldn't be able to play the piano because my left hand would never be that strong enough.

He continued and asked about driving and if I would be able to drive. The doctor told him that, yes, she can if she puts her mind to it. He told him that I would need to turn my head more than anyone else and have extra mirrors on my car. When I was graduating high school, my grandparents bought me a 2015 Subaru Forester. It was the car that I had picked out too! The car was very fancy though. It made lots of noises to help me with driving. If I drove over the yellow

lane or the shoulder the car would beep at me. If the car in front of me started to go faster than my car would automatically change speeds, it also did the reverse of that too. I also had extra mirrors on my car to help me as well.

The last and saddest question my dad asked the doctor was what if I were sitting at a bar and the love of my life was sitting next to me on my left side. How would I know? What would I do? The doctor told him that I wouldn't know unless the guy or I started talking to each other. Again, I would need to turn my head. Otherwise, I wouldn't know.

There is another story that Uncle T told me when I was about eighteen years old. He said that my parents were leaving the hospital to go take a four-hour sleep break and Uncle T was watching me. Before they left though, dad told Uncle T that if any social worker or CPS worker came by that my uncle had to unplug me from everything and take me to Canada. How would this help, you ask? I don't have the answer to that.

****LOST****

I thought so highly of him when I was younger. Then everything changed on Thanksgiving in 2016.

Chapter Eight: The Summer I Became an Adult

Teenagers think they know everything. They think they can do anything too. They think they are the kings and queens of the world, and they don't care about what happens. They don't think about the consequences of what they do until it's too late. Parents of teenagers must realize that this is part of growing up. Everyone goes through it, but when a parent has their first teenager, they don't know what to do. Parents must remember that during the teenage years their kids are going through biological growth and development, an undefined status, increased decision making, increased pressures from everything, and of course, the search for the self. I am the oldest, which means I am also the guinea pig. Whatever mistakes they made with me they won't do with my siblings. Everything that was good parenting, they will do to my siblings. But parents must remember that each kid is different from the other, and that each kid needs to be parented differently.

When I was fourteen, the summer before my freshman year of high school, I did something that really upset my parents. I made a mistake and got in trouble for it.

I was working at two summer camps that summer. One of them was the Ross School's early childhood summer program and the other was a counselor at a tennis camp. I started the tennis camp first. One of the first days I walked in all happy and excited to work with kids in the arts and crafts area. If the kids weren't playing tennis there was a playground and a garage where they could draw, paint, make bracelets with string and beads. Basically, everything that was arts and crafts was in that garage.

I knew the owner of the camp because he used to teach me tennis when I was younger, but when I walked in on the first day there was a young, handsome, cute, man. He introduced himself as Daniel. He didn't give me his last name. He gave me a high five and showed me the

ropes. He explained to me that he was the guy who oversaw all the counselors. And just like that, we were friends. Every morning when I walked into the building Daniel would give me a high five and a smile.

**** LOST****

After two weeks of working at the camp I switched to go work at the Ross School camp. On the fourth day of not being at the tennis camp I got a random text from someone I didn't know. It said, "Hey, when are you coming back?" I asked who it was, and they responded saying that it was Daniel. We texted back and forth for a while. We got to know each other better, we told each other our secrets, or rather the things I thought were secrets at the age of fourteen. We got very close. We even started to send pictures of each other.

After two weeks of texting each other I went back to the tennis camp. Daniel was so happy that I had come back. When I returned though, our friendship had turned into flirtation. We were flirting with each other, but we were trying to do it so no one else would see. This was very difficult. He would come over and check in on me and the kids and as he did, he would graze my lower back and smile his soft, sweet smile or give me a wink. At the end of the day, I would stay late to help him do laundry at the camp and when we were waiting for the laundry to be done, we would make out on the washer and dryer. At fourteen, that is very fun and hot to do.

After a week or so of doing this, he asked if I wanted to hang out with him at his dad's house. He told me his dad's girlfriend was there but that we could just go to his room to hang, watch a movie, and talk. I told mom that I was hanging out with the counselors' and that I had a

ride home. We ended up going to his dad's house twice. We never watched a movie though. We ended up talking about our lives and making out a lot. The making out turned into sleeping together eventually.

****LOST****

Yes, I know, he was twenty-two and I was only fourteen, but we liked each other, and it was a real relationship. Even if we were being very secretive about it. Remember, teenagers love secrets and hiding things from their parents. And that is exactly what I did. It felt exhilarating! It was my first time, but I trusted Daniel. He made me feel like I was older. He treated me like his girlfriend and said that I was very mature for my age. Of course, I decided to tell my best friend Sara at the time. She was happy for me but told me to be careful. She wanted to know all the details though, like any other friend would.

One afternoon when the kids were all leaving Daniel asked if I wanted to go to his mom's house instead of his dad's house. He said that he had a surprise evening set up for me. So, we went.

I texted Sara telling her that he had a surprise for me. He told me that he was going to make me a homemade dinner and dessert and that we would watch a movie and cuddle. I told Sara all this over text. But we never did any of that.

While we were kissing and waiting for dinner to be ready mom called me asking where I was. I lied and told her I was with the counselors at the beach having a bonfire. She didn't

believe me. She wanted me to go back to the tennis camp and she said she would meet me there. She had never met Daniel and didn't know anything about him. At least not yet.

Daniel and I raced to the car and drove ten minutes to the camp. We arrived around the same time as mom did. On the way there I deleted all our texts between each other. All the pictures on my phone of him as well. I even deleted his contact. When we got there Mom got out of the car and told me to go in the car. She went over to go talk to Daniel. Before I left to go to the car, I told him how sorry I was. Mom asked him questions about his age, where he went to college, how he knows the owner of the camp. She started to yell at him at some point. She told him that she was going to talk to the owner of the camp and then she got in the car to talk to me. She asked me questions and I answered them honestly. Her questions were straight forward like, "Did he hurt you?" "What did he do to you?" "Are you okay?" She never yelled at me though. She looked through my phone too because she thought I was lying to her. She found the texts that I sent Sara and that was it. I asked her how she knew because I thought she could read my mind back then, but she said it was just my mother's intuition.

****LOST****

We drove home in silence. When we got home, we went to go talk to Dad. He started yelling and using what my family calls, 'The Harsh Voice.' Mom told him to calm down because he was scaring me, but he didn't. I started to go towards mom and cuddle up next to her because I hated it when he acted like that. It always scared me. He asked difficult questions that usually a

fourteen-year-old girl and their dad wouldn't talk about. Ever. He even started talking about how he could be deported back to Canada because he is on the child abuse registry and because of what happened with Daniel. I told them everything except that I slept with Daniel.

They decided that I should go to the cops. I was an innocent victim that had been "raped" and they wanted Daniel to go to prison. So, I went to go talk to the cops. I arrived at the police station around 5:00 pm and started talking to a young detective. Around 7:00 pm the chief came in and asked if I wanted dinner. They ordered pizza, soda, and garlic knots. I continued telling the detective my side of what happened. I told him everything. He told me that I needed to go talk to the ADA and that we had to drive around looking for the houses that I went to with Daniel.

So, for the next week and a half I drove around East Hampton looking for the houses I had been to in an undercover cop car. I didn't really remember how I got there from the tennis camp, but I knew what the houses looked like. I explained to the detective that Daniel's dad's house was a modern looking house, and the roof was tilted downwards. He had an orange circular table in the front with two bright orange chairs. We found that house first. Daniel's mom's house was in the opposite direction but only ten minutes away. Her house was smaller, it was a one-story house. In the backyard was a hot tub. In the windows that were facing the front had sailboats in them.

The week after that I went up island with the detective to talk to the ADA and tell her my side of what happened. Apparently during this time my parents were talking to his parents. I told the ADA that we flirted, kissed, and slept together. I explained to her that it was all consensual and mutual. I also explained the timeline of everything as well. She asked if I wanted him to go to jail and I said no. I didn't want him to go to jail. I cared about him. She said that if I went in front of a grand jury that I would then probably have to go in front of a bigger jury with Daniel

sitting across from me when I explained to the court what happened. I told the ADA that I didn't want that. She told me that she understood and that that wouldn't happen but that something did have to happen to him. I asked what the smallest thing was that could happen to him, and she said he could go to jail for nine months and then be put on the registry.

So, that's what happened.

I felt horrible and sad. I just kept thinking about what he told me before mom came. He said, "if you need anything at all I am always here for you. Just text me or give me a call." I spent the rest of the summer doing pretty much nothing. When school started, I tried not to think about it, and I didn't tell anyone either. Anytime we drove in East Hampton I always thought I saw him driving in a car or walking by somewhere. But I never did. I never saw or heard from him ever again.

Chapter Nine: My Person

Grandfathers and granddaughters have a special bond that never goes away. It's a bond that is different from any other bond. When a man becomes a grandfather, he is the happiest man on earth. He realizes that he now has someone who he can spoil and treat like a prince or princess. He gets to do everything and more that he didn't do with his own children.

My Zaida was my rock. He was my anchor. He kept me afloat when everyone else was going crazy. He was always there for me no matter what. I was his second grandchild. When my cousin, Anya, who is a year older than me was born my Nana connected to her immediately and it was always about her. But then I was born, and my Zaida did the same thing my Nana did to Anya to me.

He loved reading my creative writing pieces when I was younger. I would only give them to him to read. He would keep them in a folder in his office and just keep adding to the folder whenever I gave him a new one. I would usually give him a new piece of writing for Chanukah or his birthday. He would always ask me what book I was reading and if he hadn't read it then he would go out and buy it and read it on his own and then talk to me about it when we both finished it.

For my birthday he would always take me to the Strand in New York City, and I was allowed to pick out any and all books. We would stay at the Strand for hours on end and once I thought that I had enough books I would find him usually on the rare book floor or the first floor waiting for me in a chair. He would always look over the books I picked out and give me suggestions on some I should get before we checked them all out.

During Thanksgiving break we would go to the city to see my grandparents. They would take Anya and I out to the Big Apple Circus every year. We loved it. On Thanksgiving we would go to one of their friend's apartments that overlooked the parade. We would spend the morning eating bagels and lox, fruit, chocolate croissants, chocolate, babka, cookies, and so much more. We then would find a good spot by one of the windows and we would just sit there and watch as the balloons went by, the celebrities singing, the marching bands, and the floats. My favorite part was always Snoopy floating by and the celebrities singing on the floats.

On Passover when it was time to hide the afikomen he would always be the one to hide it. All the grandchildren, the five of us, would have time in between meals to run around the apartment and find it. Whoever found it first would get a prize. But because there were five of us, each of us would get our own prize or as we got older some cash. There was one year that I remember very well where he left to go hide the afikomen and a couple of minutes later he came back and sat down at the head of the table. The five grandchildren, Anya, me, Asher, Owen, and Toby got up and ran around the apartment looking for it. Sometimes we would team up to look for it faster. After ten minutes we couldn't find it, so we all trailed back to the table with sad pouty faces on. He looked over at me and smiled his, "I played a trick on you" smile. I looked at him as I walked over to his chair. I looked at his seat and under it, I then gave him a hug and as I gave him a hug, I realized that he was hugging me but not the usual love hard hug. I thought that was strange, so I patted his pocket that was on his suit. Something was in his pocket. I then jumped up excitedly and he fished in his pocket and brought out the afikomen. He handed it to me and smiled.

As you can probably tell, Zaida was a jokester. He would make the funniest jokes all the time. He loved to make people laugh. When I was younger, I wouldn't get the jokes sometimes but as I got older, I did. We would come up with our own inside jokes as well.

****LOST****

Zaida was a doctor. More specifically, he was a dermatologist. He worked at different hospitals for a few years and after his residency he worked at a separate office for just dermatology. As I got older, he then made his own practice with one of his friends. It was their own practice for dermatology. They had their own nurses there and different doctors there too. Zaida's office was one of the bigger offices. His desk was a dark wooden oak with files and files on top of each other. His chair behind his desk was also made from dark wood and it spun. Sometimes I would go hang out and visit him while he worked. He would be in a room with a patient while I waited in his spinney chair reading. His nurses would come in and check on me sometimes and bring me snacks and hot coco. I became very close to the nurses that worked there. After he was done with his patients, he would treat me with gelato or hot coco and then we would take a taxi back to the apartment.

****LOST****

When I was in the hospital during my traumatic brain injury Zaida took his own notes about what was going on, who the doctors were, and what he thought about the whole thing. Every night around midnight he would check the clipboard hanging on the front of my hospital

bed. He would read it over and write it all down then he would go home and rewrite all his notes on his typewriter. I have some of his notes to this day which has been helpful to me.

In his notes he says that on the evening of April 15th, 1999, which was a Thursday, Mom had called him to tell him that I had fallen from the kitchen counter onto the ceramic tile floor. The next day, Friday, dad had left for work at 7:00 am and mom left for work at 9:00 am. Sophie spent the rest of the day with me. The play group that Sophie and I usually went to wasn't meeting on Friday so instead Sophie took me to Denny's for lunch and then we went back home.

Dad came home early that day because he was tired. When he came home, he found Sophie holding a "sleeping" me. He then went upstairs to take a nap. After a short time, Sophie went upstairs to wake him and tell him that I was having strange movements. Dad then called mom's office to tell her that he was taking me and Sophie to the emergency room. When we arrived at the emergency room the doctors began treating me for seizures with an IV Valium. Dad called Zaida and Uncle Steve to let them know. Zaida then called Dr Fred Epstein who spoke to Dr Canute who was the neurosurgeon at Syracuse University Hospital. In Zaida's notes he writes, "Apparently the child had a subdural hematoma, retinal hemorrhages, and was drowsy."

He continues in his notes, on Saturday both Dr. Hennen, the pediatric intensivist on duty that week and Dr Canute told them that I was doing well. That the subdural hematoma was resolving and that my grandparents should consider returning to New York City. On Saturday evening my grandparents did go back to the city. On Sunday Zaida called the step-down unit where I had been admitted at Dr Hennen's insistence rather than going to the Pediatric ICU where Dr Canute wanted me to go. Dr Canute did tell Zaida that I was doing well though.

On Sunday evening I was nursed and had a seizure. More examination apparently revealed bruises over the eyes and neck. I had had an earlier normal MRI and MRA and an

angiogram that was all normal. Meanwhile though, these examinations showed increased swelling, especially on the right side and some thalamic involvement. The doctors began talking about a “stroke” and that I did develop left sided weakness and deviation of the eyes to the right. Nana had left for an important trip to Washington, DC that same day. Late in the evening mom called Zaida and told him that I was worse. He arranged to take the earliest plane on Monday. Zaida called Nana and told her everything. He also called his partner, Dr. Pearlstein to cover him on Monday and for the rest of the week.

On Monday morning at the hospital Zaida found me in the Pediatric ICU. I was placed on IV fluids, oxygen, an arterial line, monitoring of vital functions, and a tube in the ventricle to relieve the increasing pressure. There were no previous measures that were taken to deal with increased intracranial pressure.

This followed a week of mom, dad, and Zaida taking turns sitting at my bedside talking to me, reading to me, showing me pictures, and playing with me. There was always a member of the family at my bedside.

There was also a Dr Higgins who was a pediatric neurosurgeon. When he returned, he became my attending physician. There was a pediatric neurology meeting the previous week and weekend and the pediatric neurologist, Dr Crosley, also returned and started following me with Dr Higgins. Either Monday or Tuesday of that week Dr Higgins had a two-hour conference with my parents, Zaida, and Nana. He told them that based on the CAT scans and MRI he felt there would be a permanent left visual field defect. But aside from that he couldn't predict any neurological deficits. He said that only time would tell but that given my age it was significant that recovery could take place. Dr Higgin's words were “the sky's the limit”. Anything new that developed though, could only be negative news.

Zaida's notes continue...

From the first day in the ICU the physicians told them that CPS was notified at the time that I was brought in the ER. Dr Rogasta, a pediatric intensivist, was on that week and he was the intensivist that had the greatest contact with me. He told them that because they were all middle-class white professionals CPS would come very hard on them. The problem was that they didn't process that information at that time because their only concern was the medical and neurological condition of me. The social worker on the floor asked them to talk to CPS when they came to the unit, and they all agreed. But they never came to the unit.

Mom was continually distraught, intermittently crying, and felt that this was no time for CPS because she knew she would become more upset. CPS immediately turned over the investigation to the police, at which point, upon the advice of their attorney in New York City, they sought legal advice in Syracuse. The police had questioned Sophie for about five hours already and allowed her to return to Paris, but my family didn't know this at the time. Whatever else Sophie said she did state that mom and dad were loving parents.

I began to recover, and I was moved to the "step-down" unit. Dr Higgins had returned while I was in the ICU and as the pediatric neurosurgeon became the attending with Dr. Rogasta. Dr Crosley also returned and followed me with other doctors. Improvement continued and I was moved to a regular pediatric floor.

Nana and Zaida returned to the City on April 26th, 1999, and Uncle Steve stayed with me and my parents for the following week. I was still in the ICU and either my parents, grandparents, or Uncle Steve was always with me.

On May 5th, 1999, at 11:15 am while Zaida was in his office, dad called him to tell him there was a CPS hearing in court at 2:00 pm that day! They hadn't been notified before at all. They were later told that as soon as CPS heard the word "discharge" from the hospital, they "struck" (this was the word that was used by a New York City Guardian Lawyer). This was the

first of a series of peremptory actions by CPS. CPS didn't have the courtesy to notify my family's lawyer who had asked to meet with them and was repeatedly rebuffed. The lawyer had offered to meet anytime the previous Friday and Ms. Jasper, the social worker, agreed to call and set a time. She never did.

In Zaida's notes he goes back to 11:15 am on May 5th...

He walked out of his office in the middle of seeing patients. He asked the staff to find his partner who was scheduled to start at 1:00 pm. Nana and he managed to catch a plane which got them to Syracuse and to the courthouse to only be told that they would not be allowed in the courtroom. The next thing Zaida knew was that the courtroom door opened, and Nana and Zaida heard the judge say, "Petition granted!" They heard Mom crying out, "You can't take my baby away!" I had been placed into foster care without any evidence that my caring nonviolent parents had done no harm! Neither Nana and Zaida's lawyer nor Mom and Dad's lawyer were not allowed to say one word during the "hearing". CPS presented its case, an undated letter from Dr. Hennen saying, "nonaccidental trauma" and that took a child from its parents.

After this, Zaida's notes fast forward a bit to July 23rd, 1999, which was a Friday. On this Friday their attorney, Mike Varvonese, met and agreed to remove the order of protection. He also said that they would have an acquittal contemplating dismissal and maybe submit to a charge of negligence. The last despite Dr Blatt, my pediatrician, and everyone else stated that the falling from the counter is not negligence. This was to be confirmed in a courtroom with a judge on Tuesday July 27th, 1999.

On Tuesday July 27th, 1999, it never went before the judge. Ms. Jasper threatened to start proceedings all over again with a petition for guardianship by CPS unless supervision stayed in place and both of my parents were kept in the computer under a potential charge of negligence. And so, it was left with an acquittal contemplating dismissal, removal of the original petition by

CPS and neither my grandparents nor Ada had to be with me when either parent was in the house. The acquittal contemplating dismissal agreement mandated psychological counseling for both of my parents. All these events had been so traumatic that mom had started seeing a psychiatrist, Dr. Frances G. Haxton.

At a previous hearing on July 8th, it had been agreed that my parents could be in the house overnight. Which was good news.

Zaida fast forwards his notes again to August 4th, 1999. On this day mom called Zaida in Connecticut. She said that apparently while I was walking in the kitchen with a special padded rubber floor, I fell. Ada was there when it happened and even though this was the type of fall that children learning to walk have all the time, mom got very upset. She spoke to Dr. Higgins about whether I could have a head injury from such a fall, and did I need a motorcycle helmet, etc. Dr. Higgins laughed this off and assured mom that falling while walking or running couldn't do any damage.

But mom was so upset about the possibility of me getting hurt that she discussed this with her psychiatrist in terms of her fears for me. And at 2:00 pm on August 4th, 1999, Dr. Haxton, mom's psychiatrist, reported the fall of July 3rd, 1999, to the 800-hotline number for child neglect. Mom had a session with her immediately after that at which time she told mom she had been concerned about her legal obligation to report the fall. She thought mom was crying for help to protect her child!

Zaida then asks a question in his notes, "Why didn't she discuss this with her patient?" Her patient being Mom. Instead, she discussed this for hours with an attorney in Long Island who might've been a relative. This person insisted to Dr. Haxton that she had to report it. The legal advice, of course, was wrong as confirmed by a professional children's legal guardian, who was a family friend. Dr. Haxton then proceeded to get mom terribly upset by telling her anyone

could have shaken me. Dr. Haxton, just like CPS, ignored the timing involved in shaken baby syndrome with retinal hemorrhage, subdural hematoma, and brain swelling. So, Dr. Haxton reported the fall to the hotline to protect her legal ass and Ms. Jasper wouldn't let go for the same reason and who knows what else.

Meanwhile as of August 5th, 1999, Ada had flown back to Syracuse in case CPS acted on Dr. Haxton's erroneous report. Dr. Haxton refused to talk to mom's attorney. He tried to get in touch with Dr. Haxton's attorney.

**** LOST ****

Zaida passed away in November of 2017. A couple of years before he too had a traumatic brain injury. He fell and hit his head. He became paralyzed and was in a wheelchair and couldn't really talk. Most of the time he wasn't coherent or knew where he was but sometimes, he was, and he did know.

He went to rehab in the hospital. He wanted all his nurses and doctors to call him "Dr. Auerbach" instead of "Robert" or "Bob". Nana had hired an aid as well that was with him 24/7. Deloria, the aid, became part of our family.

There were two weeks when he first fell where he was in the hospital, and we were in New York City to see him during spring break. For those two weeks I would drop my brother and sister off at a camp close by and then take a taxi to see him. I spent every day there for two weeks from 9:00 am to 10:00 pm with him. When a nurse or a doctor came in to see him and he

would start to yell I would calm him down. He would tell them that they were doing it incorrectly and then would explain how to do it. When a physical therapist, speech therapist, or occupational therapist would come in to do exercises with him he wouldn't do them. When this happened, I would say to him, "Zaida, remember when I had my traumatic brain injury? I had all these therapies too and you helped me through them. I am right here, and I will help you through them too."

There was one day where we were all there at the hospital and I went down to the cafeteria to get people lunch. When I came back up to his room, he was sitting up more in his bed, and he knew where he was. He saw that I had bought four diet cokes for myself, mom, Nana, and Deloria. He turned to me and said, "Why did you buy diet coke?! You know that diet coke is bad for you, and it will give you cancer one day. You should stop drinking it!" I just smiled when he said this. This was his old self. The self he was before he fell. In those moments, even if he was yelling, I would smile and remember them.

When he became an outpatient for rehab, he came to Sag Harbor more often with Deloria and Nana. He liked it better and it was quieter than the city. His physical therapist would come to the house for his sessions. There was one session that I was there for. This was a session where he accomplished a lot. He got out of his chair with some help, and he stood holding onto a doorknob for support by himself! I was so proud of him.

During the 2016 elections when it was between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton, we went to my grandparents' house to watch the votes being counted. Halfway through the counting when mom, Nana, Deloria, and I realized that Trump was going to win, Zaida made a joke. It was a joke about what was going on and he knew that Trump was going to win because he was following along too. In that hard moment for all of us he made us laugh and forget about Trump winning for just a few moments. It was a good time.

When the day came for us to let go was a horrible day. I was in school at Wheaton College in Norton Massachusetts. Mom called me to tell me that the next day I had to get on a train and pick up my cousin Asher in Rhode Island and come to the city. So that's what we did. The train stopped in Rhode Island, I got Asher, and we rode all the way to Penn Station. Leslie, my mom's cousin, and Asher's mom picked us up and we went to the hospital. Everyone was already there. Zaida's sister, Nana, mom, dad, Owen, Toby, Anya, Uncle Steve, and Deloria. We were just waiting for Zaida's brother, who was coming from North Carolina.

While we waited in Zaida's hospital room for his brother to arrive, we told each other different stories about Zaida. Happy ones and funny ones. During this time, Zaida was in the hospital bed with all these wires attached to him and was only breathing because he was on full life support. That's how we knew it was time.

Each of us had our own turn to go say goodbye to him with no one else in the room. When we were all ready, we huddled around him and let him go. As we did this, I was holding his hand and sitting partly on his bed next to him. When the machines started to beep, we all knew. My cousins, my siblings, and I sat on the floor of the room after this in birth order just hugging and holding each other. No one said a word.

We sat shiva and at his funeral I read a eulogy that I wrote to him. It was very special, and everyone loved it. The room for the funeral was packed. There were not enough spots for everyone. We had family come, family friends, his patients came, his doctors and nurses, the nurses he worked with at his practice, and people I hadn't seen since I was very young. After the funeral people kept on coming up to me and telling me what an amazing piece of writing that was. It was my last writing piece that I shared with him.

Zaida will always be my rock and my anchor. He will always be in my heart forever. When I am married, and I have my son I will name him Kai Robert. Just after my Zaida.

Chapter Ten: Why I Hate Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is supposed to be a day of thanks. A day where everyone celebrates with their family and friends. It's supposed to be a day to remember the past year and what you're grateful for. You spend the day in the kitchen making all the foods and desserts that you will eat with your loved ones later in the day. The kitchen is full of love and laughter and delicious smells that fill the whole house.

Usually for Thanksgiving my family and I go into New York City to spend it with mom's side of the family. Aunt Karen would spend the day in her kitchen cooking everything with the help of my older cousin, Anya. There would always be a turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, green beans, and a salad. For dessert there would always be homemade chocolate cake with caramel or a flourless chocolate cake, a homemade pumpkin pie, and apple fritters. At the beginning of dinner before we started to eat, we would go around the table and say what we were thankful for. It was and still is a tradition in our family.

During my year off when I was eighteen, I was a teacher's assistant at the lower Ross school. During this year we stopped going to the city for Thanksgiving. We did it out in Sag Harbor that year with my grandparents, my mom's family, and my dad's family. My mom's family stayed in my grandparents' house while my dad's family stayed with us. They slept in the cottage on our property. That year we didn't celebrate Thanksgiving on Thanksgiving Day either because my younger cousin was in a boarding school and his break didn't start until the day after Thanksgiving.

On the evening of Thanksgiving the show *Gilmore Girls* was coming out with their sequel to the show, *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*. It was a Netflix original, and it was supposed to be released on Netflix at midnight. I had watched the original show with mom, but

my Canadian cousins wanted to watch the sequel with me because it wasn't on Canada's Netflix yet. So, me and my cousins were all cuddled up with blankets and pajamas on the couch with our bowls of salt and vinegar chips and sour cream and onion chips too. Aunt Cary and Uncle T were in the kitchen drinking with OJ. While dad was sitting at the dining room table doing work and mom was in her bed asleep.

Back then my siblings were about eleven years old. Their bedtime was 9:30 pm back then. It was around 11:30 pm and Toby was still downstairs hanging out with our cousins. I told her that it was her bedtime and she stomped upstairs crying. Dad went upstairs a few minutes later because he heard what was going on between us. When he came down the stairs I was sitting on the couch in between my cousins. He pulled my left wrist and twisted it as he was pulling me up off the couch. While he was doing that he was saying in his harsh voice, "You are going to apologize to Toby right now!" I started to explain myself, but he covered my mouth with his other hand while he pulled me up the stairs, still twisting my wrist. The hand the was covering my mouth slipped down to my throat and he squeezed his hand around my throat while pushing my back against the railing of the stairs. Finally, we got upstairs, and he pushed me down to the floor and left the room.

I was on the floor of the twins' room crying and holding my arm. I tried to turn to look at my back because my back hurt too. My throat hurt as well. Everything really hurt. Owen came over to me and asked what was wrong. Through my tears I tried to explain what happened. Toby was still in her bed, but she perked up and listened. Owen gave me a hug and tried to help me stop crying. Through my tears as I was explaining what happened I said, "I am truly sorry Toby. I really am. But dad just abused me."

When I said that Toby immediately stammered, "No he didn't! No, he would never do that!" I tried to explain again to her what happened, but she wasn't listening, so I got up slowly

making faces that I was in pain and walked down the stairs. I walked right by my cousins on the couch and into my parents' room.

I tried waking up Mom by patting her on the shoulder. She woke up to me doing that and to the sound of me still crying. She sat up in bed quickly. "What's wrong? What happened?" "Dad twisted my wrist and pulled me up the stairs. He choked me and pushed me against the railing." I was sobbing now.

I was spilling out everything that just happened onto Mom, and all she said in response was, "Do you want me to divorce him?" She never asked if I was okay or anything. Just that question. I answered simply with a nod and a blubbing "Yes!" She then told me that I would be okay and to go put ice on my wrist.

I walked through the dining room where Dad was sitting. I completely ignored him. When I got to the kitchen, I saw my aunt, uncle, and OJ still drinking and talking. They saw me come in holding my left wrist and hyperventilating but they didn't say anything and neither did I. I put some ice in a bag and walked back through the dining room into the living room. Everyone was silent. My cousins didn't say a word. My aunt and uncle didn't say anything. OJ didn't even say anything. They were all witnesses to what happened, but everyone stayed silent.

My cousins and I started to watch the show. Soon after we started, Cary, Thomas, and OJ left to go to the cottage for the night. After an episode or two my cousins left to go to sleep too so I went into my room. By then my wrist had started to swell up. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to talk to him, and I didn't want to get into trouble again, but I was in horrible pain. I took some ibuprofen and watched some tv before I fell asleep.

The next morning didn't go as I thought it would. When I woke up dad was in the kitchen making breakfast for everyone. Everyone was talking and smiling to one another. I took some food and went to sit down by myself. After I was done eating, I went to go talk to mom. I told

her that I was in lots of pain and that my wrist was swelling up. I asked if she could drive me to the ER. She replied by saying, “We can wrap it now and if it is still in pain tomorrow Dad will take you to the ER.”

“I don’t want dad to take me. I want you to take me. I don’t want to talk to him, and I don’t want him near me. He must always be at least five feet away from me.”

“Okay. I understand. Can he at least wrap it for you? He is better at that than I am. I will tell him that he can’t talk to you or go near you otherwise.”

I replied with, “Fine. But promise that if I am still in pain we can go to the ER.”

She promised.

I was sitting at the island on a stool when Dad came over to wrap my wrist up. I started to tear up because of how much it hurt. When he finished wrapping it, he tried to talk to me, but I interrupted him and said, “Five feet. You must stay five feet away from me. I don’t want to talk to you either.” He respected my wishes and left.

Everyone did their own thing that day. Some people helped with cooking, others went on a dog walk, while I just hung out by myself reading a book. Later in the day around 5:30 pm we drove over to my grandparents’ house for Thanksgiving dinner. Aunt Karen had cooked basically everything like usual. They set it up like a buffet as well. The grownups all got their own table while all the cousins sat in the living room to eat. Before dessert was put out mom came over to me with Karen and whispered that we should go upstairs.

The three of us went upstairs to talk. Mom started to explain to Karen that I was “wrestling with my cousins” and I hurt myself. Karen unwrapped the bandage on my left wrist. She looked at where I pointed and said that I most definitely sprained it, but she wasn’t sure if I had broken it because it was too early to tell. She did say that I should go to the ER. She wrapped it up again and we went back downstairs.

I thought it was weird that mom had already come up with a lie for what happened. I wondered if she had talked to dad yet. I finished my dinner and had some dessert. When we got back home my cousins and I watched some more of the show. I took some ibuprofen and mom gave me a painkiller as well. My back by then had blue purplish bruises going from the middle of my back down to my lower back. My throat still had some red pinkish band that wrapped around it.

The next morning around 10:00 am I woke up and got ready to leave for the ER. Dad was already up with everyone else except mom. I went to go wake her up and tell her I was ready to go to the ER. She said that dad had to take me because she was too tired, (I think she didn't want to go because it was too much for her and she hates hospitals). Before I left though she reminded me that I had to lie to the hospital about what happened. So, dad and I got in the car and drove with some music on in silence.

****LOST****

We waited in the ER for about twenty minutes until my name was called. Dad followed me as I followed the nurse. I was put in the hallway of the hospital. There was a hospital bed that I sat on and three sheets that made it more private. Dad was sitting on the other side of the sheet in a wooden chair. The nurse asked me questions like, "What happened?" "When did this happen?" "Did someone do this to you?" "If so, who?" I answered each other quietly and told

her the made-up story about wrestling with my cousins. She then left to go set up an X-ray. A few minutes later I walked to the X-ray room with her and waited.

After the X-ray I went back to where I was sitting before, and the nurse wrapped my wrist in hospital gauze. I asked if I could get a copy of the X-ray before we left, and she gave me one. When we got home, I went to my room and didn't do much. I just watched tv and took a nap.

****LOST****

A couple of days later my wrist was in immense excruciating pain. I told mom and she said that we were going to go to Riverhead to see Toby's orthopedist. I brought the X-ray with me too.

When we got there the orthopedist did his own X-ray and then he looked at the one I brought from the ER. They were different. The one that came from the ER showed a sprain while the one that he had taken just minutes before showed two breaks. One break was on the left side of my wrist and the other break was in between my thumb and index finger. He looked at my wrist as well and as he was showing my mom where each break was, he touched it and it hurt so badly.

He took me to the next room which was called the Casting Room. Another doctor took out a cast and brought it over. It was a black Velcro cast. It could slide on and off when I wanted it to. I could make the Velcro tighter or looser as I pleased. While he was showing me how to use it, mom was texting dad.

Her text wrote, "YOU BROKE HER WRIST IN TWO PLACES. SHE IS GETTING A CAST ON NOW."

His response was, "I am sorry."

Yes, it was that simple.

****LOST****

When I figured out how to use the cast and it was on my wrist the orthopedist wanted to talk more. He said that he was looking at my X-ray again and saw something else. There was another break of the bone on my left wrist. It was near where dad had broken my wrist. The orthopedist explained that this was from another break years before. He explained that one bone had stopped growing and the one that was coming from the opposite direction had grown too much. He explained to mom and I that in the future I might need special hand surgery to fix it because after the other breaks healed this one wouldn't and I would still be in pain. He said it could wait a few years and that I could always get a cortisone shot in the meantime.

****LOST****

When Thanksgiving was over, I had to head back to teaching at the lower Ross school. All the kids asked me questions about what happened, and the girls made me get well soon cards too. It was very cute.

I wore the cast for about two months. Dad stayed away from me and didn't talk to me for about two months. I appreciated that he listened to what I asked of him. But his story was different from mine. It still is to this day.

No one really remembers what happened the night before our Thanksgiving dinner, but I do. My dad's family does remember what happened, but no one has talked about it since. My siblings were too young to remember what happened. As for my mom, she remembers. This was one of the reasons that my parents started seeing a couple's therapist.

After what happened to me with dad our relationship changed. We stopped doing stuff together. That was when I realized that it had changed for good and if I wanted more of a relationship with him, he had to start it off. If he wanted a relationship with me, he had to be the one to start it.

After he abused me, I promised myself that if he did that ever again to me or my siblings or to mom that I would call the cops immediately and tell them what happened. I didn't want him to hurt anyone else. I have kept that promise still to this day.

Chapter Eleven: A New Beginning

College students are categorized in three groups. The first group is the planners. They plan out their futures in advance. They know what they want to do, where they want to live, and who they want to be with. The second group is the non-planners. They have no idea about their futures. All they have planned is college and that's it. They are the ones who have trouble planning or thinking about the future. And then there is the last group that are the inbetweeners. They know bits and pieces of their future but not all of it.

Sometimes people ask me where I see myself in a year and I usually tell them that I'm not quite sure. But that's not true anymore. I've known what I've wanted to do since I was in third grade. Yes, I have struggled throughout my life with many different things but that hasn't stopped me. Mom always used to say, "Follow your dreams. You can do anything". She always told me to not define myself by my disability. And every year at Hanukkah she would tell me to shine my light.

"Shine your light" she would say as she rubbed her hand around my heart. Then she gave me a big hug and told me she loved me.

I have followed my dreams from the very beginning. It's been difficult to get where I am today with all my therapies over the years that have made me stronger and all my teachers and professors that have helped me and given me advice. My dream has always been to write novels, to teach general elementary school students, and to be a reading specialist. A dream that I have that I haven't accomplished yet is to write for a tv show or a movie, but I have lots of time for that.

Over the years I have come to realize that my disability is a part of me. I think I was in eleventh or twelfth grade when I finally had my “Aha Moment.” I was sitting with Ms. Gillespie, Molly, Mr. Cooper, who was Ross’s therapist, and the woman who used to oversee my therapies. We were in the special ed room alone around a table. We were there to talk about me and my disabilities. They wanted to make sure that I knew what my disabilities were exactly and if I could explain to them what they were. It felt like a test to make sure I knew everything in case someone at college or someone random or someone new in my life asked me about my learning disability. They wanted to make sure I was using the correct terminology to explain my learning disability. Molly was there to support me. I had asked her to come to this meeting to be there for me in case I cried and needed encouragement. I cried during this meeting and held Molly’s hand while I talked.

That was the moment I realized that my disability is a part of me. It will be with me until the day I die. I can’t fix it and make it better. It is what it is, and I have finally accepted it. My disability is me. It has been with me through all my ups and downs, and it has helped me grow as a person. It has helped me realize what I want to do with my life. But it’s not the only thing that defines me. My passion for reading and writing defines me. My love for teaching kids defines me. My hobbies for watching tv and movies and my interest in celebrities’ lives defines me. My love for dogs and music defines me. Swimming and watching sports define me. There are so many things that define me as me.

“Shine your light” is something mom would tell my siblings and I every year at Hanukkah. She always says, “You have a little light in your heart. Remember to shine it bright.” As she says this she points at our hearts and rubs it with her forefinger. What I think she means by this is to be myself. To show the world who I really am and not be afraid to do so. I have

something special to share with the world and I should just share it without fearing being judged or being nervous in general.

****LOST****

What's my life like now with my learning disability and my relationship with my family?

It's the best that it can be. We don't talk about it at all really. If I am struggling with something that has to do with my classes or my vision, I talk to Mom about it, and she helps me through it. Whenever I need help my parents are always there to help me. One thing that I am still trying to do is get my driver's license. I know how to drive, and I am pretty good at it. I have trouble parallel parking though because of my vision deficit. I even have my own car, but I can't drive it by myself because I don't have my license. My car has all these extra abilities that help me to drive though. If I go out of the lane just a bit the car will beep at me, I have little signs in all the mirrors that Dad put up for me that says, "look up" because I always need to be turning and looking up more than anyone else. I also have extra mirrors to help as well.

I have taken the driver's test three times in my life so far. The first two times I failed completely. The third and last time I took it I was doing well. I was on the last part of the test which was the parallel parking part. I did everything my driving teacher told me to do. I drove next to the car in front of me, checked my mirrors and made a pizza slice with my car so I could back up into the spot before I put it in park, I remembered to check if I was straight enough

because they take points off if you're not. As I was doing that, I accidentally hit the curb so lightly that I thought only I could have felt it, but that was not the case. After I straightened out, I put the car in park. The tester was very nice and said that I was so close to passing. He told me that if I didn't try and straighten out, I would have passed. I had gotten exactly the number of points to pass but also to fail. We drove back to the testing area, and I got out of the car. Mom tried to talk to the tester but that didn't change his mind, so we left. That was when I was eighteen years old. I am now twenty-four years old.

Over the years I have thought about getting my license, but then I think about what if I don't get it. I am scared to get it because of my vision. I have now planned with Mom to go to an eye doctor and check to see if it's legal for me to drive, if it's not then I will stop trying but if it's legal then I will continue to try and put my mind to it so I can succeed. Driving is the only thing that my disability is holding me back from. I mean I have other struggles as well, but they are not as bad as the driving issue. But that's okay and I have accepted the fact that it might not even be legal for me to drive.

As for my siblings, they are sixteen now and will be seniors in high school next year. I am still closer to my brother than I am with my sister. We get along and everything but don't really talk much. They are into their friends and school more than anything else. My brother is still rowing, and my sister plays soccer. My parent's focus is more on them right now than on me which is great in some ways because I am now officially an adult and I know what I want to do with my life. They are less protective of me and are in the process of accepting the fact that I am an adult, and I can do whatever I want in my life. I don't need their approval or acceptance anymore. I will still ask them what they think, and they still help me with small things that I can't do or don't know how to do. I will sometimes ask for their advice for something but not always. I am where I am meant to be, and I never thought I'd get here. But here I am.

**** LOST****

My life is pretty normal now though. I have an emotional support dog who has helped me get through college. His name is Charley after Steinbeck's book *Adventures with Charley*. Charley is a mini cockapoo. He is the best companion I could have asked for. I have great girlfriends that I see every day and I even live with one right now, until I graduate Bard College. These girls are my best friends, and we will be in each other's lives for the rest of our lives. I couldn't ask for anyone better.

I have been dating Anthony since 2019 and we are going on three years soon. He is about to graduate with his master's in teaching middle-high school history and special ed. We are going to move in together in the summer. We have a studio apartment on the west side of Manhattan that is being renovated and will be all ready to be moved into by mid-July hopefully. Ant will get his first official teaching job in New York City. He is very excited, and we can't wait to move in together.

As for me, I applied to my dream graduate school, and I got in! I got into Bank Street College of Education in New York City! Bank Street is one of the best graduate schools for teachers in the area and a lot of famous people have gone there. One person who I admire who has gone there is Margaret Wise Brown who is the author of *Goodnight Moon*, one of my favorite books when I was kid.

I will be getting my Master of Science in Education in Teaching Literacy and Childhood Education at Bank Street. This program is a dual certification. This has been what I wanted to do since I was in third grade, and I can't wait to start this new adventure!

**** FOUND****

Epilogue: The Rashomon Effect

As you can see there are a lot of different perspectives and even more contradictory interpretations and descriptions about what happened to me when I was fourteen months old. There is still new information that sheds some light every few years too. I have never actually sat down with Mom or anyone who knows the full story about what happened to me or was there and witnessed it. I don't think I will ever get that chance. I am in the process of accepting that. I am in the process of accepting that I may never know exactly what happened to me and I will never know what really caused my traumatic brain injury. And that's okay. It's part of life. And some parts of life suck. I do know that when this memoir is finally done, and it gets published in the world I will have finally accepted what happened to me. And I can't wait for that time to come.

Recently I went to New York City to go to Bank Street's acceptance day on Saturday April 9th, 2022. Mom came into New York City too because she was going to help Asher do his acceptance days with the state colleges he got accepted into. Our Saturday was full of doing things separately but in the afternoon, we met up at Bank Street. Mom took a photo of me in front of Bank Street's building to remember the day. After that we went to go do some measurements of the studio apartment I will be living in in a couple of months. We were doing this for Dad because he was doing the drawings of the studio for the contractor and for us to figure out what furniture and stuff I need and what will fit. When we were done Mom wanted to go out to dinner with just me. We walked to an Irish Pub close to my apartment.

After we ordered our food, we started to talk. The week before we had gotten into a disagreement about Anthony moving in with me because my parents thought that should live by

myself for a bit. I didn't like how Mom was talking to me and I got very mad and upset with her but then I got scared that she would stop loving me if Ant moved in with me. I told my therapist all of this and she talked to Mom with my permission about all of this.

She explained to Mom that I have PTSD and I get triggered when Mom uses words like, "I don't approve" or "I don't accept that". She explained to mom that I have a fear of her not loving me unconditionally. I always think she loves me conditionally. My therapist and mom talked about this and how this is part of my PTSD. While they were talking about this some parts of my hospitalization came up too. Apparently, some of the things I had been told or read in Zaida's notes were not the truth. Mom got upset about this and wanted me to know the truth.

We started talking about it at dinner. She told me that Zaida's notes from the court hearing didn't explain everything going on because he wasn't even in the room. She told me that her lawyer had told my parents earlier that day that there would be a court hearing at 2:00 pm. My grandparents had already flown back to New York City because I was supposed to be discharged that day. Everything was all good and I was ready to go home. Until that court hearing...

In the court hearing the judge wanted my parents to sign a form that stated that they were releasing their guardianship over me. Mom didn't want this to happen and so she was yelling, "Don't take away my baby!" Her lawyer went over to talk to her and said, "Laura, if you don't sign this form then you won't be able to see Alex. That big hulky guy over there with the gun and handcuffs is going to come over here and handcuff you and take you to jail for the night and you will never see Alex again. Do you want that?" That's when Mom signed the form releasing guardianship over me. During this hearing Mom had told one of her friends to sit with me in my hospital room just in case CPS came by to take me. They did not come by. Even though my parents signed that form I wasn't in foster care. I was technically safe from CPS taking me

because hospitals are safe places for children, and no one can touch them while they are in the hospital's care.

Mom went on to explain to me that during that court hearing she and dad also had to sign the piece of paper saying that they were neglectful parents. Being neglectful is not child abuse legally though. There were apparently two doctors at that time as well. One of them was telling my parents that I was okay to be discharged. The other one said that I was ready to go home but that I shouldn't be discharged yet because of CPS. The second doctor knew more about how CPS worked and was trying to help my parents and keep us together.

There was another part of the story that I heard that was wrong. I was told that I was in the hospital for about a year which is not true. My admission to the hospital was April 16th, 1999, and my discharge was May 10th, 1999. When I was finally discharged, I went home to the "Green House" with my grandparents. They lived with me in that house for about two weeks with Ada as well. My parents were allowed to come see me during the day, but they had to leave by 11:00 pm and sleep somewhere else. They slept at their friends' houses for those couple of weeks, but they would be back at the house before I woke up. This is when the order of protection was put into place. I have a copy of the order of protection too. After those two weeks though my parents could live with me and spend the night alone with me again. Social workers did come by randomly though sometimes to check in and make sure everything was okay and that I was safe.

When Mom was done explaining all of this to me, she asked if I had any more questions and I replied with, "Not at this very moment. But if I do have a question, is it okay to ask you?" She responded by saying "Of course." I went on to say that I didn't want to make her upset or trigger her with my questions about what happened to me. She said that she has a control on her PTSD, and it was always okay to ask anything. I then started to have a very cathartic cry in the

Irish Pub. It was a very nice cathartic cry. I realized that some of the things I thought about her were just plain wrong and I didn't want to make her seem like a bad person. I love my mom unconditionally and she loves me unconditionally.

We continued talking about my PTSD and why I have this fear of her not loving me. We came up with two options. The first one was that I was in the hospital for a month. In a bed and place I wasn't used to, and my parents were there but not in the same way as before at home. The second one we came up with was that when I was discharged and went home and after the order of protection was done Mom wasn't there in the house as much because she was going to therapy for her PTSD. I was with Dad most of the time. These are things that might've caused my PTSD, but we will never know. It is most definitely what caused my separation anxiety from her.

It was nice to talk to Mom about all of this and I felt a lot better afterwards. It was like I was seeing it more from her side. She went through something traumatic as well. We both went through something traumatic just in different ways. I hope that I can talk to her more about this soon.

We also talked about Anthony and how he was moving in with me no matter what. I explained to her that I love him, and he loves me. He accepts me for me. He doesn't see me as damaged or anything like that. He knows and understands my disability and loves me more despite it. I told her that I did live by myself for a year. During my junior year of college, I lived in the Red Hook Inn for the school year and did all my classes online over zoom because of Covid. She agreed with that as well. She promised me that she wouldn't use words like "I don't approve" or "I don't accept that" ever again either. To me, this was all good. It was a step in the right direction and a step forward.

When I got back to Red Hook, New York I decided to contact the hospital to get my medical records. I called the hospital and they transferred me to the release records department. I

just needed to fill out a form with the information I had. I gave them the dates of admission and discharge and I wanted all the medical records they had on me. They have just emailed me back saying they found the records and that it will take a few days for them to process and scan them but that I would get them by email in a few days.

After taking a week and more to process all this new information I realized that this is a true story about the Rashomon Effect. In the end that's all that I have. Different perspectives and descriptions of the same story from so many different people. They have all their truths. Now it's time to find my truth. The story that I believe is the truth about what happened to me. Writing this memoir is helping me get to that truth.