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*5.24.21*

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*Bader-Scott Car Accident Scholarship*

I was hit by a car while walking across the road on June 1, 2020. I was immobilized in a wheelchair and hospitalized within the midst of a global pandemic. I missed my highschool graduation, and had my admission to college revoked as I lay unconscious while classes started.

I made peace and found pride in the physical recovery it took to heal past my five surgeries, striving to walk on my two legs again. However, my Traumatic Brain Injury led me into an emotional turmoil I have never known... I was destroyed by doctors telling me that I may never be exceptional again. My achievements would supposedly have already reached their pinnacle, my self-expectations should be safely lowered. Oftentimes I've been frustrated in speech therapy because they're shocked at how quickly I have "gotten better" by reaching an average level of scoring on their activities. I don't want average scores. I want to exceed their charts like they have never seen, because that's the only level I expect of myself.

I was overwhelmed with shame and disappointment in myself. I truly wondered why I had survived if all I now had to offer the world was wasted potential.

My mother, my friends... they all believed in me. They made me smile again, and they waited for me until I was strong enough to let them know these spiraling thoughts I was having. They let me cry, and they promised me love no matter who I would become. It was their belief in me that brought me to where I am now. I have learned to allow myself acceptance to whatever tomorrow may look like, and whoever I may see in the mirror. A critical head injury changes a lot, but it can't change the victim's identity.

My hunger for the extraordinary and thirst for discoveries will always remain; the manner in which I satisfy them may look a little different. I'm more than willing to add in extra work to areas that used to come leisurely. This brain injury has sworn me into a lifetime of difficulty when even completing menial tasks-- but I accept that challenge with open arms! The summit I long for is no longer easy to mount with my old wit and quick answers; so I commit to finding a new way to climb.

I have photos all over my room of the girl I was preceding my accident, but I don't look at them in longing or in pain. I now see them through a lens of surreal wonder toward my growth. It feels as though I'm looking at baby pictures. It took a tightrope walk across the literal threshold of life and death to repaint who I see in the mirror, and what I see around her.

She gleams with a new quality that I can't put in words... but I want to try. I want to tell my story-- I want to tell every story and make a million more-- because stories connect us. They make our wide and wild world just a bit smaller despite its widening divides. Stories let mankind

adventure in a new pair of shoes to find that it's *love* tying every pair of laces. It's my duty to use this second shot at life to tell stories professionally as I now choose to pursue a degree in journalism.

Sure, I'll never again be the International Scholastic Silver Medalist that I continue to mourn, or the artist I cry over as I reminisce on who I was before my auto-pedestrian accident. But this new woman in the mirror has conquered her recovery; she faces her world bravely with new disabilities. I am a vessel that should've sunk that fateful night on the corner of Mound and Glenbriar, but I didn't. I sail on with humility and gratitude, the greatest fuel there is.