

The Bell Tolls For Thee

Bells demarcate time, but we rarely look TO them FOR the time. Beautiful bells hang above Lowell. However, habituated by living with the call to attention, we grow deaf to it. We have to be paying attention to be called to attention. What are the things in your life that are calling out to you? There may be many, creating noise. While noise distracts, music moves you. The Lowell bells move us out of bed on a lazy Sunday morning, by morning I mean 1pm. Bells symbolize the movement of time. They punctuate important moments like weddings, deadlines, or a new day.

Sometimes, bells mark an ending.

This is the story of my end, how I died and came back to life. I didn't die all at once; it was slow and painful. It rang slowly like solemn bells at a funeral service. It started with a disinterest in people, school and my future. That led to a loss of faith in myself and God, which spiraled into loneliness and eventually, depression.

I tried to resuscitate myself by joining lots of activities, going out to parties with friends and using alcohol to forget my worries, basically anything that would numb me. At my lowest point I would soothe myself to sleep with thoughts of how I might kill myself. It took months of therapy, church and prayer to begin recovery.

I'm going to skip over the part about my struggle to pick myself up, because since then, life has been far more interesting. I've been dying every day since that alarming bell, in a good way. Death is when you leave behind something of yourself, for others. You die a little bit each day, subsequently leaving something behind.

When I finally woke up I heard another bell-- a dead friend. This bell was swift, startling and harsh.

Angela Matthews was 20 years old when she died in a tragic car accident. She was a classmate of mine, who died doing something that she loved. The way she died highlighted how I wanted to live-- with purpose. Live like you just died, became my motto. I began to think about what people might say about me when I died.

Every death holds significance for each of us. Make your death mean something by living significantly.

This probably feels like dark, morbid advice. Maybe you didn't know Angela, you'll probably understand me when I say, "Je suis Charlie". The Parisian protest magazine was bombed for exercising their right to free speech. Those cartoonists died, committed to their passions.

Maybe you don't speak french. MLK and Malcolm X are other examples. When they died, they were pursuing something that they loved-- justice.

Death is inevitable and indiscriminate. The ironic beauty is that the threat of death forces us to live. I've been listening to these bells and they've shown me how precious life can be. So I refuse to waste it.

Bouncing back was difficult, but I've made it back to me.

I use each day to chase my dreams. A career in medicine and public health is on my horizon. I don't want to just cure people I want to change the systems that make them sick in the first place. My most commonly used phrase these days is "it changed my life" because I spend all of my time finding transformative experiences. I plan to live an extraordinary life, and my business cards will say Dr. Mandi Nyambi MS MD MBA CEO of I Run Shit Enterprises.

I have been saved by the bell.

Angela's death called me to live with purpose.

Michael Brown was a bell calling for justice.

Last Year's bomb scare was a bell that pointed our attention to student mental health.

Do you want people to talk about all of the things you WANTED to do, or what you ACTUALLY did?

When the bells ring, will you recognize the tune? Will you answer the call? Be vigilant and listen close, because if you don't start today, you may never get the chance.

I have no idea what Angela's last words were, but if I may, I'd like to determine mine. If I never say anything again and I die after this next moment this is what I'd want to leave you with...

Listen for the bell, and when it rings, don't just answer it. Gather strength and ring it loud so others, too, will hear, lest we all ignore the call.