

## “Three Years Later”

Abbie Higgins

I am not brave. I am afraid of heights. I am afraid of spiders. I am afraid of failure. And I am afraid of change. Although, you know what they say – change is the only constant in life.

A few days before housing day freshman year, I talked to my mom on the phone as I was getting ready to go to class – just like I had done since my first days at boarding school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I don’t remember what we talked about. Probably the day’s schedule, or spring break, or maybe the upcoming housing day festivities. Like planning a Wednesday night party with my blockmates or awaiting an early morning visit from some House—thankfully, Lowell.

Twenty minutes later, she called me back. But this time was different. I couldn’t understand her. She was trying to tell me something, but I heard a jumble of sounds. I could only make out one word:

hospital.

Sometime that morning, while I was packing my bag and heading to Annenberg, my mom had a stroke that destroyed part of her brain.

I didn’t tell anyone for a few days. Part of the reason was that it wasn’t clear what had happened or how bad it might be. And my dad encouraged me to keep going about business as usual, especially since I would be home for spring break a few days later. The other part is that it felt easier to deny that anything could be wrong.

Eventually, I told a few of my closest friends: just enough to feel connected to someone, but not too many or else I would have to confront a very confusing and scary reality. My friends were supportive. They offered to listen and talk about it. But I usually said no. It was housing day after all. I wanted to enjoy it.

I didn’t know how to grieve then, or honestly even if grieving was something that made sense to do. It was easier to feel nothing, or at least to pretend to feel nothing. I was at the same time angry, and embarrassed, and guilty. And I couldn’t figure out why I was feeling any of those emotions. I was not brave enough to confront them. I was not brave enough to share them. When I did, I cried.

One day that summer, after my mom had moved home from the hospital, I drove her to physical therapy by myself. I was sitting in the lobby, which opened into the gym. Towards the end of the strenuous session, I watched as my mom collapsed. I have never been so scared. I was alone. I watched as my mom rode away in the back of an ambulance. This memory is still blurry for me. Much of that summer is, actually. I think that same part of me that was too afraid back in March told me it was easier to stay busy and to try to pretend as if everything was normal.

I watched my mom re-learn how to walk, talk, write, eat. She hit the gym to regain strength in her arms and legs. At first, she needed my dad's help even to pick up a fork from the table. My mom by the way, is one of the pickiest eaters I know. That summer, I watched my dad prepare for my mom breakfast, lunch, and dinner. He made each meal, and packed it, and drove over to be with her in the rehab facility – every meal, every day.

My dad does so much for my mom and me. It's the little things that he does that come to my mind first. He always made sure there were fresh flowers, often from our backyard, on the table beside my mom everyday. He still does.

Things have gotten much better, for which I am so grateful. Although not quite the same, my mom's health has recovered. She is still the same person inside that she always has been. Except now she laughs a lot more.

I have learned a lot about myself over the last three years. And I have learned a lot about my parents as well. They have taught me to cherish the time you have with the people that you love. And they have taught me to be brave.

Ok. I'm still not brave. But I have seen up close what love and bravery look like. That is a good place to start.

Thank you.