

What Stands Out

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I got a zero on my first assignment at Harvard. It was a problem set for LS1a during the first week of classes. It was due at 6:00 PM. That day, I got lost on the bus, but I ran for the Science Center as soon as I got to Harvard Square. I turned in my assignment exactly six minutes late. Six minutes was the difference between a zero and a hundred. I tried to explain the situation to my TF, but late assignments could not be accepted. I cried that night. Eventually, I told myself to focus and move forward. I learned to accept that Harvard was a place of consistency and efficiency, where I would get exactly what I would give.

I made it through the semester. I grew accustomed to the never-ending rules and dead-lines every pre-med faces. I began to evaluate myself based on my exams scores and p-set grades. They were becoming the metrics of my life.

At the end of the year, I stuck around for a few days after finals. One evening, I joined my friend Jimmy for a bike ride. We rode across the Harvard bridge. As we got to the Boston side, I fell. Hard. The front tire of my bike hit a terrible pothole and

catapulted me head-first into the asphalt. I hit the street head-on with my face, my mouth, my teeth. Pedestrians kept stopping to help me. My friend was calling 911. I looked down and saw the blood. I lost consciousness in the ambulance, and awoke in the hospital.

The medical resident in the emergency room may have been an angel. She soothed me, calmed me, cleaned me up. My front teeth were loose, but she assured me that they'd be okay. I had never broken or sprained anything, and I was terrified. She helped that fright. I don't remember her name, but I know she made me feel so relieved. Then, my friends from school came to the hospital to see me and take me home.

Over the next few days, my friend Eliza brought me a milkshake from b.good everyday, and helped me up to drink it slowly. My friend Qasim sat with me and talked to me so many times when I was laying in bed. I couldn't chew anything because of scarring in my mouth, so my friend Omar brought me soup from Panera and a straw to drink it with. I yearned for my family, but because of the people around me, I never once felt alone. But I wondered: Didn't these people have exams to study for, applications to fill out, trips to take? I felt guilty for taking their time, but I realized I never once asked for their help. They were just there.

I remember being in the JCR a couple days later, feeling hideous after looking in the mirror. I looked repulsive, scarred, and swollen. When a stranger in the common room asked what happened, I shared my story and he said—next time someone asks, tell them that you got into a fist-fight and that they should see the other guy! It hurt to laugh but I couldn't help it, and I agreed that I'd make a pretty solid Scarface. I'll always remember how good it felt to laugh in that moment; it was the first I'd laughed after the accident. I knew then that I would be okay.

Now, three years later, I have come a long way from that first zero in LS1a. I am different from the person who crashed that bike. The things that matter most to me have gotten a little clearer, and have maybe even changed.

What stands out to me most isn't the zero on an assignment, or the pain of hitting the asphalt. Those injuries seemed awfully important when they happened, but they seem a lot less important now.

What matters are the milkshakes delivered by friends, the laughter gifted by housemates, the kindness given by strangers. What stands out is the care shown by person who helped me find and buy waterproof shoes so that unlike the last three years,

I'd have dry feet this winter. What I will remember is the love the dining hall staff has given me every single day.

I want to pass on that kindness to you. That kindness has changed my entire experience at Harvard, and it has made what I value most very clear. I started from a zero, now I'm here.