

First Place

The Accident

Aaron Turner

I tried to forget everything that had just happened. I closed my eyes tighter; praying that I would eventually wake up. I tried to breathe calmer, softer, less...heavy, while my entirety dangled within the vehicle. My own blood had become my new covering. From my lips spewed fragments of gravel and shards of glass. The pain patiently hid behind the shock. Those seconds felt like an eternity; the outside world was still moving with no intention of stopping, but mine had slowed to a crawl. During that time, I began to recount each event chronologically.

What started out as a peaceful dream quickly derailed into a life changing nightmare. The routine was simple, get out of bed, get cleaned up, get on the road, and get to school. It happened like clockwork, always the same with never a change. On a normal morning, Jay Z and Beyonce would be belting melodically about their love for one another. However, this morning was quiet, no blather between my sister and I and no radio performance. I guess you could say it was too good to be true, but at that moment, it never crossed my mind. There was no one else on the road, but something was waiting for us.

Within seconds, it felt as if the rug had been pulled from underneath me. Speed was no factor, but the momentum of the downward slope had kept us in motion. Upon approaching the turn, the steering wheel failed my trust as it locked beneath my grasp. We were headed straight for the ditch until the first wheel left the asphalt. That twisting jolt had quickly swept us off the path of the ditch and had thrown us back even quicker into the direction of the road. Before I could touch the brake, I realized the problem ahead. We were already sliding sideways and soon the

yellow lines would become parallel with my door. My side hit first, and my window never stood a chance against the force. As we turned upside down, miscellaneous objects began flying in varying directions. Every time the roof of the car hit the asphalt, it caved in closer to my sister and I. We were rolling. The grass nearby was the end of our fear-filled rollercoaster ride.

I remember every detail because I was not given the opportunity to ignore it. My eyes seemed to have been my biggest enemy as their awareness kept my memory in this traumatic loop of terror. My sister was left unconscious, so she does not remember me moving her head forward while the car caved around us. She did not see her leg find its way outside of the window. She never saw the fear in my eyes. I remember everything being so peaceful right after. The warmth that existed from the sun's presence, the fluorescence of the grass, and the silence. The eerie silence that tried to deceive my mind. It left me unsure of whether I was alive or not; was she? It seemed as if I was left stranded in this purgatory with no sense of escape.

The entirety of the situation did not really sink in until I felt a tingling on my arm. Ants. I guess you could say that these crimson-colored creatures had come to deliver the message to me that I was in fact alive. That was the moment I was thrown back into the reality of it all. Everything was not what it should have been, the sky was beneath me, grass peeked through the shattered windshield, and the blood from my wounds dripped towards the ceiling not the floor. We were upside down. I shook my sister whose hair was like a veil over her face; whose leg was resting beneath the roof of the vehicle. She screamed in agony like a trapped animal. Could that be exactly what had happened? Had we fallen right into the trap that death had set for us? My sister, like a bear who was unable to free its leg, and myself, suspended by the seatbelt and out on display like a marionette. Both of us, encased in this cage of despair, with questions that neither of us could

properly answer. Had we stepped into the Devil's playground or were we fulfilling some divine prophecy?

Either way, something heard our calls for help because it sent rescuers to aid us. I like to think of them as guardian angels. All of them, complete strangers, who took time out of their lives to help us get back to ours. The car was lifted by a group of men to save my sister's leg, and I was cut free from my entanglement. Soon after, we were rushed to the hospital. Everything was fine or at least would be with some time. It was a miracle. I had stood in the face of death and walked away with a few cuts, small bruises, and a second chance. While walking out, family and friends rushed to hug and console us. That feeling of love and genuine care from everyone surrounded us like an angelic symphony. However, that tranquility is disturbed when the lasting memories are performed by demon choirs. As they hiss and sling fire, the horrors return and even though time has passed, still inside me is the need to know why. Why can I not forget? Why must this haunt me?

Second Place

I am Black, and My Life Matters

Jade Goodloe

Being a part of a society where the color of your skin can change someone's entire way of viewing you and even before you are able open your mouth to speak to them, you hear them saying hurtful things because they have assumptions about you. I had these things happen to me at an early age. Back then I had no reactions; today, however, I feel rage, but I know I cannot express my anger, that I have to constrain it and somehow, through words, tell the world that I matter.

As a young child I was taught the right way to see color, meaning my parents taught me everyone is different and to see beauty in differences. As I grew older, I started to observe and see that things are not right and that not everyone was raised with the same morals. Yet, because I was raised differently, my parents taught me how to deal with other people, so I was given “the talk.”

Every black child is given the talk. The talk is given to protect all black children. It explains that sometime in your life you will be racially profiled and disrespected and you must be smart and not fight back. You're told what to do when pulled over by a police officer even if you did nothing wrong and told how you should present yourself to the public, so you will not draw attention to yourself. My parents raised me to love everyone, but once I reached the preteens, I was then taught everyone will not love me, thus I needed to prepare myself for the challenges I would face.

When I was given “the talk” I was in middle school, I began to understand that my life, a black life, mattered. My first realization that racism still existed was when my dad and I went to a corner store to get snacks and the cash register clerk told a group of young black kids to stand outside and leave their belongings before entering the store. Immediately my dad put our snacks back and went to the cash register and told the clerk: “You are one of the reasons there will never be peace in this world” and we left.

I was eight years old.

Growing up black you did not need to be in a poor community to understand the unfair treatment and disrespect towards African Americans, because when you walked out of your home, be it small or big, you were nothing but a stereotype. As a black person I am not blind to racism. When I was in the sixth grade, I was switched to an academically better school in a nicer neighborhood. Immediately I felt like an outcast in the school since not many people looked like me in my classes. I once added extensions in my hair. The minute I showed up at school, I was teased by white students and on social media about how “ugly” my hair looked to them. As a child still trying to find my own identity, it was tough for me not to break down and feel a certain way when teased. At first, I did not realize what they were saying was racist until I realized they were trying to make fun of my black hairstyle because it was not like the white girls in the class.

Racism is meant to tear others down and make you feel less of what you are, and because of that terrible day I learned that racism is real at all ages. Also, I learned that as a young black lady no matter where I am, I will be faced with hate just by being who I am. Yet because of that day my mom made sure I learned to love myself and who I am. Understanding what being black in this world means will help you understand why my life matters to me.

My parents have always told me that society views black men and women stereotypically. We are rude, raunchy, disrespectful, and criminal. Most black people understand what “pretending” means, which is when you go out your way to make others feel comfortable around you, so you will not come across as angry black women or violent black men. The term angry black women are a term used in a predominantly white male workforce, and to silence a black woman into not expressing complaints about how poorly they are being treated at work. When my mom worked in a corporation, she applied for a higher position several times and even though she was the most qualified person, she did not get promoted because she was a black woman. Despite her frustration and understanding about why she did not get those positions, my mother knew never to express her feelings to her bosses because she understood she would be seen as an angry black woman. My mom’s way of dealing with mistreatment is due to what she was taught when she was young -- even if you feel you are in the right do not lash out or speak with passion because you will be viewed negatively. The stereotypical angry black women are used to silence.

Over the years, I have learned the way of life of a black person. The system is set up for my family and me to fail. I now understand that on this earth not everyone is rooting for you and you must instill in yourself and uplift yourself that you are beautiful and strong. But I am determined to show the world my life matters. I am determined to beat the odds against me, and follow my dreams.

That is the whole purpose of why black lives matter to me, because we as a community have fallen into the trap that we are worthless and cannot make it out of our situation without doing anything illegal. There are so many of us who have broken out of the status quo, and there are others who have not had the strength to get out of what they are going through or feel like they cannot make it out. As a black woman I have learned to control only what I can control, I cannot change how others view me, but I can change how I view myself and how I want to live my life.

In the end it seems as if we are still stuck in a racist world and will have to continue to fight and deal with mistreatment and misjudgment by others, but I know that my life, a black life matters just as much as anyone else’s.

The Value of Values

I believe that people should set the standard for themselves to live everyday with the purest intention of being a kind person who treats others with empathy and compassion. I spent a lot of time with my mother growing up and she always taught me to treat everyone the same no matter what they looked like and because of that I was friends with everyone. One of the other persistent lessons my mother focused on was that you never know what is going on in another person's life therefore your words or actions can have a much larger effect than you know. Personally, I have been led to strive for gentle days filled with love and genuine happiness.

The things I value in my life have very little to do with actual material value. Peace of mind is the number one thing that I value. I engage in things that make me happy and I try to avoid situations that I know are not going to benefit me. I have been through a lot in my life and because of that I learned that we can't control what happens to us but we can control how we react so I always try to react calmly. If a situation is going to stress me out then I walk away and choose peace.

Secondly, I value family because the people you choose to call your family are supposed to provide you with unconditional love and support. Family is the people that you go to no matter what in situations you need help in because you know they are going to have your back. We all need a family. Sharing blood with someone doesn't automatically make you family, it's the bond that is shared. I have a cousin who I am not actually related to at all but our parents knew each other and therefore we were together a lot as kids and I always knew her as my cousin. Although we don't share blood, that is my family and sharing blood wouldn't make us any closer.

I value education and learning because knowledge is power and we are never too old to learn. The more you know the more you can accomplish. I think it is very important for people to be open to learning because as humans we go through new experiences that teach us new things and sometimes with new information we form new thoughts and opinions on things. The purpose of us being here is to learn as we live. Education doesn't have to be sitting in a classroom for hours, it can be going on a walk and observing a new plant or hearing the sound of a new bird. Learning can be fun and should be lifelong.

If I was shaping a new society it would be called Love Land and it would be a self-sustaining society with close to zero waste. Love Land would share my values and focus on being a good person and contributing to society over having a lot of money and power therefore people would have values and habits set with pure intentions. Love Land would have free education, a fair justice system, and fair trade. Love Land would differ from America because the citizens would not have to work 40 hours a week, every week to survive because that isn't how life is supposed to be. In my society the happiness and well-being of the people would be prioritized which I believe will lead to less crime and violence. It is not ethically or morally right for there to be people in this country who have millions of dollars that they will never touch in their lifetime yet there are people in the same state that are starving and living on the street. I believe that everyone has basic human rights to food, water, clothing, shelter, education and they would have access to these things in Love Land. As far as laws and rules the society would follow close to a direct democracy.

Everyone has different morals and values that they try to live by. Some values are common and shared by many and some values are unique. I value family as does America and so would Love

Land. Family is one of the most common values in the world. I value peace of mind because life is short and I am not going to spend my time on this earth mad and upset. While everyone has their differences one thing that most have in common is that they live by the values that they think make the world the best place it can be.

Smile

This was quite obvious but not obvious, I was well abled but only thing keep eating my head that I had black gums. I know it seems ordinary but it wasn't ordinary for me when I was small. I use to think I should apply Colgate to my gums too whiten them not in real sense but to turn them pinkish red , normal color of gums . I know it sounds ridiculous but yes . I use to always brag around my mom for same thing. From then I got habit of smiling in such way that my black gums wont be visible. While speaking , gums use to be visible knowingly unknowingly, but during smiling I use to get extra conscious. Kind of complexity about gums had developed in my mind already. May it be family photograph or school photograph, I use to smile to certain extent only . I use to smile awkwardly because of which I not use to get really good pictures , in almost every picture it use to seem like I am frowned. Later on, I thought my face is maybe not that photogenic. I use to smile to certain extent only rather to certain curve . my mother use to tell me some or other myth how black gums are beneficial , just to make me accept . Once she said they would turn normal as I grow elder . I know moms ae so sweet , they are so creative rather , they can make stories whatever just to see their child happy. As age was growing , my friends use to tase me , 'why you smile in such way ?'[in such funny way rather] in photographs we use to click . I use to reply in any dumb manner like I don't know how to smile types anything . I was in my syjc , we had our presentations for board , we were all dressed up in formals Shravani and I decided to click some pictures of each other , just another way to relieve our board stress. As usual I was struggling to how to click pictures of mine, shravani till then was continuously clicking pictures of mine , she said some or other would be good. Cracking some random jokes , we were clicking pictures . She didn't said me to do typical poses neither told me to smile little narrow. but to my surprise, those turned out to be best photos of mine till date , just because I laughed a lot carelessly , not thought for single moment how those black gums would steal all attention from picture. I myself only realized those black gums are gem for me , rather are reason for me to laugh a little louder carelessly each day . I was bit late but realized I should flaunt my black gums as my beauty and not hide them. From then whenever you will see me , you will always see me with broad smile (making sure all of my black gums are visible).This incident was so usual but it made me realize of my beauty { which I use to consider flaw }, made me accept as I'm. Now almost every picture in my gallery is having huge broad smile, many people complimented about same , many questioned too why you laugh so broadly , I answered because I love it . so flaunting my black gums laughing hugely till end.

What if I had a time machine

Time is like a grain of sand that slips from our hands. The moments we hold are precious and once they are gone we can never return to them. Those moments are now stored in our memory to remind us of better times but what if those moments could be experienced again? What if you could travel 40 years into the future to see what you have accomplished? Time travel would be possible if you were to use a time machine to travel to another dimension.

Having a time machine would allow us to travel far back in time and far into the future. The memories I hold in my mind could easily be experienced over and over again. I could travel in the past to remove all conflicts I have encountered and even travel back to my younger years to give myself back then the knowledge I have now. The time machine would also allow me to look into the future to see if the decisions I make today were worth it in the long term.

If you were to travel into the past what would you change? Traveling back in time would be very convenient to help people be the best they can be. This machine could be used to change personal issues when they start as small as overthinking to overcoming an addiction. Individuals suffering from a drug addiction could travel back to the day they decided to try it out and say no. This will give them different results for their present and future lives. For me, I would use this to gain as much knowledge as possible and change past scenarios where I made careless decisions.

When I was younger, my mother always reminded me about how important school is. As a kid, I never really listened because college wasn't in my plan. Now as an adult I realize the important values of getting a quality education. It wasn't until I was working a dead-end minimum wage job that I realized that job wasn't gonna cut it. I worked 40 hours a week and would often come to work on my days off. Even with the number of hours I was getting I still was never impressed with the money I was making. That is when I made one of the best decisions of my life which was to go to college so that I could prepare for a job that would pay well. I was a successful kid in school

but I never did strive to do my absolute best when it came to academics. I would use the time machine to travel back to when I was 16 years old. That is when I started to lose my focus on academics. I got so distracted by everything else around me that I set aside education as an option. But, if I had that time machine, I would change this experience. I would have enrolled in college then.

If you were to travel into the past what would you change? If I could use a time machine to go back in time I would change a lot of previous events in American history. My main concern would be preventing slavery. Slavery is the reason for racism towards African Americans and the reason why many in these communities inherited the past traumas from their ancestors. Many slaves, which group included my ancestors, were freed when this happened but it still was hard for them once they were released. The slaves were either paid very small amounts of money or weren't paid at all. Once they got to the freedom they had nothing and were still treated as if they were still slaves for many years later.

Using a time machine to go back into time I could outlaw anyone from taking African Americans from other countries to use them for slavery. This would prevent anyone from getting people from other countries to work in the U.S as a slave. Taking a stand during that time to acknowledge that African Americans should not be enslaved or used for their work would put more value on the lives of blacks. The most significant benefit is that our culture wouldn't carry the traumas of our ancestors.

So, how about you? What would you change if you were able to travel back in time?

Had these two events, in my personal life and the one experienced in early American history, not occurred, what would my life be today and what would the USA be today?

The changes that I could have made in the past with a time machine would have made a huge difference in my personal life today and in American history. Traveling back in time to change how I perceived education would put me further today in college. It would have given me the knowledge I needed when I finished highschool up to the point of starting my first college courses. Traveling back in time to change American history would have made a drastic impact on the lives of African Americans today. The lives of African Americans today would be drastically different with me preventing slavery from taunting our community. Today the black community would not have experienced any segregation or racism.

If everyone today could use a time machine it would be nearly impossible for any of us to make mistakes. Once a mistake is made you could easily go back to when it was made and change the scenario in which it happened. This would give everyone equal opportunities to succeed in their own personal lives and change terrible events from the past. For me, I would use it to change my personal life and eliminate slavery. That's why the time machine would have been the perfect device to change American history as we know it.

