

This was a long time ago and I am trying my best to be as accurate as possible, but please forgive any inaccuracies.

This story begins in my second grade classroom at Hubbard Woods Elementary School in Winnetka Illinois on May 20th 1988. My teacher, Ms. Dueble was out for the day so we had a substitute. It was a beautiful spring day and I was very excited because our class was scheduled to take the bicycle safety test that morning. If I passed, I would be able to ride my bike to school every day. It's a little silly to think about that because our house was right across the street from the school. You could literally see the school out of our front window.

I grew up in Winnetka Illinois. Winnetka is a suburb on the north shore near Chicago. We had beaches nearby, a big park across the street, a downtown area I could walk to if I wanted to get a hot dog, or buy some baseball cards. It was an idyllic place where we all felt sheltered from the crime and violence that is so rampant in Chicago. We knew our neighbors and I hung around the neighborhood with my friends. The schools were good and opportunities for success were in abundance.

At school I could hardly stay in my seat that morning because I was so excited about the bike test. We had a brief morning meeting and then went outside to the playground for the road portion of the bike test. We slowly rode our bikes through a course that had some modest obstacles. I navigated the stop sign and cones with expertise. When I learned that I had passed the road portion of the test, I was very happy, but was still nervous about the upcoming written portion. I was insecure because I knew I was neither the most disciplined nor focused student. As a matter of fact, I was a bit wild. As the youngest of four siblings, I got away with things that my older siblings would not have. When I was in kindergarten I had to go sit on "the chair" everyday as a consequence for my not staying on the rug during story time. I was high energy and liked to push limits and make jokes. My three older siblings taught me to question authority and to think independently.

After we got back to the classroom I sat down at a table with some friends to begin the test. We sat at small round tables, about five or six of us per table. It was quiet as we were all taking the bike safety test very seriously. I was sitting at a small table with some other classmates. Suddenly, I heard loud noises and a flurry of commotion. I don't remember faces, just a feeling of disorganization, intensity and terror. I fell to the ground and blacked out.

The next thing I remember was crawling in the hallway by myself. The hallway felt so empty. It felt like the whole school had been abandoned. It was calm and quiet. My hand hurt really bad. It was a stinging pain. I looked at it and saw that it was bleeding in a way I had never seen before. There was a hole in it and blood was pouring out of the hole in rhythm with my pulse. I remember the color of the blood. It was dark, almost black. My hand was covered in blood and I was looking at it pulsing, trying to figure out what happened. It was almost mesmerizing. I didn't know what had happened. All I knew was that I was in pain and I was scared.

I tried to make sense of what was going on. I remember thinking that this must be some sort of safety drill. I thought that the school was preparing us for something. I went so far as to imagine that the person who came into the room was the school janitor who I liked and trusted. I thought

that he came into our classroom and shot me with some sort of fake gun and that I would be okay.

I kept trying to understand what was happening. I remember being afraid, confused and shocked. I looked down and my clothes were covered in blood. I was bleeding out of my stomach. The amount of blood coming out of my stomach was much more than out of my hand, but my hand hurt much worse, a pain like I was stung by a hundred bees. My clothes were soaking wet with blood. As I slowly crawled towards the exit, I left a trail of blood behind me. I was confused and then started to feel scared. I knew something was very wrong. What was happening? Was I okay? I was hurting so bad and I was starting to get cold and tired.

An adult swooped into the hallway, picked me up and took me into another classroom. I could sense that something was very wrong by how he was acting. I could tell that he was scared. This made me even more afraid. The room he brought me to had first graders in it. I remember them looking at me as I bled and bled. As I was held in the man's arms I remember everyone's faces. The man holding me looked terrified. I could feel him shaking and saw him sweating. The first graders didn't look as scared, but they knew something was wrong. I knew somehow that they shouldn't be seeing me like this. I didn't know why, but I wanted the kids to look away.

I started to feel overwhelmed with emotion. I started to feel my emotions in my body. I was shaking. I felt very tense. Then I started hysterically crying. I wanted my mom. I was shaking, crying and screaming for my mom. I wanted to know everything was going to be okay. I cried and cried yelling out for her. Then, once again, my memory blacks out.

I somehow ended up back in my classroom. The next thing I remember is when the paramedics came. I remember waking up and looking at their faces. I saw that they were paying less attention to my hand and more to my stomach. My stomach just felt cold and numb and my hand continued to sting in a very painful way. I could tell that they were afraid. I looked to my side while lying down and saw that the classroom was messy and everything seemed all over the place. I pieced together that the wound in my stomach was more severe than the wound in my hand because the paramedics were much more worried about it. My memory once again fades out.

Later I remember riding in the ambulance and talking to the paramedic. I was feeling very cloudy and disconnected. I told him that I was tired. I could see the fear on his face. He told me not to go to sleep, but I felt so tired. I was so cold and so tired, but also very, very calm. I went to sleep.

The next memory I have is when I was in the hospital. My body hurt, breathing hurt and I had tubes in my stomach, a catheter and a tube up my nose. There was a cast on my arm. I was confused, but also very tired. I had a big bandage on my stomach and beneath it were staples. Instead of stitches, staples were holding my stomach together. They looked really weird and looking at them gave me the chills. It was like a silver centipede climbed onto my stomach and its claws were stuck inside of me. It was strange to be afraid of my own body.

In the hospital, my parents did their best to explain what happened. They told me that I had been shot. They told me that several other classmates were shot as well. They also told me that one of my classmates did not survive. His name was Nick Corwin. It seems like cliché, but Nick was truly the most popular, nicest, smartest and well liked kid in my class. He was mature way beyond his years and I always looked up to him. I remember not understanding what happened. I definitely did not have an emotional reaction to this information other than confusion. I didn't feel anything that strongly, maybe it was because I was on heavy medication, maybe because the physical pain was too much for me to feel anything else. Maybe I had to turn off my emotions and just focus on surviving. I did see how upset my family was. I would later learn that I would spend the rest of my life understanding the emotional significance of this event.

My family told me that a woman came into my classroom and shot us. They told me that I was safe because she was dead. I was confused and afraid. They did not know why she did any of this.

My recovery was long and painful. I was sore and weak. I hated when the nurses would come in to draw blood throughout the day and in the middle of the night. I really hated all the tubes in me. The catheter was very uncomfortable. I also really disliked the tube that went through my nose and into my stomach. Some of the most painful and uncomfortable times involved that nose tube. The tubes made me feel held captive. It felt like the tubes chained me to the hospital bed. My memories of this time are foggy. I knew something significant had happened, but was not in a place to really understand what or why. Mostly, I reacted to other people's reactions. I began to understand that this must be something very serious simply because everyone around me seemed so upset about it.

I was so weak that I had trouble walking. I was stuck in the hospital bed. It felt like everyone else was out enjoying the summer and I was stuck in bed. Eventually I gained back my strength and was able to walk around the hospital unit, but that wasn't enough. I wanted out. I wanted back to my life. It felt horrible that I was stuck in the hospital during summer break. I wanted to be outside hanging out with my friends and family. I wasn't angry then, but when I look back to this time now it makes me angry. Getting shot hurt, but the recovery was much worse. I lost a part of myself and part of my life. At the time I just wanted life to go back to normal. I wanted to get the hell out of the hospital and be better.

Immediately after I got shot, my family didn't know what to do. My parents were at the hospital with me most of the time. My grandmother came in from Florida to stay with my siblings. I remember my dad being very interested in the doctors who were treating me. He looked up to them. To this day, he idolizes doctors.

My Dad tried to make the best of things. I remember him talking with the doctors and trying to help me understand what they were doing to me. Maybe he felt he had to be strong and take care of me. He had to help the family move on. I appreciate how hard it must have been for him and how he tried to support me in the way I really wanted it, which was to try to move on. All I wanted was for things to go back to normal.

My memories of my mother in the hospital are fainter. I know that my mother was having difficulty accepting what happened and that it was a very hard time for her. She was not at all absent; in fact, she said she never left my side. However, in my memories, my mom is not as prominent as my father is. I remember her love, care and support, but not as many actual, coherent memories. I have talked with my Mom about her feelings at the time and she said she felt very overwhelmed and guilty. She did not protect me from getting shot and desperately wished she had. After the shooting, my mom has been my main source of emotional support and I appreciate her always being there for me.

My siblings were around as well. I am the youngest of four. I have two sisters and one brother. Our family spent a lot of time together. We regularly had family dinners and took trips. A few years earlier we all took a long trip to England together. I looked up to my sisters and brother and thought they were cool. I particularly looked up to my brother, who is eight years older than me. Me getting shot, so randomly and so suddenly, affected all of my siblings. When I was still in the hospital, I remember my brother trying to have fun, making jokes, helping me distract myself from where I was. He brought in some toys and we tried to pull off some pranks at the hospital. We all tried to be together, but it was a strange time for the whole family. Everyone was trying to cope with something that we could not fully process or comprehend. I think I was incapable of understanding the significance of what happened to the extent that my siblings were because I was just eight years old. I think my brother and sisters had a better grasp on the severity of what happened.

One thing that I was completely sheltered from was the media. I don't remember one camera or reporter. This was not the case for my family. My parents and siblings were often asked to talk to reporters. My family decided not to talk to the press. They also seemed to feel upset and annoyed by the press. I can imagine that being put on camera is not what they needed at the time.

Some friends would visit as well. In the pediatrics area of the hospital there was an arcade. They had free Pac Man arcade game with a button that allowed you to get a boost whenever you wanted. I guess they had the cheat button to make us sick kids feel better about ourselves. To some extent it worked. I remember going there and having some glimpses of normalcy. There was another kid in the hospital that I got to know. He was in for an asthma attack. It was kind of like we were inmates, locked up for the summer. No kids wanted to be there.

At Highland Park hospital where I was recovering I felt pretty isolated. Most of the other kids who got shot were sent to Evanston Hospital. I wished I was with them. At least we could have hung out and maybe tried to make sense of things. But no, I was up in Highland Park and learning quickly that there were few people that I could relate to. Few people who could really truly understand what I was going through. That is when I started to try to push down my emotions. They would be too much, I wanted to move forward and not dwell on what happened. I wanted to see my friends and go to camp and enjoy the summer and act like nothing at all happened.

My family and I celebrated when I would have tubes removed and got excited when I could have certain foods again. All of these things represented steps towards getting back to normal. The

removal of tubes was symbolic because it represented one less thing keeping me stuck in the hospital bed. As the tubes were removed, I came closer to getting out, which is all I wanted. We celebrated when I started walking. I desperately looked forward to the day when I could finally go home and try to move on with life.

I was excited when two members of the Chicago Blackhawks came to meet me when I was in the hospital. They were Keith Brown and Darren Pang. The media ran with the idea that I was really into hockey. I did play hockey, but it was definitely not a huge passion of mine. I was not a great athlete at any sport. However, I really enjoyed meeting the Blackhawk players and I still have the hockey stick that Keith Brown autographed and gave me. I won't get rid of it and have a fond emotional memory of their visit.

We continued to count down the days until I got to go home. I was so excited. It didn't bother me that the house was right across the street from the school where I got shot. It didn't bother me that I had no idea why this happened. I also just assumed that everyone else at school would be back to normal as soon as I was.

I was ecstatic when I finally did get out of the hospital. I was able to go to day camp and enrolled at Adventures in Learning at Washburn Junior High in Winnetka. We did different activities throughout the day based on our choosing. I loved the archery class and that summer I enrolled in the fishing course. The fishing course was a privilege because we would go off campus to Lake Michigan or the Skokie Lagoons to fish and this gave me a sense of wonder and exploration. Fishing seemed like an adventure because I could imagine catching some amazing fish that no one had ever heard of. It was therapeutic to participate in something so engaging after being stuck in the hospital for three weeks. I was so enthusiastic about this fishing class that my parents got me a fishing rod to practice my casting in the park across the street from our house. My excitement was likely accentuated after being cooped up in a hospital for so long.

One day, just a few weeks after getting out of the hospital, I was in a park. The park was called Mann park and was triangular shaped, situated directly in front of our house and Hubbard Woods School, where I got shot. I was standing in the park with my Dad. I had my fishing rod and was practicing my casting when suddenly I started to feel sick to my stomach; nauseous, cold and very sick. It came on fast and felt really bad. A cold and dizzy feeling that reminded me of when I was in the ambulance a month earlier. I felt like I was going to pass out, but was able to cross the street and get back home.

I went upstairs to my parent's room to lay on their bed. I wanted my Mom. I felt a sickness deep in my stomach. Suddenly I began to vomit. All over my parents' light blue bedspread. It was not normal vomit; it consisted of massive amounts of dark blood. Again, the dark colored blood I first saw after getting shot. It was really disgusting, and I remember chunks of blood getting stuck in my teeth and my throat. It was a lot of blood and it kept coming up. I'd stop for a few seconds and then start again.

Afterward I felt better. I wanted to move on and act like it didn't happen. I remember wanting to hide it. I wanted to go back out to the park and act like nothing happened. I wanted to run

away. However, the blood told the tale. There was so much of it and it was so dark that it was impossible to hide. So, once again, I woke up in a hospital bed.

Apparently, when I got shot, the bullet had hit an artery and that artery was causing internal bleeding. I would never take the fishing course at camp; I had to go back to the hospital to get this fixed.

This time my treatment involved multiple surgeries and lasted two weeks. It was not an easy thing to fix. I don't have as vivid memories of this time beyond being very sad and disappointed. I hated that I was back in the hospital. I hated it, my family hated it, it was the worst. All the anticipation of getting out of the hospital and then having to go right back in. I was learning how hard life could be and experiencing unrelenting frustration and disappointment. Why did this have to happen? I remember wanting to run away from the hospital. I wanted this to end.

The condition was so serious that I had to transfer from Highland Park Hospital and go to Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago. There I finally had a surgery that fixed the internal bleeding. According to my dad, the Doctor who did the surgery was a special doctor from Germany. My dad loved telling me how amazing the surgery was and how they used a tiny camera to fix the artery.

After two weeks, I again got out of the hospital. It was not the same feeling as before. I was not as excited or optimistic. I learned that unexpected, terrible things happen to me. Not only was I shot for no reason, but I also then started vomiting blood all over my parents' bedspread a month later. Life was cruel to me and I was changed. The second hospitalization was not as painful physically, but it was very damaging to me emotionally. It caused me to become cynical and angry. However, I was not going to tell anyone how much it affected me. I was going to move on. I saw no other choice. To me it felt like that is what everyone needed. Just to move on and be better.

## **Life After the Trauma**

After the second hospitalization I remember more normal childhood type stuff. I had friends; I started having girlfriends. I played sports and focused on my school work. I was never the best student because I did not like studying, but I got by in my classes.

However, parts of my life did not feel normal. I first remember feeling anxiety when I was about ten or eleven years old. I remember being able to imagine terrible things happening to me. I would be scared that someone was going to break into the house and kill me. I feared that people in passing cars would shoot me. I remember feeling very afraid at times. Similar to the fear I felt when I was in the hallway after being shot. The fear was not felt just in my head, but also in my body. I would feel my heart rate go up, my thoughts would feel faster and I sometimes wouldn't remember what happened minutes before. I didn't have these experiences very frequently, maybe once or twice a year. I remember not wanting to tell anyone about my fears. I wanted everyone to think that I was doing fine. I did not want to go back to the hospital.

Every now and again I was encouraged to go see a therapist. I was told by my mom that I needed to talk about what happened. The few times I went I would tell my story, the therapist would be really emotionally affected and I wouldn't feel any better. I remember going to see a therapist who had a beard when I was 9 or 10 years old. He had puzzles and stuff and I remember not really understanding what I was supposed to be doing with him. I remember thinking that I was supposed to be sadder about what happened than I was. It seemed like everyone was just waiting for me to have some sort of emotional breakdown because of what happened to me. It felt like everyone was trying to have me feel sad and upset, but I didn't. It felt like my parents, teachers and therapists expected me to have problems. I wanted to prove everyone wrong. I wanted to be okay and move on with my life and not have to deal with the emotional effects of the shooting.

My family was close and I continued to look up to my siblings. My brother Matt was into music and sports and skateboarding. I thought he was really cool. My sister Mary was a good athlete and popular. My sister Sarah was popular in school and had a wide range of interests. We all went on vacation together. We often went to our grandmother's house in Florida. She had a pool and we would spend all day swimming, fishing in the canal in her back yard and watching movies if it rained. She lived in a gated retirement community and many people got around on golf carts. Riding around on the golf cart with my siblings was so much fun. We would go off road and it seemed like some amazing adventure to me. We rarely talked about the shooting. We were just able to have fun and be in the moment together.

I remember once when my family was on vacation in Arizona. We stayed at a resort called The Pointe and it was a dude ranch themed resort. I loved it. They had horses, lots of restaurants and several pools. For some reason I had a fascination with the TV channel where they promoted all the different activities at the resort. I watched it over and over again and it made me that much more excited to be at the resort. I really loved swimming and trying out all the different pools. I could have stayed in the pools all day jumping from one to another.

One day while at the resort I was swimming in one of the pools. My mom was nearby, but everyone else was tired of swimming, so it was just me in the water. After a long time, I finally got tired of swimming and got out of the water. There was a man sitting on a chair near the pool reading a book. As I was getting out of the water he looked up at me and noticed my scar. He asked me what happened. I remember feeling very anxious. What should I tell him? My family had been so private about me getting shot that I didn't feel comfortable talking about it, especially to a stranger. After what felt like forever, I told him that I was shot. He was shocked. He looked upset. He didn't know what to say. I told him that I was shot at school by a crazy lady. I looked away, I could feel his discomfort. I felt ashamed for having to tell him. He said, "Oh my god, that's terrible, I'm so sorry." The intensity of his reaction made me feel like I did something wrong by telling him. He was so upset and I felt like I caused it. I walked away and felt very sad.

I talked to my parents afterwards. They didn't know what to do. I remember them telling me that someday I'll have chest hair that would cover up my scar. I remember them saying that when I get older people may think the scar was from a more routine surgery and not ask me about it. I just remember feeling like I could never take my shirt off again because it made

people uncomfortable. I started to not like going to public pools, the beach, playing sports, anything where I had to take my shirt off. I always feared someone else asking me what happened and me having to tell them and feel bad afterwards.

My family continued living in the house across the street from Hubbard Woods School. I used to hang out at the school a lot in the afternoon and on weekends. There was a hill I could ride my bike down, there was a jungle gym, monkey bars and rings. One day, when I was riding my bike around the playground a boy who was new in school approached me. He had recently moved to the area and started school in my grade. He approached me and asked to see my "bullet holes." I didn't know what to do. I felt very uncomfortable. I showed him my hand, which has a circular scar about a half inch in diameter. He got excited. He thought it was cool. I definitely did not. I never felt proud of my scars. I hated how it felt like I had to do some trick for him and that he was amused by my scar. Even though I knew he meant me no harm, I avoided him after that.

Junior high was awkward. Raging hormones and awkward social skills made life difficult. I had a period when I was sad because in the span of about three years three close friends moved out of town. That was really hard. I did not want to deal with having to make new friends. I felt that with the old friends, all of whom were at the school when the shooting occurred, certain things were just understood. I did not have to talk about the shooting, they just knew about it. Making new friends always involved telling them about what happened and I didn't want to have to deal with that.

When I was in junior high, my parent started to have problems. My mom didn't like living across the street from Hubbard Woods School. It was a constant reminder of what happened. So my family decided to move. We ended up moving into a giant house. It had five big bedrooms, four bathrooms, a huge yard and a swimming pool. It was much bigger than our previous house. After a year or so living there, the bills got to be too much for my father. He had wanted to give something to the family after what happened and so he bought a giant house. My Dad worked in finance and the early nineties recession coincided with us moving into the big house. He was not making enough money to keep up with the increased expenses. He drank to cope with the stress, but the biggest problem was that he hid what was going on from my Mom. So the family kept on living as if there were not problems.

While my Dad was struggling to keep up with the finances, my life kept moving forward. I went to sleep away summer camp at Manito-Wish in northern Wisconsin. It was way up in the woods, far from Winnetka. I both liked and disliked camp. I liked the outdoors and exploring the lakes and some of the camp activities, yet some of the social stuff was more challenging. A significant part of my sleep away camp experience was the social culture. There were Lord of the Flies moments, which consisted of a bunch of junior high boys with little supervision developing a culture and social hierarchy. I remember feeling vulnerable, particularly among the boys that weren't from Winnetka that didn't know my story about getting shot. I remember being nervous about telling them about it. I was also worried about how they would react to seeing the scar on my stomach. Would they think I was weird? Or some sort of freak? I feared being objectified or rejected.



In junior high I mowed some lawns to make some extra money. My brother did the same when he was my age and I always wanted to be like him. One of the families whose lawn I mowed was new to the area. When I was working there, one of the children was in a hammock reading a book about the shooting. I felt uncomfortable and anxious and didn't say anything about it. I started to sweat, wondering if they figured out who I was and paid me to mow their lawn out of some sort of sick fascination with a morbid incident in their new town's history. I wanted to flee, yet I kept my head down and finished my job. That was a time I remember a spike in my anxiety. It is interesting that it was related the societal impact of being shot as opposed to the actual incident. After the pool incident in Phoenix, I started to feel shame and anxiety just for being associated with something perceived as so negative.

My father's struggles continued. He was no longer able to hide what was going on. Bill collectors were getting more aggressive; one morning a car was repossessed. A cycle developed of him coming back home, seeming better and then relapsing it was not always with alcohol, but more often with deception and avoidance related to our family's finances. At the time I remember feeling scared and sad; scared that our family was falling apart and sad that I would not be taken care of, that I would be alone and witnessing the pain my mother was feeling.

I started experimenting with alcohol in eighth grade and drinking more regularly in high school. I wanted to see what it would be like to have an altered mind state. I felt anxious for so long that I was excited to see the world through a different lens. Throughout high school and college I drank and experimented with some other substances, which did provide me with some relief in the moment. It also helped me find a way to connect with people that had nothing to do with my getting shot.

I went to high school at New Trier in Winnetka. It's a big suburban school which had about 3,500 students. Those years were a mixed experience for me, some good and some bad. I certainly had fun and enjoyed parts high school. It was such a big school that I had a radio show on the school station, which actually broadcasted around the area. It was also such a big school that I was able to take some classes that smaller schools didn't offer like sociology and psychology. They even had a class called Literature Psychology where we would read books and psychoanalyze the characters. I had friends, but it was hard because of the three close friends who moved away. I became closer with other friends, but still felt lonely at times. Several area middle schools fed into New Trier, so I had to navigate the feelings of being known as one of the kids who got shot.

I was always very interested in girls and had on and off girlfriends. However I had insecurities about my scar and how I felt it made me unattractive. I would get nervous about taking my shirt off and her being turned off. This never happened, but was a strong fear. I would ask girls I was dating how they felt about my scar and they would always say it was nothing to them. I never liked going to the beach or the pool with them. I avoided taking my shirt off. They insisted my scar was not a big deal to them. However, it was a big deal to me. My scar forever labeled me as different and associated me with something negative.

After high school, I ended up going to college in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California. I wanted to get out of Winnetka. I wanted to be able to be myself and not be

identified by what happened to me. I was able to do that. I had a great time in college. I definitely loved the freedom and the anonymity. I partied, made friends and explored a new city. I probably could have focused more on my school work, but socially and emotionally the experience was really important for me. I had to do it for myself. I had to get away. My brother lived in LA at the time, so it was also a great opportunity to get closer to him. We had a lot of fun and I made some great friends.

Although I got away, there were still times where my past experience affected me. While a freshman, I naively decided to pledge a fraternity. In one of the hazing activities, the fraternity brothers kidnapped us. I was sitting around with my pledge brothers at one of their apartments having beers, hanging out and laughing. All of a sudden, I heard a bang at the door and saw people rushing in and yelling. I felt a surge of anxiety in my body and went out to the balcony. I looked down, I was on the second floor and saw that it wasn't that far to the ground. I thought I could land safely, so I jumped. I landed on a hill and twisted my ankle and got the wind knocked out of me. The fraternity brothers were scared I hurt myself and quickly switched out of hazing mode. They asked if I was okay and seemed worried. No one else jumped off the balcony. No one else had such a strong reaction to people rushing into a room.

I also remember when I was a freshman in college and the Columbine shooting happened. It was during a period of time when there didn't seem to be as many mass shootings. The shooting at Columbine actually happened on my 19th birthday. I remember watching the footage from Columbine on my tiny 13 inch TV in my dorm room. I felt bad for all the kids at the school because I knew what they were going through. I felt a connection, but didn't know what to do about it.

Sophomore, Junior and Senior years of college were fun. I had lots of friends, off and on girlfriends and was very interested in music. I lived with friends off campus. We lived in a house with my girlfriend and several other friends and we had a lot of fun. I went to Vegas several times. I was very into electronic music and went to nightclubs and other venues in Hollywood. I was a DJ and loved collecting and playing records. I was living my life without boundaries or limits and loved it.

I studied psychology. I found it very interesting. I liked how deep it was and how it has a philosophical element to it. I was not interested in it because of my own experience in therapy. At that point I had never really taken to a therapist, so was not motivated to emulate anyone. There were some times when I wondered if I suffered from the ailments that we studied. When we studied Post Traumatic Stress Disorder I remember checking if I had the symptoms necessary for a diagnosis. I convinced myself that I did not.

After college I returned home to live with my mother until I could get settled. I did not like being back in the North Shore. She had moved to a different town, but it was still only a few miles away from Hubbard Woods School. I was always overly preoccupied with running into someone from school. I didn't want to be back there. I didn't want to go back to being the kid who got shot.

I got a job and moved into an apartment in Bucktown in Chicago with a friend. We explored the city, had fun and I started to feel some of the freedom again. My girlfriend from LA eventually moved to Chicago. The relationship was good at times, but I struggled with communication and was very immature. I was pretty much a grown-up kid and she was more responsible, taking care of me. When we were in college it was more fun, she would be the responsible one and I was the wilder spontaneous one. We moved in together, but eventually she got tired of my immaturity and broke up with me. I was still acting like I was in college. I was not growing up.

After the breakup was the first time I felt depressed. I moved into a cheap garden apartment by myself and found myself drinking more than I ever had. I made friends with my neighbors, who were all pretty eccentric. They were interesting, but I was still very lonely. At this time my siblings were all getting married and my friends were settling down as well.

Through all of this I maintained a baseline level of functioning. I lived independently, I never had to move back in with my Mom or take a break from work. I was able to survive, but was definitely not thriving. I had interesting jobs. I worked at a residential treatment center on the border of Illinois and Wisconsin called Allendale. At that job I worked with teenagers with severe behavioral problems. I enjoyed parts of it. I made friends with my coworkers. Other parts were pretty terrible. When the residents would become aggressive they would need to be restrained by the staff members. I was not the biggest or strongest staff member, so I was not the first one to intervene in crisis situation, but I did a handful of times. It was terrible. Seeing a teenager in so much pain. Seeing them have no way to express it other than aggression. It was painful to experience.

Next I got a job at Northwestern University doing research for Illinois Department of Children and Family services. Then I went to Graduate school at University of Illinois at Chicago Jane Addams College of Social work for my Masters in Social Work. During the summer break of graduate school, I lived in Puerto Rico and worked at a camp for disadvantaged youth and at a homeless shelter. After graduate school I worked for a program that provided in-home family therapy to teenagers who were on probation and needed extra help. I went to the most dangerous neighborhoods in Chicago. I knocked on doors in what remained of the Chicago housing projects. I went to jails, cheap hotels, food pantries, shoe shine shops. I was in areas where shootings were rampant.

Once, while I did a family session on a porch in West Englewood, there was a shooting a few blocks away. Another time in Woodlawn I was approaching a house to do a family therapy session and a pitbull came around a corner and bit me in the hand. In both of those instances I felt a surge of adrenaline when they happened, but was not afraid. I was going to the places that I was supposed to be protected from in Winnetka. I figured, if I could get shot in Winnetka, it could happen anywhere. I saw a world that was very different than Winnetka and learned a lot about people.

Despite being stimulated by my work, I became hopeless about my future. I was feeling very alone after the breakup. When I was at my worst, I felt both anxious and depressed at the same time. I would be anxious about my future and depressed about my past. I was desperate to get back into a romantic relationship. I dated, but I was not in a good emotional place for a

relationship. I would compare the girls to my ex-girlfriend. I started to idealize the relationship with my ex and forgot all of its flaws. I forgot about how we stopped communicating, had no intimacy and grew apart.

## **Accepting Help**

One morning in 2005 I woke up feeling terrible after a day of “celebrating” St Patrick's day. For me that meant binge drinking. I could not remember a good chunk of the night before. I had an ATM receipt from a carniceria I've never been to before. My head felt terrible. I texted my brother, "What a disaster". He responded, "Yes you were." I became anxious. I was pacing around my dark, little, garden apartment in Wicker Park. I had moved there after my girlfriend and I broke up 10 months earlier. Before I got the apartment, I had to stay on my brother's couch for a while. I was and still am close to them, but it was a lot for he and his fiancé to deal with. My brother was getting tired of some of my behaviors. He was growing up and moving on in his life, I was not. Some of that frustration was clearly communicated in his response to my text.

I spent the next few hours anxiously trying to piece together what happened the night before. We started drinking in the morning at a house party. I then remembered taking the bus downtown and going to a bunch of bars. At one point we actually ran into my ex-girlfriend. Later we were at a Japanese restaurant with my brother and his fiancé. From that point on I had to talk to my brother to fill in some gaps. He told me that we were at the Japanese restaurant and that I was obnoxiously flirting with the waitress. He said that he had to take me home and that I was barely conscious. He said that I was loud and out of control. After he said this a surge of anxiety and shame flowed through my body. Then the negative thoughts came. What's wrong with me? What was I thinking? I'm such a mess, who would ever want to be with me? I felt alone and out of control. I was completely out of touch with my emotions and was lonely and desperate. My friends and siblings were moving on with their lives, they had girlfriends and good jobs. I was in graduate school for social work, single and engaging in some of the same partying behaviors that my friends and siblings had grown out of. For some reason, I didn't grow up. I was a man child.

I decided that I wanted to go to therapy. This was the first time in my life that I decided to go to therapy on my own. I was twenty five years old and had just been broken up with by my girlfriend that I had been together with since college. I wanted to talk about how I was anxious. I didn't want to talk about my drinking, depression or that I may or may not have symptoms of PTSD. I felt like anxiety was more socially acceptable. It's so much more visible in popular culture. I think of George Costanza on Seinfeld, or Woody Allen. They are lovable, not dark and twisted. It seemed easier for me to stomach that I was anxious than accepting that my anxiety was a symptom of something much deeper, but that is what I would soon come to find out.

I was referred to a therapist through UIC, where I was getting my masters in Social Work. I met with her at varying frequency over the span of about a year and a half. She challenged me to accept that my trauma affected me. She challenged me to consider how drinking was not helping me. She challenged me to accept that I had symptoms of PTSD. After I stopped seeing her I

continued to struggle with some anxiety and depression, but everything seemed more manageable. I did not feel as alone. I was finally able to listen and receive help. I learned that when I had problems, I was better able to understand them and process through them. I was better able to ask for help.

By going to therapy on my own volition I also was able to separate help from having to be stuck in a hospital bed. I think that I associated the shooting with me being trapped in the hospital, so talking about it meant being trapped and controlled. I learned that I could control my life and that accepting that getting shot changed me did not mean that I was losing anything.

My process of accepting help was complicated. I needed to get treatment at my own pace. I remember going to therapy at times and not being ready to confront issues that were brought to me, issues that I am now very accepting of. After getting shot I desperately needed to observe and experience that life goes on. I needed to know that I could try to be normal. It was not until I realized on my own that I had trouble at life did I realize that I wanted help. I had to want help for myself and for reasons that I could understand. Reasons like feeling very anxious, feeling depressed, struggling in relationships and having problems with intimacy. I remember many people telling me, with good intentions that I should go to therapy when I was younger, but I really was not able to get much out of it until I became ready myself.

Dealing with shame and anger has been a big part of my recovery from trauma. Much of this is related to society's response to my getting shot. I felt ashamed for causing pain to people when I told my story. I felt shame that I survived and my friend didn't. I felt ashamed for being different. I felt ashamed for the idea that people in the community would ask my siblings, "How's Peter doing, no, how is he REALLY doing?" Like I should be messed up. It makes me angry that I'm expected to have problems because of what someone did to me. When I was in my teens I don't think I was able to be angry about getting shot as I felt that I should just be happy to be alive. I think I was afraid that if I were to get in touch with that anger that it would be too much for me. Then I started to realize that accessing some of that anger was Okay and was not going to overwhelm me.

I have found it difficult to find an appropriate target for my anger. Getting angry at the shooter has been hard because I didn't know her. It's not like someone close was taking advantage of or hurting me. She was a complete stranger. I can get angry about the ridiculousness of the action. Going to a grade school to shoot kids is terrible. Who does that? It is also further complicated by the fact that the woman who shot me killed herself that same day. I am conflicted about this as I don't want to know her because I hate her for what she did, but her existence could possibly help me make more sense of what happened. I also think that some of my anger towards the woman who shot me comes out in a deep desire for accountability. I am very focused on rules and consequences. This may also be related to issues of trust, but I feel that if someone commits a crime, they should have consequences. The fact that the woman shot and killed herself presented me with closure, but it was closure that I couldn't control. It was forced upon me.

I have found myself wanting to ask the woman who shot me: Why did my life have to change so much? I wasn't doing anything wrong. I did not deserve punishment and even if I did who are you to punish me? Why do you get to decide who lives and dies and who gets to live with scars

the rest of their lives? I wish this never happened. It was such a stupid and horrible thing for you to do. I truly hate that it happened and I hate you for doing it for no good reason.

Perhaps my anger is pent up as I have not yet had an opportunity to publicly share my side of the story. I have always felt that no one could handle or understand it. I've felt like I need to edit myself to make those I love comfortable. I have felt like those who love me don't want me to be angry. Now is my chance to express it. So, the uncensored description of my experience of getting shot at the age of eight and having to live the rest of my life with that experience as a part of me is that it sucks. It has been very hard, I have been very angry. I never asked for this to happen and I hate that it has affected me so much. I hate that there seems to be an asterisk next to my name, indicating that for me to simply be living and functioning is some sort of an accomplishment. I hate that I am "special". I hate that I had no choice for privacy. No one asked me if I wanted this to be private. I did not deserve this. You caused me physical and psychological pain that I still feel today. That is not okay and I hope you can know that pain you have caused. But you probably don't, you were oblivious, angry and psychotic. I hate that I can't blame you, but that I sometimes take my anger out on those I love. I do want to ask you why? What were you trying to accomplish? Why did you shoot me, I never even met you. You could have expressed your pain in a million other ways, but you choose to shoot a bunch of kids and kill one of them. What a terrible way to handle whatever pain you were experiencing. Your decision was a horrible one and didn't accomplish anything. What you did was not fair. I was just a second grader who was excited to be taking the bike safety test. I just wanted to be able to ride my bike to school. What you did changed my life forever and I hate you for it. It is also painful that I don't even know you and that you killing yourself allowed for zero accountability for what you did to me. Now I have to tell a disturbing story all the time and it's all because of you. I don't want to disturb people. I don't want to feel this burden that I now need to do something "bigger" with my life because I'm lucky to be alive. I resent that I'm lucky to be alive. I just want to be alive.

The biggest dilemma I experienced with relation to my getting shot was learning who I am. I am what happened to me. I am the result of something terrible. When I look back on my life, memories before getting shot are faint and incoherent. The first distinct memories I have of my life is getting shot. I don't remember much else. This leaves me questioning what is me and what is the trauma? Am I outspoken and good at planning because of what happened to me or was it part of me before I got shot? I am a good planner and it works well in my marriage as my wife is more easy going. Would I be more easy going had I not gotten shot? I remember some things about myself before I got shot. I mostly remember relationships, like with my siblings, parents, friends at school and my first grade teacher. I remember that I was pretty wild. I was famous in my class for eating a bug that landed in our tadpole aquarium. I remember I was independent because I had problems sitting on that rug in kindergarten. Mostly I remember having fun and feeling loved.

However, I am not sure. These earlier memories are so faint and I wonder if they are even mine, or just me remembering stories about myself I was told by my family. The memories of the shooting are so clear in comparison. I will always remember looking at my hand as it pulsed out blood. I will always remember vomiting what felt like chunks of blood onto my parent's comforter. I cannot forget feeling so upset that summer about being stuck at Highland Park

Hospital. Am I over-identifying with the “bad” memories and ignoring the happier ones? I don’t know. These are questions that remain inside of me.

A major change I made in therapy was accepting that I needed help and that, in order to do so, I needed to let my guard down. I had to stop protecting myself when I didn’t need to. I was protecting myself from being hurt again, but I was over protecting myself. I was shielding myself from future pain, but also shielding myself from care and love.

A mentor of mine once told me a story of a man who built a canoe to cross a river and from that point on dragged the canoe everywhere he went for the rest of his life. He wanted to know that he would be prepared if he ever needed to cross another river, but was also encumbered by having to drag a canoe with him everywhere. This is similar to my story. I was trying to protect myself from getting hurt, but I was also slowed down in my life because I was dragging around excessive self-protection.

In therapy I learned that I was coping with my trauma the best way I could, but that my coping techniques needed to be upgraded. When I was eight, I did not know the best way to cope with getting shot. In therapy I have learned that I can have compassion for my eight-year-old self and know that I did the best I could at the time.

I learned that I used two primary ways to cope with my problems: avoidance and control. I have worked on gradually easing my need for control. Finding activities where I can be more present has been very helpful. I learned to be more present when listening to music and going for long walks with my wife. For me anger can feel empowering, but it is often a response to more complex emotions. I have worked to better understand my anger and found that it often revolves around feelings of wanting to be in control.

I learned that I pushed my emotions down to feel more in control. I was afraid that if I felt my true emotions that they would be out of control, so not feeling was a way for me to be in control. I have learned that emotions do not need to be consuming. I can be angry, but that does not mean that it is all I feel and it does not mean that I am out of control. Thinking of emotional spectrums of intensity is helpful for me. If I’m sad, that does not mean I am immobilized by depression. If I’m anxious, that does not mean I am panic stricken. I have found for myself that when I am feeling something a little stronger than normal that communicating what I'm feeling can help it be understood and better managed than ignoring it.

Typically, the way I indirectly express emotions is to withdraw myself. I get into a very protective and isolated thinking track in which I think that no one can really understand me and that I can't trust anyone, so I should just push everyone away. When I get hurt, my response is to pull back and withdraw. It can be hard for those around me. It can feel like I'm giving the other person a guilt trip. However, my experience is very different. I am pulling back to protect myself. I am pulling back to feel safe again. I pull back to re-evaluate the risk of opening myself back up to potentially be disappointed again. I know this is hard for those close to me, so I am working on figuring out a better way to handle disappointment. It can really be painful for them to see me pull away so overtly.

I have found it helpful to have several doses of therapy at different periods of my life. I have needed to evaluate how my trauma is affecting me, because it affects me differently at different times. I have had to master it as I've mastered other developmental phases before moving on from them. I learned that as I have become more sophisticated in my emotional capabilities I have needed to review how my traumatic experience affects me.

After I went to therapy on my own and started to accept more things about my past my life got better. I became more independent and started to feel happier. I saw two other therapists for short stints. I learned that my need for therapy coincided with major life changes and that I could use it for my benefit.

One fall day when I was 27 years old I was living with a friend and we were in a basketball league. Although the league was recreational, our team became more and more competitive as the season progressed. As the team became more competitive, I became less and less interested. I have never been a strong athlete and was on the team mostly just to get some exercise and to hang out with friends. Nonetheless, we had a Sunday night game that we lost. After we got home, my roommate and I ordered some food and went to bed. I noticed some stomach pain during the game, but nothing out of the ordinary. I had grown accustomed to some gastrointestinal discomfort. Usually my gastrointestinal distress was self-induced by consuming junk food. I knew that I would eventually feel better after drinking some water and waiting a while. I figured this instance would be the same. However, it was not. The pain kept getting worse and worse.

I went to bed and woke up in pain after an hour or so. The pain continued. It started out as more of a cramp, but then the pain became sharper. Slowly, the pain continued to increase. I didn't know what to do. My stomach was sore in a way that felt different than cramping or a stomach ache. Why was this not getting better? Should I call someone? Should I go to the hospital? I didn't want to bother anyone if it was eventually going to go away. I didn't want to go to the hospital. So, I laid in bed waiting for it to go away.

The pain continued to feel stronger. I started sweating and became dizzy. It got to be about midnight and things were steadily getting worse. I decided to go the hospital down the street. Knowing my aversion to hospitals, this alone illustrates the immense pain I experienced. I left our apartment and walked down the street to Lincoln Park Hospital a couple blocks away. This was not a major hospital in Chicago and is now closed. I went straight to the emergency room and waited a short time. I was asked if I wanted to call anyone and I said no. I wanted to take care of this on my own. I was given some tests and they determined that I had a bowel obstruction. I had never heard of such a thing. I was put in a hospital bed and waited for the doctors to come up with a plan. Again, I was asked if I wanted to call anyone but I said no. I wanted to do this by myself. I didn't want to involve my family because they had already been through enough. The pain continued to get worse. I was given morphine. Then the pain decreased and I was in a calm, dreamlike state. At that point I was again asked if I wanted to call anyone and I decided I had better call my family. I felt like I had tried to do it on my own, but things were getting worse and I was scared. They were even talking about surgery.



My stomach was bloated. It was getting bigger and bigger. It was very sore and tight. The nurse said that they were going to put a tube into my stomach through my nose. The nurse attempted to insert the nasogastric tube and messed it up and it went into my lung. It was terribly painful. A sharp pain coupled with feeling like I was choking. I gasped for breath and my body flailed. They attempted again with more success. Here I was again. Back in a hospital bed with a tube up my nose. This was terrible.

The doctors determined that they would give me an MRI to check the status of the obstruction. After my family arrived we met with the surgeon who may have to go in and remove the obstruction if it did not resolve itself. My family was worried about me being at a second tier hospital. Before the MRI test they had me drink barium so they could better see where the blockage was. I drank the barium and then had the MRI. I was still cloudy from the morphine, so I felt removed from what was really going on. Eventually I felt a strong urge to use the bathroom. I went several times and it was a huge relief. I would later learn that somehow the barium was able to clear the obstruction. I would not have to have surgery again after all! My stomach was sore and I was exhausted, but I got to go home.

I spent the next couple years experiencing bowel obstructions every year or so. I learned that a bowel obstruction is when your intestines get twisted on itself and then the food inside gets stuck. The multiple surgeries I went through after getting shot makes this more likely to happen to me because there is scar tissue on the intestine which makes it less flexible than normal intestine. When it does get twisted, whatever food was above it gets backed up and the intestine swells. During this period of my life I had to go back to seeing lots of doctors. I always hated when I had to go see a new doctor, and I had to tell them about getting shot. The doctor always seemed to feel the need to comfort me, or sometimes talk about how they remembered when it happened and how they may have known one of the doctors who did the surgery.

One thing that was different this time though was that when I went to the hospital a couple times for bowel obstructions was that I was an adult. I was able to express how it felt and to better utilize the support of loved ones. My girlfriend [now my wife] was with me. My family was with me. I felt more in control and aware of what was going on. This, in a sense, allowed for the hospitalization to be a bit of a corrective experience. It made my memories of being in the hospital as a kid less scary. I was able to go back and be aware and alert; to get help and understand what was happening. It helped me get over my fear of hospitals.

Another example of having a corrective experience was during the blizzard of 2011. While I was working as a therapist with kids on probation. I had a meeting with a kid on the south side and was driving home at three in the afternoon. I knew a big snowstorm was coming so was listening to the radio for reports. The sky was dark and the snow had started and was coming down pretty heavy. I wasn't sure what route to take home, so listened to WBBM radio for the report. They had a reporter in a car that was on Lake Shore Drive who said that things were moving, so I decided to take Lake Shore Drive home. Traffic was slow, but it often is when it's snowing, so I kept on the road just thinking I may get home late. I had dinner plans with my girlfriend and called her to say I was going to be late. Traffic got slower and slower and the snow kept coming down harder. I was getting anxious. I was worried that I was never going to be able to get home. The snow was just too high, there was no way I was getting home. So I

waited. I was waiting in my car without moving for about five hours. I called 311 and kept asking what to do, could I leave my car on the street? The operators kept saying no, you can't leave your car on Lake Shore Drive, just wait, help was on the way. I watched the fuel gauge get lower and lower as the snow piled up. The storm was so strong that I could hear thunder. What would happen if I ran out of gas and had no more heat? I waited, and called friends, family and 311. Finally, at 3am, I got through to an operator who finally admitted that leaving my car was all that I could do. I had been in my car 12 hours. I left my car on the road, wrapped my scarf around my head and ran through over three feet of snow to the nearest subway stop. I got on the red line at Clark and Division and took it up to Belmont. I then ran to my apartment. The other cars waited another several hours until they were told to leave their cars and they were put on a bus to a city college.

This experience was a stressful one. I was afraid. I was worried that no one cared. I was worried I wouldn't survive. But, I was able to use help. I was on the phone with loved ones. They helped me plan what to do. My brother was the one who insisted that I leave my car and gave me the strength to do it. I talked to my girlfriend who helped calm me down. I was not alone and I had some sense of control. It was not like when I was a kid.

Life continued onward. I got a better job. I started working at Rush University Medical Center in the department of psychiatry at the Rush Day Hospital. It was a better environment than any of my previous jobs and the work itself was more enjoyable. My girlfriend and I got closer and closer. Much of this was because of me getting more and more comfortable with myself and my emotions. I was able to share with her and ask her for help.

Getting married was an important step in my moving on with my life. My wife is a kind, gentle and caring person. She listens to me and is affectionate towards me. Even though I knew all of this, I was still nervous about marriage. I worried about all the problems that my parents had. I worried that I should not be vulnerable. On our wedding day, when my wife was walking down the aisle, I cried. I rarely cried after the shooting. What hit me so hard was thinking about my wife's vulnerability and not mine. Thinking that she was choosing to trust me to be with her. It felt like such an honor and I felt so excited to hug her as soon as she reached me. I knew that I wanted nothing more than to be with her. I wanted to share everything with her.

After a few years of marriage, my wife and I decided that we were ready to begin trying to have a child. Prior to this we were pretty indulgent. We went out to eat a lot, we went on lavish trips. We went to Paris, Tokyo and all over the states. There was a point where we were talking about our next big trip and we didn't really want to go anywhere that bad. We were satiated with self-indulgence and ready to take on a less selfish endeavor. So, she went off birth control and we were waiting to see what happened. After a week or two, she got pregnant. I couldn't believe it. It seemed too fast and too easy, but she took the pregnancy tests and confirmed it. I still had a hard time believing it. It was too easy.

A few weeks passed and my wife started to feel sick. A few days later I got a call from her that she wanted me to come with her to the doctor. She was afraid that she had a miscarriage. While we sat in the waiting room we watched all the little kids playing with their parents and it seemed to rub salt in our wounds. My wife was very sad and anxious. I sat next to her and held her

hand. We finally got called and the doctor confirmed that she had a miscarriage. My wife continued to cry. I was still in disbelief. It never really sunk in to me that she was pregnant in the first place. It all seemed too fast and too easy, but it was different for Lilly. She felt it in her body. She knew she had been pregnant and she knew that it was over. She had a deep sadness.

To add insult to injury, the next day was her birthday. We had dinner reservations, so we went out to celebrate. We went to this amazing Asian fusion restaurant and had wonderful food, but needless to say, it was not a happy night. However, I have never felt closer to my wife. I felt her pain and I encouraged her to not hide her tears. I was there for her and I fell even deeper in love with her. Being with her at her most vulnerable time make me feel more connected to her. It was similar to when she was walking down the aisle on our wedding day. She trusted me to take her hand then and she trusted me to be with her in her pain now. It was an honor and I found it beautiful.

After our miscarriage My wife and I had a period of reflection. She was sad for a while, but we talked and got through it. We decided to give it another go and she got pregnant again without complications. During this time, I started thinking that I needed to share my story. I felt that since we were to bring a life into this world that I needed to get this last bit of self-reflection out of my system. I met with a therapist several times to help work through my anxiety about sharing this with the world. I talked about my fears of being shamed for exploiting the event and for bringing attention to a community that may just want to forget about it. I fear that the other kids who got shot will be mad at me. It's a physical feeling--my heart rate goes up, I feel a little shaky, my face gets red. It's like I'm at the top of a high dive and am scared to jump into the water. I know rationally that everything will be okay, but I still have this fear that something terrible could happen.

I think my fear of being judged by the other survivors may be because they may not view me as special and coddle me the way the rest of the world does. They may think that I'm making too big a deal of something that they handled easily. I have not stayed in touch with any of the other survivors. I am not sure why. We just were not that close. We all seemed to like each other, but there wasn't this deep connection that it felt like there was supposed to be. My memory of getting shot was only about me; I don't remember seeing anyone else. It's not like we were at war in the trenches fighting for each other's lives. Then we would feel a bond. We were just sitting in a classroom. I wish the other survivors well, and hope they are living fulfilling and happy lives.

## **Living After Trauma**

On December 5th 2016 I was co facilitating a family session when my pager went off. I knew something serious was happening as I rarely get paged. I knew it was my wife. She had woken up at 2:00 a.m. that morning and said she was scared that her water broke. We both thought that she may have been overreacting. This was her first pregnancy, so there were many times throughout her pregnancy when she would worry that something had happened with the baby, but it just turned out to be the baby moving around or gas or whatever else. So, Lilly called her doctor early in the morning and they decided that she should just go to work and call if anything else happened. Lilly is a mediator for couples divorcing. She helps them determine custody

arrangements for their children. Sometimes she has to teach about mediation to these couples before they start the process and was presenting information to a group of divorcing couples when she felt something again. She had a colleague relieve her and called the doctor and they decided that she should go to triage.

When I returned the page from Lilly I was anxious. I was still in a bit of disbelief. Before she was pregnant with this baby, she had the miscarriage. I think both of us were worried that something bad would happen again. However, we talked and she said she thought that nothing was going on and that she was overreacting. I told her that I needed her to be able to tell me what she wanted and she was able to say that she wanted me to come be with her. I was and still am very thankful that she was able to be so open and direct, otherwise I would have missed the beginning of what turned out to be a transformative part of my life. I rushed to the hospital and was still in disbelief. We sat in the triage room and a nurse came in and checked my wife and said that yes, her water had broken and that we were going to have a baby.

I was flooded with emotions, but the most overwhelming one was love for my wife. She had been through so much with the miscarriage and the discomfort and anxiety of being pregnant. I knew she wanted a baby and was so happy that this was happening. I too was excited, but for some reason was more excited for her than for me. We went to a delivery room and waited. She was given medication to move the contractions along and it worked. In about six hours things became more intense, she was ready to have our daughter and the doctor came in the room to deliver the baby. It was a doctor that neither of us had met before, but she seemed enthusiastic and confident. The nurses and doctor asked my wife to start pushing. Then kept asking her to push and it seemed like she had no time to recover in between. I was holding her leg and trying to be supportive, but knew I had no idea of what she was going through or feeling.

After a few minutes, things got tenser. The doctor and nurses looked worried. Apparently, the baby's heart rate had dropped and they were worried about her surviving the birth. Suddenly four or five additional nurses and another doctor came into the room. I could feel the tension but they told us very little about what was going on other than that they were going to use forceps. This being our first baby, I didn't know what to do or say and became worried. At one point the staff began arguing. Tension was very high. My wife was given oxygen and kept trying to push, but I was thinking that it was too little. I was thinking that this was not going to work out. Thinking about what would happen if our daughter died. How Lilly and I could move on. We could travel, spend time together. We could just give up on this whole baby idea. It was crazy to begin with. Imagine, me being a father. With my luck, no way would it ever work out for me. I was feeling and thinking these thoughts when they pulled the baby out. She was little, her arms and legs were purple and she was not crying. I was worried she wouldn't make it. The doctors and nurses were still very tense and took the baby over to the warming table to tend to her. I've seen the movies, the baby is supposed to come out and cry. The baby was not crying. What was going on? Was she dead? Was this truly not meant to happen? I held my wife's hand while watching the swarm of nurses surround the baby. They were quiet. I felt a huge feeling of love for my wife as I knew how much she had been through. I wanted the baby to be Okay for Lilly's sake. I could handle the disappointment, but I didn't want Lilly to have to. Finally, after a few minutes the baby began to whimper and then cry.

My daughter Grace has only been in my life a short time, but I have appreciated every minute of it. I have been so amazed how quickly I can love someone. It is so instinctive and innate. As she grows and matures I love her more and more. I am so thankful that I am in a place in my life where I can have such an experience. A place where I am open to being so out of control and so needing to trust others and accept help. There is no way I would have been ready for this had I not used therapy to explore my life, my experiences, my trauma and how it affected me. There is no way I would have been able to handle this had I not wanted to change.

It took me a long time to be ready to accept that my trauma deeply affected me. To accept its impact on my life felt like a defeat but it was also liberating. It was almost empowering in a sense that I felt more in control by accepting that what happened to me affected me and how I view the world. Accepting that the trauma affected me also gave me chance to confront what I always feared was something so intense that it would cause me to come unglued. I have found that the process of avoiding processing my trauma is what actually caused me to become "unglued". Denying that what happened affected me was much more exhausting than confronting my issues in treatment.

Accepting help was something that was difficult for me to do. It meant first admitting that there was a problem. I think this was something that took me a long time to be willing to do. As expressed earlier, this problem was thrust upon me. What caused my problems was not genetic, or some sort of condition I was born with. Rather, it was something that was done to me without my permission and in an invasive and destructive way. I could have died. My life could have been over before it really began. The notion of accepting that this event, which almost killed me physically, is also a "problem" psychologically was hard to do. However, I was eventually able to do so. I have been able to accept that I react differently to things because of what happened to me. I have been able to accept that my fears may seem more real or likely to come true because of what happened to me. What has been more powerful, however, is that now I have the ability to share my experience with others. I do not have to push it down and just survive. I can own that something terrible happened to me, but that it has also made me a person who feels deeply and has strong empathy. I have become closer with those I love after accepting and being able to communicate how much I have been affected by getting shot.

A big fear of my accepting help is the fear that it will not be available when I really need it. I feared that eventually, I could be in another situation where I cannot be protected and where I am on my own. I fear that accepting help makes me dependent on it. I need to be independent if I am going to be able to protect myself, as part of me has learned that I can't fully depend on people as no one was there to protect me when I got shot. I have been learning to accept and appreciate help, but there still is a part of me, deep down, where I question if it can really be depended on. However, I have been taking steps. Each time I ask for help and am responded to I learn to trust more and more. It is scary for me, but it is healing.

When I think back on those who have helped me along the way, I feel that I have not been overtly appreciative enough. I think this is because I accepted help so grudgingly. I did not want to admit that I needed help. I feel that every therapist, mentor or coach I worked with along the way helped me in some way or another. However, it was difficult for me to appreciate all of their work and their efforts to try to help me. I felt angry that I needed the help in the first place

because I did not ask to be shot. But now I would like to say thank you. I appreciate all of your help. When I was young I appreciate you listening to my story. When I was older I appreciate you nudging me to realize that getting shot may have affected me in some ways. I appreciate you helping me accept that I have some symptoms of PTSD. You helped me realize how those symptoms get in the way of what I want in my life. You helped me figure out how to navigate my self-imposed roadblocks and get what I want, which is love, security, warmth and acceptance. Thank you so much!

I have become more compassionate and caring as I've acknowledged the true impact my trauma had on me. I have noticed that I've eased up on criticizing myself. I have problems just like everyone else. Some of them are related to my having been shot when I was a boy and others are not. I am finicky, impulsive, gluttonous and somewhat self-absorbed at times. I am not perfect, I never will be. But, I am able to love people and I do care deeply about others. I am able to help people at my job. I have been able to balance my perspective of myself. I am not all bad. I am not all weak. I have vulnerabilities; I am aware of some of them and am receptive to understanding more as they come up in my life. I also know that I have strengths. I know that my life has gone on and that I have been able to form meaningful connections with others. I am thankful that I am able to experience fatherhood. I am thankful that my symptoms have not made life so hard that I couldn't do this. I want to share this wonderful world with my daughter!

I have found that as I have changed my perspective of myself it has also changed my perspective of other people. I see strengths in people that I may have judged negatively in the past. People are complex and have many different facets. Some good, some bad. I have found myself more able to see the good in people than I have in the past. I used to focus on the bad in people to protect myself. If I knew someone was bad, I knew to avoid them so I wouldn't get hurt. But by avoiding them I was also missing out on their good parts. I have been able to see other people are capable of changing. I have changed, so others can too.

As I've moved through life stages I've changed quite a bit. I have had to shed my layers of what I mistakenly clung to for self-protection. I have learned that my shutting out my emotions caused me to miss out on a lot. I was faced with continuing to suffer as a result of my trauma, or confronting it and being able to open myself up to allow me to access so much more. I have found that in acknowledging my emotions I have been more vulnerable, but I have also been more alive. I am able to feel joy and happiness. In the past I shut those feelings down along with the negative ones. It's like emotions are sunlight. Sunlight can burn you, but it can also give you vitamin D and can lift your mood. I used to live under an umbrella to protect myself from being burned, but I also was blocking the positive parts of sunshine. Now I know how much sunblock to put on, when I need to sit in the shade and when to soak in the sun.

#### **A note of encouragement to those affected by trauma (Separate page)**

As you move through life phases I urge you to accept yourself. Honestly look at yourself and identify both your strengths and your vulnerabilities. Accept yourself at the place that you are right now. I feel that acceptance is much more productive than avoidance. Accept your pain and acknowledge it; do not run from it. View the world as bigger than just your life. That your own need for comfort may be limiting you. Your sole focus on surviving limits you from seeing so much beauty, love and care in the world. There is a reason for why you act the way you do and

that is because something terrible happened to you. I want you to accept that. That won't be taken away, what happened happened and it hurt. You can be angry, sad, scared. Do not disown your feelings. Accept them; running from them only makes them stronger. However, I urge you to contemplate if you are ready to try to move forward. Moving forward is not forgetting the past. It is simply looking at your life and thinking if you want more. You can have more. It is out there. All you need to do is trust again. What happened to you made this hard to do, but just dip a toe in the water. Begin to trust in yourself and others; push yourself to do it. Maybe start with a therapist or family member. Be open and honest with him or her. Tell them if you are cynical of them. Tell them if you are scared. You are in control. You can stop if you need to. But try to tell your story. Try to understand how what happened to you affected you. Begin to accept yourself, particularly your feelings. Your feelings are not wrong, they are what they are. Express them and then you and your therapist can begin to understand them. This will begin the process of moving out of survival mode.

Then, as you become more accepting of yourself, you can start to take more risks. This is the beginning of thriving in life. You hopefully will gain some confidence. You will begin to feel that you deserve a better life. You deserve to thrive. You are no longer just a survivor, there is much more to you. You can explore facets of yourself that you may have ignored in order to survive. You deserve to be cared for, you deserve a better life. This confidence is not entitlement. It involves having pride in yourself and feeling that your hard work deserves to be acknowledged and responded to. Entitlement is feeling like you deserve the recognition without doing the work. In going through this process you are doing the work, but you are also going to have to follow through in other aspects of your life, like your career and relationships. Start to transfer your insights from the therapy session out into the world. Continue to accept help and trust those you love. Continue to trust yourself. Think about what your life could be. Explore the world, develop new relationships, ask for the promotion, find the better job. You deserve it. You are no longer limited by your self-protection. You can do and have the things that you used to be afraid of.

After you are thriving in your life, you can think even bigger. You can look outside the confines of what is and then think what can be. What can I create? How can my fantasies become a reality? You have the confidence to thrive, now it's time to build something. Think big. Allow yourself to wonder what could be. Maybe you never felt you could do this because of what happened to you, but you can now. It may feel childish to have fantasies, but maybe you never felt you could. Allow part of yourself to be a kid again and imagine and wonder what could be. Maybe this part of your development was stopped because of what happened. Maybe you stopped being able to have hopes and dreams. Allow yourself to have those now. You have been through a lot; you are strong, but also vulnerable. Your experience makes you someone who can bring something better to the world that hurt you so bad. I urge you to at least try. Go out in the world and create.