

Falling Out: A Memoir

Kenyon Aubin Oster

Saving a Life Should be More Fun!

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DEDICATION

I'd like to thank my friend who sued me after I almost died saving her life. Without her, I'd never understand the true importance of forgiveness or positive energy. I'd also like to thank my family for always believing in me. XOXO

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Introduction

When my friend sued me after I almost died saving her life while simultaneously falling out of the closet I knew I would never forgive her. I wanted to kill her with my bare hands more than I wanted to forgive her. Saving her life devastated me physically, emotionally and mentally, but the lawsuit destroyed the expectation of goodness I grew up believing in and that was a never-ending heartbreaking betrayal that I didn't know how to wrap my head around. In the blink of an eye, because of my selflessness, my life became a huge unnavigable mess. Lost and numb and detached, I manufactured a sense of hope by creating a yellow brick road paved with cluelessness, denial and positive affirmations and went on a journey to heal myself and find my voice.

I was young and carefree and hanging out on a balcony at a gay bar in New Orleans when my friend lost her balance. I reached out to stabilize her, but a few minutes later the paramedics were pulling her off my lifeless body from a top a sewer cover on Bourbon Street twenty something feet below. When I awoke from the week-long coma I was a nineteen-year-old, amnesiac, zombie with little hope of ever living a normal life with parents who didn't know how to love or help their gay, brain-damaged son.

The doctors mainly shrugged their shoulders when diagnosing my recovery because: *I'm going to feel like I'm going to lose my mind at any moment for the rest of my life.* One minute I'm a regular zombie struggling to focus on a task at hand, and the next minute I'm running to the nearest bathroom because an intense shit-my-pants fear is boiling inside of me. Losing my mind throughout my day hastened the need for me to become more present inside myself to articulate my needs, desires and feelings because I was so detached it was as if I was floating inside of myself.

Eventually, I begin using the phrase *something wonderful is going to happen to me* to guide me along my journey and to usher in positive energy, but my day-to-day is exhausting. I fall down, I hide in a bathroom, repeat my mantra, get back up, live my life, live inside my head, repeat my mantra, discover more words, climb a mental hurdle, have an epiphany, reach the next level of awareness and do something to claim my journey (like change my name from David Landry to Kenyon Oster) before falling down and getting back up to do it all over again a few more times a day. It's an existence that slowly erodes my self-esteem until my life falls apart completely, and I lose everything I own in this world (read: become homeless) except the courage I had to go on this journey in the first place.

I secretly move all of my stuff into my cubicle at work, and, for the first time in my adult life, become fully present with myself. I may not ever heal completely. I might have to ride a wave of crazy a hundred times a day for the rest of my life, but my selflessness and my honesty placed me on this

journey to magnify the importance of forgiveness and positive energy and I have to stop fighting with myself about that fact and embrace the lesson that's right in front of me. The expectation of goodness I grew up believing has some battle scars, but now I have a good enough reason to let go of my anger and the shame and all of the negativity and forgive my friend. I've been conjuring positive energy for as long as I can remember and ushering it into my life, but not being able to let go of the negativity prevented me from embracing it fully. My friend left the expectation of goodness I grew up believing in a mess for quite some time, but I'm not going to let her destroy it completely. I honor my goodness by forgiving her. I honor my goodness when I let negativity go. This is the reason I need to forgive my friend. It's the reason I have to forgive myself for not wanting to forgive her and for not knowing how to go on a journey that no one expected me to go on in the first place. Yes, saving a life should be more fun, but rising above the adversity and embracing my goodness so that I can honor it completely is the place I've been struggling to get to for years and now that I'm here all I can think is something wonderful is going to happen!

A STRANGER IN THE FAMILY

Like most people, I grew up afraid of dying. When I actually died, though, I felt no fear at all. It's *magical*. Everything is *love*. But now that I've crossed back over to the land of the living and am lying in a hospital bed, it's a different story. Unable to organize my thoughts or find the words I need to articulate the disorganization, I'm trapped inside my body.

Lisa, my sister, pushes her shoulder-length blonde hair out of her face and reveals her tear-filled hazel eyes. Our parents, Lorraine and Paul, have left her in charge of me while they're grabbing a few of my belongings from Mom's car.

Lisa smiles. "I know you can hear me, little bubba!"

I hear her, and then I don't. I'm awake but just barely cognizant of the fact that I'm awake. It totally blows, but there's nothing I can do about the haze of disorientation where I now live. It sucks all the energy out of me and leaves me flickering between being aware of what is happening and being completely unaware, while wrapped in this silent mental nothingness.

"Talk to me, little bubba! You have to say something!" She pauses, stares at me. "I see you looking at me. We all knew you were going to be okay as soon as you asked for Popeye's from the other side."

Although I don't remember it, asking for fried chicken while knocking on death's door gave my family a sparkle of hope and a few chuckles.

"You need to call Jason, little bubba," Lisa continues. "He told me he wants to see you."

Lisa's voice mingles with the football game blaring from the wall-mounted television at the foot of my bed. Like the cheers and whistles, her words sometimes sound like incoherent noise. And when they are not, it's as if she's speaking in slow motion.

I struggle to break through my catatonic pause. "He gave me the condoms to hide." My flat, lifeless

voice matches my expressionless face and throws her for a loop.

“Hello!” Lisa waves her hands in front of my face. “Is anybody home? What happened to your voice, and why are you talking about condoms?”

“We ... had ... a ... fight.”

“Y’all had a fight and he gave you condoms.” Lisa nods and tries to put the pieces of my death-warmed-over rambling together. She cannot wrap her head around the fact that I am a non-brain-eating zombie who blurts out whatever pops into his head without rhyme or reason.

“When did y’all fight?”

My mindless dribble continues. “Yesterday.”

“You seem punch-drunk, little Elmo.”

I only hear the word *drunk*, so I shake my head.

“Yeah, you do.”

I shake my head again.

“Are you still gay?”

I nod.

“That’s cool. I love you, but if you wanted to come out of the closet you didn’t have to fall out of it from the balcony of the biggest gay bar in the city trying to save your friend’s life.” She looks at me and laughs. “I thought you knew you couldn’t fly.”

I stare into space and let her words fill my scattered thoughts for a brief moment before nodding. “I can’t fly.”

“Duh,” she says, smiling. “And Jason caused a whole lotta drama while you were dead. He didn’t tell

Mom or Dad that you're gay or that he's your boyfriend, but with all your friends coming to see you it was gayer up in here than Richard Simmons at a Judy Garland concert. I thought someone was gonna win a Tony for best ensemble. They didn't want to believe it so they never asked me, but when your friend Monica (deep voice, heavy bosom, full beard, lesbian) came to visit they couldn't deny it anymore. They didn't say anything while she was here, but they made Jason leave after she left."

Holy shit and oh lucky coma! I planned on coming out to my parents at some point. I hadn't gotten around to it. Never in a million years could I have imagined that saving my friend's life and having a bearded lesbian friend or a boyfriend would force the issue. Jason's tears (I assume he was teary eyed at some point) combined with Monica's presence must have turned our parents' Rush Limbaugh- and Fox News-lovin' sensibilities inside out and upside down.

"Mom and Dad are hoping that you don't remember being gay."

Our parents wanted me to be a priest. It was a reasonable assumption. I attended a lot of church youth events throughout the country and state during high school. Priests wear such uncomfortable clothing, so I decided to be a journalist.

"Shhh." Lisa jolts forward. "We gotta talk about this later. Mom's down the hall."

The familiar jingling of the key ring Mom bought in Bolivia years ago echoes throughout the hall and alerts us of her arrival.

"The parking garage should be closer," Mom sighs as she enters my room and stops at the foot of my bed. Her wavy, auburn hair looks slightly unkempt, and her eyes are puffy. The usual lilt to her voice is replaced with exhaustion. Although she always sees the sun through the clouds, I'm nineteen years old and the newest member of the living dead all at once. The clouds are pretty thick and dark for her right now. In addition to all of the emotional stuff she's carrying, physically she's holding a white garbage bag in one hand and a black duffle bag in the other.

“Has your brother been talking?”

“A little.” Lisa nods.

Mom perks up instantly. “What was he saying? Does he want Popeye’s?”

“I didn’t ask him, but he really isn’t making any sense. I was going to ask him if he saw the light when he was dead, but I don’t think he knows what planet he’s on.”

I’m not on another planet now, but I was in another dimension when I crossed over. Yes, I saw *the* light, but I also saw darkness. I was covered in both of them from head to toe at different moments. Regardless of light or dark, it literally felt like I was luxuriating in a tub of bliss that filled me with an abundance of peace and wisdom and happiness that transformed me into a mass of love. All that was left of me was love. I never wanted it to end. But as I was moving toward the light and searching through a haze of light, I began to see an alternating pattern of ceiling tiles and fluorescent lights floating above me. That’s when I crossed back over and came back down to earth.

“What did your brother say that made you think he was on another planet?”

“He mumbled a few nonsensical things about not being able to fly, and he said he had an argument with someone yesterday.”

“Oh.” Mom pauses. “Did you ask Dave if he remembers the accident?”

“I told him about it.” Lisa winks. “What’s in the garbage bag?”

“That’s what your brother was wearing when he fell.”

Lisa yanks the garbage bag from Mom’s hands and dumps its contents onto my lap. My favorite pair of J. Crew loafers and matching belt land on my lap with a loud, painful thud along with a pile of bloody rags that were once my clothes. The pain from the heel of one of my loafers coincides with the moment I float back to reality and become aware of the conversation that’s being had about me in front of me.

“At least your belt and shoes are still intact, little bubba.”

Mom looks deeply into my eyes. “Lisa said she told you about the accident, Dave. Do you remember saving Hannah’s life?” She studies me. “The doctors said your clothes might spark your memories of the accident.” She moves closer. “Is it working, Dave? Do you remember anything?”

“He looks confused, Mom.”

“Are you remembering anything, Dave?”

Mom and Lisa resume their conversation about me while I dig inside myself for words.

“No,” I eventually blurt with my lifeless voice.

“Well, I’m glad you found a reason to talk again.” Mom smiles. “I was hoping you would. Tomorrow I’ll bring all the get-well cards that came to the house for you.”

“We surely do have a lot of cards for you, Master David.” Dad enters as Mom is speaking. Even though a chocolate donut muffles his words, and he looks as exhausted as Mom, it doesn’t diminish his enthusiasm. He takes off his gold-rimmed glasses and massages his forehead and the bridge of his nose. His thinning brown hair is slowly causing his widow’s peak to disappear.

“Dad ate most of the chocolate that everyone brought you.” Lisa smirks.

“My number-one son is awake!” Dad declares while doing his best Charlie Chan impression.

“No duh! We know he’s awake, Dad!” Lisa calls attention to his annoying talent for playfully announcing the obvious while somehow remaining oblivious to the statement’s obviousness.

“We’ll buy more chocolate for you,” he assures me. “Are you hungry, Master David? I can go to Popeye’s right now if you want me to.”

Lisa snaps, “Stop trying to make him eat fried chicken.”

“He was asking for it. I’m just making sure he knows he can have it if he truly wants it, Lisa.”

Mom intercedes. “Do you know where you are, Dave?”

“You’re at Ochsner Hospital, little Elmo,” Lisa offers.

“Do you know where Ochsner is, Dave?”

They stare at me, wait for me to speak. The divide between the world where I reside and the one where they live becomes clear when I disappear from the conversation and inadvertently go all Bermuda Triangle on them.

“Are you with us, Master David?” Dad asks.

“Do you know where Ochsner is, Dave?”

They wait for me to speak. I stare ahead, at nothing.

“Paris,” I inform them after taking my sweet-ass time to rejoin this world.

“Not even close, Master David.” Dad shakes his head. “Ochsner is in New Orleans.”

“Do you know where Ochsner is, Dave?” Mom asks.

I think long and hard before answering the question. “New Orleans.”

“He got it right!” Mom excitedly pats Dad on the shoulder. “Dave, do you remember saving Hannah Song’s life?” She clues me in. “You were friends in high school.”

“You remember her, little bubba, don’t you?” Lisa eagerly asks.

“I don’t think he does.” Mom frowns. And then she smiles. “You chivalrously saved her life. Your friend Julia told us all about it last week at the emergency room.”

Finally, there’s proof that chivalry isn’t dead. It’s alive and well and it almost killed me. So it certainly

can't be dead and everyone needs to stop complaining.

“Julia told us everything, son. She said you reached out to save Hannah and that's when the two of you fell. You saved her life when she landed on you. That's when you hit your head.”

Lisa winks. “The doctors can prescribe painkillers if you have a headache.”

“I hope he doesn't need something prescribed to him,” Mom sighs.

“Of course he needs something hardcore, Mom. He has massive brain damage! And one of your doctors is named Doctor Bellows, little bubba, like that character from *I Dream of Jeannie*. He can prescribe you anything you want.”

Mom cringes. “Your brother probably doesn't remember *I Dream of Jeannie*, Lisa.”

“Sure he does,” Dad insists. “Don't you, Master David?”

Lisa folds her arms, squeezes her eyes shut and nods her head Jeannie-style. “You remember that show, little Elmo—the astronaut and the genie?”

“Yes.” I nod. My voice resonates with lifelessness once more.

“I told you he remembered.” Lisa gloats, and holds up an orange plastic pumpkin. “Do you want some Halloween candy? Our cousins Cybil and Nelda brought it. Dad hasn't eaten any of it yet. I hid it.”

I stare at her with glazed-over eyes.

Dad moves closer. “Have you seen the scars on your body?”

He tenderly lifts my shirt and gives me a tour of my battle scars. “Your right lung collapsed, so the doctors inserted a chest tube through your rib cage.” He points to the scar a few inches below my armpit. “That's what that scar is, and the one right below your belly button is where the doctors ran a tube filled with saline through you to see if you were bleeding internally.”

This is my family's new reality. This is my new existence. I'm a stranger to myself and to the people I've known and loved my entire life. They have no idea how to help me. They have no idea what's going on inside my head. My family, numb and half-asleep and disconnected, continues speaking near me and about me and to me until the silence of my mental nothingness envelops me once more, and I pass out.