When Skies Are Gray

Daniel Mershon
Concordia University - Portland

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WHEN SKIES ARE GRAY

Daniel Mershon

The skies were gray on May 2, 1998. Not just gray, dark gray: completely overcast and not a hint of sun shining through. It wasn’t raining yet. I was outside shooting hoops with my father. He heard the phone ring and went inside to answer it. I kept shooting and the ball went through the basket more often than one would expect for a nine year old. I retrieved the ball from under the hoop and dribbled it back.

My father walked out, and the look on his face was anything but good. It was a sorrowful look, not only because of the loss, but guilty because he was bearing the horrendous news. We stared at each other for a moment. A tear rolled down his cheek… “Micheal just died.”

He knelt down and I ran into his arms. Tears were drowning my eyelids. I wasn’t bawling, I wasn’t hyperventilating, I was simply crying. I was crying because when my father uttered those words, I remembered all of the times that Micheal and I had fought. We apologized but neither of us meant it. They were apologies forced by our parents who just want resolution. I was crying because we never would make up for it, and because we would never fight again. My tears were supposed to be a catharsis, but they made me grieve more than ever.

Micheal and I heard the sound of the ice cream truck coming. We had been planning this all week: the moment he passed our house we would run to the gate and moon him. The obese ice cream man drove around the corner to see our buck-naked rear ends. We were laughing at our brilliant idea, but his only response was: “Mine’s bigger than yours!”

We drove to my mother’s house where Micheal had died. My mom greeted us with tissues in her hands. I wanted to see him so she led me into the bedroom where he lay. He rested serenely on the bed where my Mother had moved him. His skin was milky white and his veins were overly visible. I couldn’t bear the sight and I ran out of the room.

I didn’t want to cry, but I couldn’t help it. I missed Micheal, and we all would, but crying wasn’t going to help us and it definitely wouldn’t have brought him back. Micheal would miss us too, but he wasn’t crying. He wasn’t crying when he passed away either. He just closed his eyes and slipped away. I kept reminding myself that Micheal was in a better place. Of course we would miss him, but he’s not suffering anymore; we should be happy for him. He had been bed ridden for six months—not just six months, but six months out of 86; roughly one fourteenth of his life. And in the last few months he couldn’t even talk or lift a finger. All he could do was sit there while the cancer suffocated his brain. But now he is probably flying and running through heavenly fields.

Micheal had to go in for Chemotherapy ever day for what seemed like an incredibly long time. One day I was watching the screen in the room adjacent to the radiation room. My father, who was in the other room, slid his finger up his cheek giving the impression that he was picking his nose. Micheal thought it was funny, and wanting to be funny like our Dad, he stared straight into the camera and stuck his index finger into his nostril.

At the funeral I felt fine, but confused. People were dressed in black. Why couldn’t they wear normal color clothes, something more vibrant? Black was the color of death, and we didn’t have a funeral because he died, we had one because he lived. We all knew he was dead and I for one didn’t want to be reminded of it. I saw people that I didn’t even know, or who barely knew us, and they were crying their eyes out. I kept asking my Mom why everyone was crying. She just looked at me as if she was trying to hold back her own tears. Were these people who barely knew us crying because of this tragic incident, or were they merely crying because they felt sorry for us? Everyone kept hugging me; people I barely knew. “I’m sorry for your loss” they would say. But why are you sorry? You shouldn’t be because it’s obviously not your fault.

Many people spoke at the service, and each one brought back memories. There was an F-15 pilot that my Dad worked with. He let Micheal and I taxi out in one of the jets. This was when Micheal could still walk. When he realized he was unable to walk he just sat down. “Don’t worry Mom; I’ll just learn to walk again later.” We couldn’t let Micheal know
that he was dying, but deep inside he probably did know. His optimistic attitude often left my mother running out of the room in tears because she knew the unfortunate truth; he wouldn't walk again, and he wasn't going to get better.

The Make-A-Wish Foundation wanted to help Micheal. His first wish was to meet his biggest hero, Shaquille O'Neal, so they sent us down to a basketball game in Los Angeles where he could meet Shaq. Micheal was so distracted by actually seeing Shaq that he didn't realize the autograph Shaq left on his basketball card. Micheal's second was for a Nintendo 64. I imagined how miserable he must've been when he couldn't walk. To make my brother's last few months more enjoyable I withdrew all the money I had been saving since birth (with my Mom's permission of course); money from chores, washing cars, birthday gifts, etc. and I bought him the N64 he wanted. I was completely broke, but it was the best $300 I ever spent.

After a few guests spoke there was a lady who was going to sing. When she started to sing I noticed her beautiful voice, as did everyone else. “You are my sunshine my only sunshine.” At that moment I came to my realization. I remembered all of the good times I spent with Micheal. I remember my Mom singing that song to us when we were younger. She used to sing it before we went to bed. Her voice was beautiful too because she was singing it to us—for us. I looked up at her and we were both starting to cry. “You make my happy when skies are gray. You'll never know dear how much I love you.” Micheal was happy no matter what. Even when he couldn't walk he was optimistic. He never realized how much we loved him, but I didn't realize it either. The memories kept flashing through my head. So many good memories, and that's all I have left. There won't be any new memories made. My head was buried in my Mom and we were crying harder than we ever had before. “So please don't take my sunshine away.” I could still picture my Mom singing that song. But her sunshine had been taken away. The sky was gray, and her son wasn't coming back.

TOM AND THE BULL

Dustin Kunkel

I saw Tom go off at
A lope into the woods.
The woods near the
Bottom of the hill, where
The river flowed.
He crossed the footbridge and went into the field across the way
Where the bull grazed—the sign said, “beware:
The bull is loose!”
He was gone a long
Time, and we sat

Waiting in the rain and

Wind,

And when he
Returned he was
Shaking his head and

Smiling.