

The following is taken from draft twelve of the book. The final version was draft fourteen or fifteen. Although this section didn't change much, those of you who have the book can see the evolution from this draft to the final product. Enjoy.

One Beat at a Time

Living with Sudden Cardiac Death

Prologue

My life at times has been as normal as any middle class kid named Matthew in any small town in Michigan. At other times it has been so abnormal and miraculous that it could make even the most devout atheist question his views. Like everyone, I've had struggles; the difference is that my tough times have been quite stunning, even worthy of telling in a book. Like a Fourth of July fireworks display, those times in my life when I've escaped sudden cardiac death look amazing from the outside and are so powerful as to shake me to the core.

Each and every person on this planet has had or will have at least one moment, most of us many more, where we find ourselves crying out "Why God?" from deep inside. We cry out until we remember that we aren't even sure we believe God exists. My life seems to have been filled with those moments, one after another. Yet each and every time I have managed to come out on the other side with at least a smile, and usually a laugh.

This book is the story of my fireworks display and how I've made it through. The story will be told along with my reactions, my reasons, my thoughts, and my prayers. For some, the story alone will be enough. For others, the story won't be so impressive, for they've got one of their own. For them, the help may come through seeing a different way of thinking, of reacting, and of living.

As I sit here today, I am prepared to tell my story like I've never told it before. I plan on opening up completely for the very first time, as I have come to realize that when you open up beyond what feels comfortable, that's when people are touched.

One wintry Michigan night back in college, I was out with some fairly new friends. We had just spent hours at the library studying when we decided to walk across campus to a local gathering place to sit fireside and chat. As we talked, they knew nothing of my past or my current struggles; I was just a guy they were getting to know.

I don't know what it was about that night, maybe the lateness of the evening, the warmth of the fire, or the look of acceptance in Lauren's eyes, but I revealed much more of myself than I normally would have at that point in a friendship. I opened up. For some reason, I

not only told the amazing details of what had happened to me, but also let them see the fears I faced at the time. I told the story like I'd never told it before. I also got a response like never before. I don't even remember the words they used, but the looks on their faces said it all. It touched them in a way I never expected.

So as I sit here prepared to tell my story, I am going to tell it as I did that night, sitting in a large overstuffed leather chair by the fire, late into a cold night, opening up more than ever before. I'm not going back to look up dates, making sure to get every detail perfectly right. This isn't intended to be a record of history. This is my story the way it sits in my mind, all true, the way I and those closest to me remember it.

So as the fire crackles in the background and you forget about the lateness of the hour, relax, enjoy, and picture this . . .

Chapter One

– Let the Fireworks Begin

Some people are born on third base and go through life thinking they hit a triple.

– Barry Switzer

It was a cold day late in February of 1976 as she sat leaning out of her second-story bedroom window, willing to put up with the cold just to get the high. It was a good cold though, the kind of day that makes the slush-filled gray Michigan winters worthwhile. The sky was as blue, and the sun as bright, as any summer day. The air was so crisp it made her want to breathe in deep, just to feel the sting in her lungs.

She sat there in a marijuana-induced mode of contemplation thinking about how weird it was leaning out of the bedroom window that just a few years before belonged to her parents. She was married now, living in the house that held all of her childhood memories. The house was in the small autoworkers town of Montrose, just outside of Flint, the kind of town where everyone knows everybody. Yet no one really knew her. She thought about her marriage, her job, and her friends. She thought about everything as she sat there resting heavy in her insecurities; she thought about everything but the consequences.

Just a month later she gave birth to me, and man, was I cute, in a weird sort of a way. Like a baby monkey, my ears were all folded in on themselves, and I had entirely too much hair,

but other than that things were pretty normal. In order to correct the slight oddities of appearance, my mom, a second-generation hairdresser, used hair tape to set my ears back and quickly gave me a haircut. She trimmed off about an inch of that jet-black, arrow straight hair that would not cooperate with any amount of hair spray that was commercially available in 1976. Yes, life was grand for me then.

Life was great for my mom, Sue, as well. She was a young mother worrying about her baby just like any other. She worried about the little things--a cold, a runny nose, and at times what seemed to be my inability to sleep--but never about what was actually to come. She never once found herself imagining what it would be like to hold onto her lifeless son while crying out to God for help. Yet in the years to come that is exactly where she would find herself, more than once. For a twenty-five-year-old party girl, anything that serious was inconceivable. Even when thoughts of doom and fear (of a much lesser variety) did crowd her mind, she would simply smoke them away. She wasn't the type to let herself get down. She was about having fun. Enjoying life.

These days my mom says that if she had known what she would go through over the first twenty-eight years of my life, the thought alone probably would have killed her. It's funny how this life only lets us see just enough ahead to take a step, and no more.