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Heartfelt

Zach Kapstein

Providence College, zkapstei@friars.providence.edu

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HEARTFELT

By: Zach Kapstein
December 10, 2020

Dedication:

I would like to dedicate these stories to my dog Yellar, who has inspired me over the years to live life to the fullest and take no days for granted. A brother and the best of friends, his love and support through the good and bad of times has never wavered and I will be forever thankful to have him.

Perseverance

A crystal clear, star-studded sky, with a slight breeze setting the temperature at 70 degrees.
It was the classic end-of-summer New England night.
The high school football season had just kicked-off and this was our year to go-out as seniors,
winning the state championship.
A year of revenge and redemption was underway, determined to erase last years' shortcomings.

As I took the ball from my quarterback, darting down the field, everything was quiet, as if
in slow-motion but I knew my legs were racing, trying to evade defenders.
Feeling only the wind on my face, the goal line was fast approaching.
I was all alone.

Boom! From seemingly out of nowhere, I got hit from the right side.
My left shoulder went straight into the freshly cut turf.
"Pop-pop!". Two noises that will forever be etched into my mind.
I did not need an x-ray to show me that I had just snapped my clavicle in two places.

Laying on field, staring into the dark sky, it took everything I had not to cry.
Not from the pain, but knowing that my final season had just gone down the drain.
Football was my sport, my passion, my love.
Was this fate?
Two days later, I would be pieced back together with eight screws and a titanium plate.

After watching my team lose once again in the playoffs, I would spend the next four months
rehabbing the broken shoulder.
Weekend mornings were dedicated to laps in the pool.
Nights were filled with grueling exercises.
To say that this was enjoyable, you would have to be a fool.

"Why?" A constant question that jogged through my mind.
Months later, that answer, I was able to find.
After a productive spring baseball season, we saw my surgeons' craft was the reason, when my
name was called during the Major League Baseball draft.

Orange Sky

The glowing flames race across the mountain-side.
A wall of fire incinerates the dried timber,
consuming anything that tries to hide.
Animals have become homeless
and houses have turned into exploding bombs.
The fine dust tickles your throat,
while tears stream from tormented eyes.
You quiver before every breathe,
knowing that toxic ash will poison your lungs.
Nothing more needs to die.
Are we the culprits for this orange sky?
It is summer in western Montana
and yet we endure this apocalyptic landscape.
A burning atmosphere.
A hell on earth itself.

Heaven

Floating on the Missouri in Mid-July,
intruding into God's backyard.

The sun shines in the blue sky
as you feel its rays bristle your skin.

Jagged snow-capped mountains guide
the river to the promised land.

The soothing trickles of water
pierces your ears.

Lush green timber clothe the landscape
and you inhale un-touched air.

Wait! A tug on the pole!
God shows mercy as the trout bolts free.

*Quietly a river refuses to disappear
into ground.*

A Higher Power

A white envelope sat alone on the kitchen table. *He* didn't need to read the "US Army Official Mail" stamped on the top left corner to know what it was. It was a death sentence, camouflaged on paper. 1969 was the most divisive year in the United States since 1860. Inspirational political and spiritual figures such as JFK, MLK and Bobby Kennedy had all been assassinated. Riots, driven by racial tension, had left major cities in flames. The body-count in Vietnam was climbing by the minute. America was lost. It was coming apart at the seams. Morals, values even the candor of the U.S. government were called into question. Was it considered patriotic to die chasing ghosts in the jungle, fighting the spread of communism or to march in the streets opposing it? At the time, there was no correct answer. The Vietnam War had driven a stake through the middle of America. *He* didn't have the connections to serve in the Air National Guard or study at Oxford. *He* wasn't a Senator's son. *He* didn't have the "dough", therefore, *He* had to go! A torn ACL suffered playing college football the previous year would deem him "4F". An injury that was once considered career ending, had now shown its true purpose. In 1969, my father met his guardian angel.

Free Fall

The seagulls were singing and the clean salty air bristled my nose. Walking down the beach I could already feel my nerves jumping with anticipation. The tension building in my stomach was nauseating. For a 90-degree, sun-filled July day in New England, I was anything but relaxed. The perfect beach outing with fear racing through my body. A type of strange paradox.

My older brother was accompanying me on this journey. It was a 20-minute walk from the parking lot over golden sand, out to the giant rock. I knew this route very well, as I had traversed it many times throughout my youth. But today was different. Today I was going to look my greatest adversary right in the face.

The rock protruded out from the shore, into the ocean for about 200 yards. As we got closer, I kept telling myself “you’ve got this. No problem.” Some things are easier said than done.

By now my heart was beating faster and faster. Was it the fear inside of me growing or was I really that out of shape? A combination of both was the correct answer.

We finally got to the “spot”. A ledge carved into the side of the rock, 50 fifty feet above the crashing waves. I stepped down onto the over-hang, my brother, Jake, stood next to me. The churning, dark water looked ominous. But it was the sheer height of the impending jump that terrified me the most.

Heights were my kryptonite. My absolute greatest fear. But I had witnessed Jake and many older friends make the jump before. Today was my turn to overcome my strongest vice.

After 5 minutes of myself trying to find the courage to make the leap, Jake was getting impatient. “Come on dude! Are you gonna jump or not!? I don’t have all week to stand here!”, he snickered. Being too mesmerized on watching the crashing waves, combined with the absurd height, I couldn’t find the words to respond to him. I was petrified. Frozen.

Finally, I heard a voice inside of me scream “just do it!” With all the power in my legs, I pushed myself away from the rock. Free falling towards the water, a million questions raced through my mind in only a matter of seconds. *Did I clear the shallow rocks? Is a shark waiting for me?* Adrenaline electrifying my body! *Am I gonna hit the...* CRASH! Everything went pitch black. The cold ocean engulfed me as I sank towards the bottom.

Realizing that I wasn't dead, I kicked my legs towards the surface and gasped for air. Looking back up at Jake, a huge smile lit-up my face. I did it! I had conquered the biggest fear of mine and it was absolutely exhilarating! I turned towards the beach and swam as fast as I could, eager to get back on top of the rock. What was once a personal detriment, was now a great pleasure.

When It Matters

What makes an athlete *great*? Is it how fast he runs? How high he can jump? How much weight he can lift? Or, perhaps, is it something else? Is it when the chips are down and he hits the game winning shot? Drains the winning put? Maybe a walk-off homerun?

Bottom of the 9th inning. Game 7 of the World Series. The Blue Jays are down 6-5 to the Philadelphia Phillies. Two men on base, with two outs.

Joe walks confidently from the on-deck circle, up to the batters' box. This is it. What every young baseball player dreams of from the first time they pick up a ball. A chance to have their name etched into the history books.

For Joe Carter, this is the culmination of a tumultuous career. Once considered a 5-tool prospect, he was a first-round draft pick out of Wichita State. Ten years later, he has become the quintessential "journey-man", bouncing around from team to team and now relegated to left-field. This is Joe's chance to prove the doubters wrong.

Standing 60 feet away from him on the mound for the Phillies is the lefty, Mitch Williams. He is considered one of baseball's greatest "closers". A man brought in to finish games. To erase any hope of winning for the opposing team. His sole job, on this night in Toronto, is to get Joe Carter out by any means necessary, then celebrate the 1993 World Series.

Up until this point, Williams has been stellar. He has struck Joe out the last four at-bats. The Phillies have the champagne on ice. They are just waiting on Mitch to finish the job and complete their championship season.

Carter locks-in as Williams delivers a 98 MPH heater down the middle. "Strike!", shouts the umpire. Williams rears back and burns another fastball towards the plate, catching the outside corner. "Strike!", the umpire blares again.

The Blue Jays are down to their last strike. A World Series hangs in the balance. Joe steps out of the box. The righty takes a deep breath. He knows that Mitch is not wasting any time. He is coming right at him with the hard stuff.

Joe steps back in. The fans, the players, everyone is waiting with bated breath. Inside a stadium that seats 85,000, you can hear a pin drop. Sure enough, Mitch unleashes another 98 MPH heater. Only this time, “crack!” The ball sails over the left-field fence.

Jordan sinks the shot. Orr scores the goal. Ali knocks out Liston. With one swing of the bat, Joe Carter, the obscure, after-thought of a player, has just won the Toronto Blue Jays their first World Championship in dramatic, walk-off fashion.

So, the question remains. What makes an athlete *great*? For Joe Carter, it was redemption. It was his moment to become a world champ when it mattered the most.



Zach Kapstein, is a Junior at Providence College. He is a History major, who enjoys writing and studying American History. Zach takes great interest in sports, hunting, fitness, and traveling. He spent nine years playing and coaching in Professional Baseball before returning to college in 2019.

“Zach, simply put, writes for anyone who enjoys a good story. Through his exceptional use of literary devices, he is able to create inventive and entertaining stories. Each piece he writes is better than the last.” -Ian McElrath

“Zach’s imagery and telling of his stories are quite profound. His imagination shines through from the first to last page. His narrative storytelling makes it a thrill to read and a book that I couldn’t put down!” -Thomas Zinzarella