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A Short Memoir

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My mom gave me two options a half year ago, either I go to Utah Valley University in Orem, or Dixie State in St. George for college. I chose Dixie without much hesitation. I thought it would be nice to be with family and away from the parents so I applied, packed my bags, and travelled through a literal snowstorm to reach my destination. However, I didn't really think my living situation through. Although it was an absolute pleasure to stay with my grandmother in Hurricane, it was a huge change and a challenge, mostly from my choice to attend only three classes a week at the Hurricane Education Center that was thirty minutes from Dixie's main campus. It separated me from the actual students having a real college experience in dorms and large classrooms as I found myself alone in my room virtually every day. I didn't make friends. Isolation was a subconscious goal of mine. I had minimal social encounters with the other students. I made acquaintances, but nothing more than knowing a few names and taking a seat next to those figures with those names.

I thought I would be able to write a fiction novel while I was attending school. I had many ideas and stories stirring up in my brain that needed some way to be released in a format that was understandable to others. Although I didn't read much myself, I thought writing a book could be my creative outlet. I was wrong. In two months, I had written only half a page.

I eventually thought writing music might be fun to experiment with. I taught myself lyric writing and penned multiple lines of potential songs on paper. I was excited about what I was doing, calling my mom a few times to share what I had written. I showed my grandmother who was staying with my parents what I had done while visiting my home in Orem. She majored in music education in college so I assumed she would have experience in what I was doing. She was enthusiastic about my poems and told me I had something special going on. So my lyrics sat, ready to add music. But the music never came. I had no piano to experiment with, and I

barely learned how to do my scales on the guitar I had brought with me. Music apps still could not replicate the way a piano feels under fingers. So my lyrics stayed as poems and my hopes diminished.

I became depressed, as many do when potentials become not so potential. I dropped a math course out of frustration and confusion, I stopped trying to be productive, and I cried myself to sleep plenty of nights. But it all stayed bottled up inside me. When people would ask me about specific details of my life, why I was or why I wasn't doing or experiencing something, I began feeling conflicted. It left me uncomfortable when someone asked me about a mission, or a girlfriend, or why I wasn't attending a singles ward. It was nice to know they cared, but invasive of them to ask the "whys" of my life. I hated being questioned as if someone deserved the answer. Also, when those same people asked me what I wanted to do in my life I always replied with uncertainty as if I wasn't sure. That was all an act. I had a plan. An elaborate, detailed plan. Even multiple elaborate plans. But embarrassment prevented me to express my larger-than-life desires and visions, for I failed myself and changed my life direction very often. Too often. I couldn't stick with one thing and run with it. I was unsatisfied with every choice I made, which in turn led me to believe others would be unsatisfied by my decisions. I treated my creative plans as top secret. I wanted them to seem like some grand surprises when I succeeded. But success was never around the corner. Those plans stayed secret.

It was like I had become a rebel. Not going to school full-time, not taking the steps to serve a mission, not motivated or progressing through life like all those my age. I was an outsider looking in. Alienated. I was just going through the motions, making sure everyone at least believed my efforts were actual efforts. This became a habit. I cared less and less about what

others wanted for me, ignoring their invitations to do as they did. I still wanted to satisfy others, but to do so would leave me with less than what I wanted out of life.

Loss seemed to be a theme in the four months I had away from home. In February, my grandmother's husband passed away. I drove the entire distance from Hurricane to Logan one morning after hearing of his entrance into hospice care. He wasn't expected to live long and the doctors weren't exaggerating. He was gone as I made it to his home in Cache Valley. I had never seen such heartbreak from my grandmother. As a family, we had lost a great and loyal man. More than two months after his leave from this world, my brother-in-law's father had passed also. He was a gentle giant, and just as my step-grandfather he too was spared from an extended period of pain when his time here ended. Although I did not have blood relation to either of these men, I had still felt the ripple of their impression on this earth. I was lucky to have been able to love and respect both. They will never be forgotten by those who cherish their memories of them.

Almost every weekend, I had the opportunity to go to see my sister, her husband, their dog, and their beautiful four children in Ivins. We ate, we went to church, we talked, and we played. It was more than enjoyable. It was comforting. My main purpose in going to Southern Utah was to be with my family and I met my goal of seeing them often. At church, I had great amounts of fear and dread when going to the meetings beyond Sacrament, even though their ward was very kind and welcoming. But I believed my sister and brother-in-law noticed my struggles and were willing to take me along to their crazy mixture of adult Sunday school,

Primary, and Strengthening the Family lessons. It was generous and uplifting and I gained faith through their support and sacrifice.

Eventually, I had made the decision to leave Dixie and go back home to Orem and begin attending school at Utah Valley University the following summer semester. I had come to the conclusion that I would pursue a four-year degree in art to gain basic and advanced foundational skills. UVU was one of the only four-year universities in Utah to offer an Illustration emphasis in Art and Design and I had the desire to gain the skills to become a concept artist. It made sense for me to go back home and pursue that degree, hopefully gathering enough skills and knowledge to pursue entry into the multiple industries I had an interest in. For the first time in years I had a clear path that I truly had the faith to take.

So, the last day I had with my gracious family in Ivins came the last week of school at Dixie. Everything seemed like just another good afternoon with them, but with small hints of disappointment. It seemed like they did not ever want me to leave the St. George area. I could somewhat understand that, I wasn't too excited to leave them either. But nonetheless, I assumed the day would go on normally. We attended church and were able to watch the season finale of a show we had, as a new tradition, viewed every Sunday. After dinner and the show, I came upstairs and noticed my sister and younger niece doing dishes. I approached them and heard my niece respond to my arrival with, "Great job, Jordan. You made mom cry." I panicked. What did she mean? I thought I had hurt her mother's feelings somehow. As I glanced up to see my sister staring out the kitchen window, a tear streamed down her cheek.

"I don't want you to leave."

I didn't know what to say. I never knew what to say. I didn't know what to do. I sometimes knew what to do. My heart broke. Right there. My sister had made me feel

immeasurable guilt without meaning to. I didn't think that I had grown any closer to her the four months I had come down for school, but that sentence she spoke proved me wrong. I was never closer to her than in that moment. She was more than my sister. She was my close friend, something that I didn't have a lot of. All the members of my family had become more valuable to me than ever imaginable. I realized how grateful I was for my grandmother for letting me stay in her home. For the value she had on my health and well-being. For her forgiveness and strength. For her kindness and stories. I realized how grateful I was for my sister and her husband. For welcoming me into their home during some tough months of their family's lives. For continuing to smile, even when they were hurting. For the great dinners and "our" show. I realized how grateful I was for those kids I was an uncle to. For their enthusiasm and joy that provided an example I emulated. For their generosity and honest enjoyment of me and the time I had with them. I realized how grateful I was for my parents. For providing me with the means of staying hundreds of miles away from them to attend school. For listening to my complaints and compliments of my journey. For helping me to keep my composure. I had so much gratitude for those who spoke to me, who texted me, who called me. That communication had aided me in what had been the most confusing and challenging months of my life to that point. I was thankful for the jokes, the concern, and the life that was shared. Those individuals were my family when I needed family the most.

There weren't any visible tears from me in that moment of realization, but as soon as I shut my car door after saying our goodbyes that night they came to me with no warning. I cried my way home. I was so grateful for the love that I had felt, the true joy that I experienced being with my loved ones, and the times of sorrow that we were able to share and support each other through. I was sad, but had felt that I had experienced growth. Growth that could never be

replaced. Although I was unsure of where exactly my life was going to take me, I knew that my family would always love me. And that, was the most important lesson I learned from my semester down at my home away from home.

With much love,

Your son, grandson, brother, uncle, and friend –
