

## To My Brother by Alexis Negron

Every future moment is uniquely made up of its past. Now for you to understand my hopes for the future, it's important I tell you about my past. To preface, by eleven years old my DNA was primarily made of resentment. I concocted a version of myself I was beginning to accept. I was no longer the happy child I once was. From age eleven to my early adulthood, I became comfortable living in fight or flight mode. As I share my story, please keep note that each of these moments has landed me right here.

In 2008 I had a front seat watching my mother fight for her life. At this time, I had learned she was terminally ill with thyroid and breast cancer. In early August of that year my mother succumbed to the cancers that had been slowly attacking her body for years. From that very moment, I was filled with rage. Now you would think this would give me the strength needed to attain everything I could for my future. To turn my anger into success. To make my mother proud and create the life me and my little brother desperately needed. However, those weren't the cards I'd been dealt. At 15 years old, I dropped out of high school and by my 16th birthday I was emancipated. The responsibility I needed didn't come with a handbook. Growing up, I didn't take much care of myself. The women in my family preached the importance of self-care, but I didn't listen. I landed my first job in fast food and remained loyal to a company that didn't have my best interest at heart.

Throughout the years of neglecting my well-being, health, and education, I was scared to live a different life. My brother was my responsibility and in fear that leaving this job would give some sort of struggle, I never left. For 7 years I was overworked, tired, unhealthy, and sick. He, who was just one year, one month, and a day younger than me, was like a son. No matter the difference in age I always treated him like my child. I simply wanted to provide him with the life I knew he deserved. I tried to give him everything, and while doing so he reciprocated the concern. He noticed I was becoming increasingly tired, my skin more pale than usual and my health was starting to decline. On New Year's Eve of 2019 I was rushed to Jersey City Medical Center. I woke up on New Year's Day after having surgery to remove my appendix and gallbladder. Late 2020, in the midst of Covid, I was rushed to the hospital again, only this time to find out I too was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. I now walk around with the ugly 1-inch scar on my neck. Anytime I look in the mirror I don't think of my own suffering, but I'm always reminded of my mother's. Her scar was much bigger than mine, and it's a reminder that so was her battle. I never knew the scar on her neck was a giveaway of being a thyroid cancer patient when I was a child, but I know now. I refused to let this effect my responsibility, so I thought. Although I was operated on, received treatment, and now live with a lifelong condition of hypothyroidism, I soon returned to work in 2021.

Now after all that I've mentioned you would think my future would have changed, but nothing did. My future in fact got worse. I received a phone call, a phone call that would change my life forever. It was July of 2021; I was told to go to the ER. It was my 23-year-old brother who was rushed to the very hospital where I'd receive my diagnosis. I arrived at the E.R and all I can remember was a woman with black hair, and black scrubs asking me, "How long has he been a diabetic?" While trying to have a conversation with me a total of 18 nurses and doctors were working quicker than I could comprehend to intubate my brother. At that moment in time my

body sunk. My brother never knew he had diabetes and neither did I. What is medically known as DKA, a diabetic coma, was what was happening to him. His organs one by one shut down and on July 31st of 2021 I held his hand until his very last breath.

Lastly, it is possible you may have asked yourself if this was the event that changed my life, and the answer is yes. It took for me to lose the very thing I was fighting and working for to change my life. Losing my brother has pushed me to make some very difficult decisions. I quit my job that summer and immediately went back to school as he'd always begged me to. He was certainly the one to tell me to get a law degree because I'd always win an argument. He was certain to tell me that I had the will to fight for people rights. It is because of him I learned to be a better woman for the future. It is because of him I went back to school and got my high school diploma within three weeks. It is because of him I'm now majoring in criminal justice. It is because of him my future as an aspiring lawyer is in motion. Losing my Irish twin of 23 years shifted my future in more ways than one. It's challenged me to make him proud. My future is entirely dedicated to him. The meaning of my future is painfully defined by my past, but my future is much brighter because my purpose is.

## No Future by Suzzette Collazzo

### No Future

Every passing second was once something we looked forward to; was once the future. We book flights to places on our bucket list and dinner arrangements with friends to celebrate milestones but there is no certainty we will make that flight and no assurance that we will reach that milestone. What is the future? Any (time) ahead of the millisecond that you are currently experiencing. By the time you have finished reading this submission, the future would have come and gone well over billions of milliseconds. Time itself has determined that there is no future. There is no future, just an everlasting present because time never ceases or suspends itself. Instead, there is hope. The hope that we will get to move on from the current point of time we find ourselves in and the hope that we will attain what we aspire to grasp in our hands if we just have the time to do so.

If we are sufficiently self-aware of our mortality, then we know that every upcoming second, minute, hour or day is promised to no one. Therein lies the heart of what Horace tried to convey with "carpe diem" or to seize the day. With the knowledge of our temporality on this earth, we must seize the everlasting present as often as the opportunity is awarded us. Routines make up the bulk of this finite life experience and most times, carpe diem represents singular events, standouts in the muddled regime of our daily lives. We live for those singular events. We call

back on those events every time we sit with friends and family at gatherings. Those are the moments that make us pensive, that bring us joy or self-reflection.

I don't quite understand why we wait to see war across nations, discrimination at our doors, despair in our schools, death in our families and disease in our lives for us to reevaluate what is of value in our lives and what is worth living for. If we could only have one more day, one more second, one more moment, to tell the ones we love, that we love them, to embrace those we neglected, to speak up for those disenfranchised, to give back to the community, to do more with our lives. What is the future if not the hope for one more "present-second" to do more, to get to the things we have delayed? To finally accomplish what we set out for? There is no future. There is just hope for more time. So, seize the day, seize the hour, seize the second, the moment and the opportunity because you do not know if this moment will last, you do not know what or who you will lose because our very next breaths are not promised to us, and we may never get the opportunity to say "tomorrow." I will get to it tomorrow, I will call tomorrow, I will be there to support you tomorrow, I will tell her or him tomorrow. Tomorrow not being promised to any of us may sound morbid or bleak, but reality and life experiences are sobering and remind us of what's important. We may have been spared a school shooting, a failed encounter with the police, a deportation to the birth country of our parents or a bombing in our city and in that realization, we should be reminded to seize the day. How is it that we can truly carpe diem? Just do it. Whatever you set out to do, say, become...do it already because there is no future, just the hope for more time.