

Be grateful. Be grateful. Be grateful. The few words my mom always used to say to me when I was young on the off chance she wasn't out at the bar around the corner. Drinking, that's all she did, but I couldn't say anything about it. After all, she is my mother. Mothers do everything for you, at least that's what people say; people that have a mother that's around. A mother that goes to the playground with their kid, that walks their kid to the bus stop in the eye-drooping morning of sunrise, a mother that spends time with their kid. I didn't have that after middle school. I didn't have that person, I was my own role model. The world was my role model.

My uncle, Rod, used to take me to the corner store a few blocks away from his house whenever we needed a bite to eat. His buddy Isaac who worked behind the counter used to hook us up with a free bag of chips or a Diet Coke, sort of like a family discount. They were the closest people I had to family. Isaac was in his early twenties at the time, always had a fresh taper, and would never go a day without wearing a new pair of Nikes. I used to always want to be like him. Every kid has their role model, usually it's someone like Superman or Batman, but mine was Uncle Isaac. He isn't really my uncle but who cares. He used to let me come behind the counter sometimes, there was a small TV tucked under the cash register that always showed the Phillies game whenever they were playing. I remember going there after school and hanging out with him. The best part of the day. Grab a bag of chips and whatever was left of my lunch, take a seat on the floor, backpack as a seat, and sit there for hours watching Isaac do his thing. Isaac knew about my mom's situation, sometimes I wondered if that was the only reason he was letting me hang with him.

My alarm went off *7:00a.m.* I hopped off of my bed, sheets crumpled at the foot of my bed from kicking them. My clothes rack is covered in clothes thrown over the metal poles. My mom asked me to clean my room a few days back but I never got to it. It happens a lot. A rock hits my window.

"Yo Cody, wake up!"

"Huh," I said, eyes barely open.

I slid open the window and looked out. It was Jerry. I've known Jerry since Pre-K, we've been through it, nap-times and all. I yell back at him that I'd be down in a few minutes. I rush around my room putting on the clothes that I see first. I threw on a black hoodie, navy cargos, and a pair of Blazer Mid '77's. Isaac got me into shoes, the only problem is that I don't have the money to buy too many pairs. I ran down the hall, grabbed an apple out of the fridge and I was out. Jerry was sitting on the stoop in front of my door.

"Where are you tryna go?" I said.

"I was thinking we could hit up the diner on Broad, I'm in the mood for some waffles.

"Alright I'm cool with that," I said while locking up the house.

We hop on the nearest SEPTA bus and ride it up to the diner. Jerry said that he had about thirty dollars or so in cash. I check my pockets. I have a spare 20 from the other day. My TransPass from school got stolen out of my bag in the subway so I had to buy a few tickets to get home. We walk into the diner, it's basically empty. The hostess is seated in one of the booths, Jerry gets her attention. She seats us at a booth, the diner is pretty dark, there's a few lights over the counter with red bulbs. It looks depressing, no wonder no one shows up here.

"Why'd you pick this place?" I said to Jerry.

"It was the closest place and I'm starving."

"Fair enough."

The menus are huge, doubled sided with almost every food you can think of. I get what I always get, two waffles, scrambled eggs, and a side of toast and bacon. And some OJ. However, Jerry is lost. He has no clue what to get.

"It ain't that hard," I say.

He looks up at me with a glare. I smirk and look back down at my menu. The waitress walks to come and take our order. For some reason I feel like I recognize her, she looks about our age. When she makes it to our table I ask her,

"What school do you go to?"

"I go to Carver," she said.

"Oh cool."

"What would you guys like to eat," she said quickly, trying to change the subject.

"I'm gonna get the two waffles with the eggs. Also let me get a side of white toast and some bacon, thanks."

"What about you?" she said looking at Jerry

"Oh let me just get the bacon, egg, and cheese," he said.

She walked away and Jerry and I looked at each other and started laughing.

4:05pm

I'm back at the house laying on the couch in the living room. We have one small TV that I was able to afford to buy when I saved up enough money from my job over the summer. There is a small pool a few blocks from my house so I got the chance to be a lifeguard for a few months. It was a slow summer so I had to figure out a way to spend my time. I was watching old MTV music videos on the TV when my phone started ringing, *Uncle Isaac*. He doesn't usually call me but I pick up anyways.

"We've got a problem," he said. "Come down to the store."

"I'll be there," I said, hanging up the phone.

I grab my bike from the shed in the back and race down Broad Street occasionally moving faster than the cars. I'm a few blocks away from the store when I see a guy in a red ski-mask running with a bag in his hand. I think nothing of it and keep riding. A few minutes later I get to Issac's shop, park my bike up against a stop sign, and run in. The cash register is wide open, empty. The shelves have been shoved down on top of each other and there are bags of chips scattered around the floor. Isaac stares at me and shrugs.

"What happened?" I said.

"I left the store for one minute to go to the back and grab something from the cooler to restock the fridges and when I came back the register was cleared."

"Hold up. I saw a guy running down Broad Street with a bag of something. You think that was him?"

"Could have been. Just let him go, there wasn't much in the register anyway. It'll be okay."

"You sure?"

"Yeah it's not worth it, I'll pay more attention next time."

This wasn't like Isaac at all, he isn't the type of give up that easily. I am stuck on him saying that he'll pay more attention because that's something that I have been thinking a lot about lately. I've noticed that a lot of the people that I used to talk to have drifted further and farther away. That's why I appreciate Jerry so much, we've been with each other through everything. I've seen him more than I've seen mom. I always worry about where she is, how she's doing, why she's doing what she's doing, and if she wonders about me. I don't like to think about it too much, I want to focus on myself right now. I just started to keep a journal that I can write in whenever something important happens that I want to remember. One of my first writings was about Jerry and I having breakfast together. Nothing super special but something I want to look back on.

7:30pm

I'm sitting in front of the TV eating some ramen that I found stored in the back of one of our cabinets. I try to get money here and there but my mom isn't around to support us enough to get a good amount of food. Isaac hooks me up sometimes but it still isn't enough. I turned on MTV again. Something just draws me to it everytime, I like the music but I enjoy the lyrics in the music more. Since I started writing my journal, I've been taking notes on the songs I hear to get ideas for my writing. Nas, Eminem, and Tupac are the artists that resonate most with me. I don't know where they come up with their lyrics but they are something special. I leave MTV running in the background as I walk over to my room. My room is to the right of the kitchen. I have a window that looks out onto the street, the yellowish-orange streetlight is glaring into my room. The house is quiet. I have nothing to do so I decide to take a walk.

*Journal #2 - May 4, 2019
a birds eye view of the city,
downtown always
shine pretty.*

*each window light
tells a story,
some are bitter cold while
others are warmly.*

*I sometimes sit up all night
wondering if anybody looks
into my window of life.*

8:15am

I wake up the next morning and my phone is flooded with text messages from my uncle Rod. My eyes are still fuzzy but I get out of bed anyway. He never texts me so this must be bad. I throw on a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie, grab my bike, and rush out the door. He told me to meet him at Issac's shop ASAP. I bike fast down Broad St. and make it there in about fifteen minutes. Rod is

waiting outside with his red Toyota, he's leaning against the car with one hand on his head. He seems panicked. I put my bike inside the shop and ran over to him.

"What's wrong, you're scaring me right now," I said.

"Cody...your mom's in the hospital."

"What? When? How?"

"She was found outside of a bar last night, I think she was jumped or something like that. The doctor said that she's in pretty bad shape. Hop in the car we can go down to the hospital right now."

I don't say anything else. I can't say anything else. I don't know what to say. I'm always worried about my mom but I never actually imagined anything ever happening to her. Rod said that she was at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. We are driving well over the speed limit but I don't care. I can't think, I almost feel numb. We barely say anything the entire car ride but I can tell that he is anxious as well. I have a good enough relationship with him that I can tell when he's stressed. It's not that often where you don't see him smiling or cracking jokes. We reach the hospital after about ten minutes and park right outside the sliding glass doors. The receptionist sees us run in and asks for our names and who we are trying to see.

"Janet West," Rod says.

She directs us to the room that she's in. I take a moment before I walk in preparing for the worst. I wonder what she'll say to me. If I'm being honest I don't even know what I'm gonna say to her. The door has a small window on it that I look through before walking in. I see her laying on the hospital bed, tubes up her nose, and bandages wrapped around her face. She looked like she was hit pretty hard. After enough stalling, Rod leads me into the room. When I walked in, her eyes opened slightly.

"Mom I-,"

"Cody I'm sorry. I'm sorry for not being there. I'll be better. I've realized that I've been putting myself in dangerous situations and leaving you to worry about me. I should be the one worrying and taking care of you. I'm sorry.

"I love you mom."

"I love you too. Go home now, I don't want you to see me like this anymore. I'll be home soon."

"Mom I'm not going anywhere, I'm staying right here."

I knew this is what I had to do. I couldn't leave her side this time. I wasn't going to let her leave me again. Rod looked at me and smiled. I knew he was proud of me for doing the right thing. He whispered to my mom for a few minutes and left the room. I didn't talk to her for most of the time, she seemed really zoned out. I was in the hospital for two days until she was discharged. I couldn't wait to get home and eat some real food once we went grocery shopping because I couldn't stand anymore of that green jello and meatloaf. Most of all I was happy to be home with my mom. She hasn't always been this distant, up until I was in middle school she would be home. She was a completely different person; someone I looked up to.

Journal #3 - May 5, 2019

*she always came
home with a smile on her
face.
you could always hear
her laughter from where
ever you were.
she'd fill the room with a
warm sensation which
made me so secure.
she was there for you no
matter what.
but she never seemed to
treat herself.
she put everyone she*

*loved in front of her.
when she was alone she
would cry her eyes out.
it was as if when she was
with people light follows.
but when she's alone
darkness corners her.
she knew many loved her,
but didn't believe it.*

*she needed help.
she wanted help.
she was others 'help'
but she wondered to herself
'where is my help?'*

We are back at the house sitting on the couch together eating spaghetti and meatballs, my moms favorite. There's nothing on the TV, we are just sitting there talking. Crazy right? I didn't think I'd ever sit and have a conversation with my mom after she left. It's moments like these that may seem small to other people that can mean so much more to people like me. These are the things I'll cherish forever. Not a new hoodie or a poster to hang up on my wall but a chance to sit and talk to someone that I love. When my mom first left a few weeks back, I thought I'd never see her again. I thought that I would have to learn how to provide for myself and find ways to make myself feel better when I don't have a role model to look up to. At the end of the day, she came back. I have my role model back. I'm grateful for my mom, she's not perfect but she's here and ready to be present in my life again.