

## Screaming for Those that Can't

June of 2014. A long time ago, yes, but not in terms of its impact. For a long time I didn't even know what had happened. It wasn't something that I could put into words. Eventually, I came to understand that June through September of 2014 could have been my brother's last months. This was seven years ago. At the ripe age of nine years old, I didn't really understand what was going on. I knew that my brother had a weak heart, and that this third open heart surgery was going to fix him and then he'd be okay. Clearly, since this is the basis of who I am today, the connection between what you have and what you want, like an extension cord, that isn't what happened.

I can't say I was scared, because nobody told me anything that was scary. My brother was going to get his heart fixed. While staying with a family friend, I found out that the process was getting a lot harder by the day. The family friends my sister and I were staying with had lost a child to a congenital heart defect. A very similar one to my brother, Elliott's. They understood that it was a difficult situation, and that they had to be very gentle with us. I think I knew that things weren't going as planned when I went downstairs one night to find their daughter, who was thirteen at the time, crying on her mom's shoulder saying "not again". Of course I hid, and listened to her cry, and her mom cry, and her dad cry. Then I went back upstairs and went to sleep. I had no trouble getting to sleep. My mind wasn't racing, I was completely at ease. I don't know why I wasn't scared. But I remember not even being worried at all. I just wondered when my mom would get home.

My sister and I bounced around that summer, between both my parents and both pairs of grandparents being at the hospital with my brother, all we had to stay with were cousins, aunts, and great-aunts. I didn't talk to my mom a lot that summer. On the phone, I was distracted, in person, I couldn't stop staring at my brother. The image of him with a thick tube down his throat, tears in his eyes, staples in his chest, and a bunch of bloody tubes leading to places all over the room, will be burned in my mind until the day I die. But I didn't cry, I just looked at him. I don't remember ever talking to him at that moment. But I could hear him sobbing and screaming without him making a sound. He couldn't. But I heard him, my god did I hear him. I screamed for him, in therapy years later, at fundraisers for him, at people who asked me how he was doing. I couldn't say anything else other than rude, hurtful things. How dare they inquire about the six year old who's enduring more pain in this very second than they'll ever experience in their lifetime? How dare they make me scream at them about everything I'm going through? Nine years old, and I was preparing myself to bury my little brother.

Not all stories have a happy ending. This one does. He's now thirteen, after another attempt at open heart surgery, he's just as painfully obnoxious as every other teenage boy. He doesn't remember his struggles, but I'll never forget them. As for previously mentioning that this shaped the "adult" I've become, I feel for others. I see the emotions they can't express and I express them instead. I am what they need. Like an extension cord running from an outlet to what you want to use, I am the connection. Never appreciated enough, always used. I am your extension cord.