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Arrive Alive

Why is it that the humans have the intense infatuation with dangerous activities? What is it in our brilliant minds that pushes us to run faster, jump farther, swim deeper, or climb higher? This is a thought that I find myself pondering a lot. Perhaps it is in our genetics to seek out danger; to challenge fate. It could possibly be that we are plain crazy. Possibly, the very act of dangling our lives on the edge of disaster is a reminder to us that we are alive. Here, in comfortable first world America, we don't contend with Mother Nature on a level that tests our survival endurance regularly. Thus, from the comforts of our first-class vehicles, we brainstorm ways to test fate. Then, bam! Before we can even stop to think over the decision, our foot is on the pedal and our prefrontal cortex is no longer in control—we've become a slave to adrenaline. Threatening, imminent death causes your eyes to dilate; your heart to pound in your ears; your hyperactive mind reminds you of your sense of *being*. You feel alive! That heartbeat pounds so loudly that we cannot but help recognize our innate detection of the peril we are contending with. Yet, in a twist of reality, our quandary is no longer dangerous. Rather, this moment of insanity morphs into a game of sorts. Yes, a game. But, however, it is a game that we *must* win at all costs

What is it that causes us to continually fall victim to the superiority illusion: that we are more capable than we really are? What specific function of physiology causes us to make the horrible, compulsive decision to *act* on this compulsion? This is a thought that I find myself pondering a lot when I hear the name Joey. Joey was an athletically built lineman, incredible thinker and one of the few people I could call my friend. Joey always strove to be better; in football, in school, or in character he was constantly progressing as an individual. He and I used to play a lot as classmates in my fifth grade classroom where our friendship began. As time moved onward and entered into the confusing years of middle school I could always count on Joey to talk over the challenges I faced as life only got slightly less confusing. Joey and I continued to navigate middle school with each other through eighth grade. He knew that I would do all I could for him and I could rely on him in the same way. Then I moved away when my parents divorced and we began to lose contact.

If I could do it over again I would have been smarter and not let that connection fade. The one sure thing about this precious existence we call life is its unpredictability.

What *exactly* is the judgement process that dictates whether some people live while other people die? Why does God call home some of his sheep but not the others? This is a question that I find myself pondering a lot when I picture his car wreck. Joey died last year as a result of a car wreck where he

himself fell victim to his adrenaline. He was driving back home from a football practice, hyped up from their last victory the Friday before, and felt high on life. He blasted the music. He took sips of his Gatorade and fiddled with the stereo. As he added continued his dangerously unimportant tasks, he sped down the road covering a football field per second. He then decided to do what I've heard too many of my peers do: record a Snapchat story. Joey soon became intoxicated with the illusion of superiority and was driving under the influence of invincibility. At this point the "brain CEO," the prefrontal cortex, had no control over Joey. His eyes dilated and his heart pounded as he rode along. Joey was no longer living in reality, he was playing the game and unknowingly risking it all. For minutes he was warned of his mortality by the pounding in his ears yet ignored the instinctual signals that he was in trouble. He should have listened to his heart. Soon after, when his truck barrel rolled off the road and into trees, there was no heart left to listen to—only the wailing sirens that pierced the chilled October night. The flashing blue lights and smell of burnt oil were the signals that the game had ended for Joey that night on Route 302.

Why does God intend two people to meet if he only means to take one of them away? Why did God call Joey home so prematurely? These are just thoughts I cry over all too often. How exactly, as a sixteen year old, was I supposed to deal with the loss of a friend? A distant yet true friend...

Sometimes I just don't know how to deal with it. I've always been taught, through whatever I go through, that there is, as William Shakespeare once said, "nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Now, there is no bringing my friend Joey back, I know that. I also know that there is no genuine silver lining to the death of a sixteen year old. Nevertheless, there is a lesson to be learned and one that is much more personal to me than I would have preferred it to be: your actions do not always result in the consequence you expect— *no matter how in control you feel*. Texting, Snapchattng, drinking, eating, or speeding while driving are not things that are worth dying over. I am not innocent of this act of lunacy, however. At a point not too long ago I was just like so many of my peers who are striving to feel *hyper alive*. I was just like Joey. The thing is, *We are NOT invincible!* Arrive Alive.