

Car accident leads to moment of clarity

It could have happened to anyone.

That has been the rallying cry of strangers, family and friends in the weeks following my car accident with hopes of appeasing my guilt and comforting me in a time of sadness. I know they mean it genuinely, I'm lucky to have people in my life who care enough to say it.

However, their few kind words have had the opposite effect on me. Because I'm starting to believe they are completely true.

It honestly was a freak event. Sunny skies and warmer weather replaced by dark clouds and instant freezing that were gone as quickly as they came. In two minute's time, sun, rain, snow, wreck, nothing. I know it could have happened to anyone because as I stumbled and pulled my girlfriend out of my totaled car to climb up the embankment, I watched helplessly as it did. Four other vehicles quickly followed my lead, spinning out of control into medians and oncoming traffic.

I ended up in a ditch, right after one of the most surreal moments in my life. Anyone that's wrecked similarly can relate. As soon as we hit the black ice, we started pulling 360s. Everything became a white blur due to the sudden heavy snow, and I had no idea where I was headed besides dead. In what I was sure were my last few moments on earth, paralyzed with fear, all I could squeak out was, "I'm so sorry." "It's ok," my girlfriend shakily replied. We clearly need to work on cooler, less pitiful kiss-offs for next time.

And then we waited. It was the longest few seconds of my entire life and the most sincerely scary. This is what my life had been building to? In that spinning eternity, I found myself not soothed by a higher power or a sense of purpose or calm, but instead struck and dumbfounded by the vast, incomprehensible randomness of the universe, everyone and everything. And shortly after, struck and dumbfounded by my air bag.

An overwhelming, blinding whiteness overcame me. "Ok, so I broke my neck. This is it." Until I started to blink.

I became aware of my smoking surroundings and what had just happened. I was alive. I felt my face swelling and tasted metal, but I was alive. There was going to be no saving grace, no mulligans, no help out of this mess, but it was ok. I was alive.

Friends have joked in the passing weeks that it was either God's wrath that put me in the ditch and bloodied my face or his love that kept me out of a coffin. But neither option sits well with me. I prefer my mom's explanation: It was the air bag.

People are uneasy with uncertainty. Death is uncertainty personified. Many turn to faith for answers to the unknown and for the sense of peace it brings them, but for me, especially now, it is a false peace. Bill Maher once said "the only appropriate attitude for man to have about the big questions is not the

arrogant certitude that is the hallmark of religion, but doubt.” I have to believe that’s true. We’re asking questions no one can ever know the answers to. And that is ok.

This doesn’t mean believing and having faith is a bad thing necessarily. Both can help provide a moral compass and a sense of community. Ultimately, it’s what helps you get through the night.

For me, I have found there is a tremendous peace in not knowing. Not having a grand purpose has freed me from falling short of it. Knowing that nobody has the answers has freed me from worrying so much about the questions. I’ll still ask them endlessly, of course, and follow the same existential rabbit hole till I reach the same conclusion: We are responsible for our own actions, purpose and destiny. And so is everyone else. We’re truly all in this together. What could be more comforting than that?

So I did not pray to the heavens for my survival after my wreck. But I did hug my mom, my little brother and my girlfriend who walked away with nary a scratch. My faith was rewarded, not for a god above, but for the kindness of strangers, family and friends in a time of sadness and for my little car doing its job in saving my life (RIP Sasha Thumper).

There may be life after death and a home in the sky for all of us, or they may be nothing but the memories of others to carry us on. I don’t know. What I do know is there is a random, beautiful, puzzling, perfect world right here now around us all full of people the same. We get a chance to live in it. And we are alive.