

I Felt Nothingby Brannon Hancock

When my brother died, I didn't feel anything at all. Just a lump in my throat that I couldn't seem to swallow, and then nothing. Which was strange because I'm used to feeling. I was always feeling what he felt, being twins and all. And then he was dead, and I felt nothing. I suppose nothing was what he was feeling, too.

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I was the oldest by nineteen minutes. I popped out all slick and easy, and then Samuel tried to come out the wrong way, with the cord around his neck. The doctors had to move him all around so there wouldn't be any problems. My mom tells it like it was cakewalk, but my aunt Jean said she cussed up a storm. And mom doesn't cuss. Aunt Jean said she kept screaming for the doctors to pull him out. The doctors told her they had to protect the baby, that he could die or suffer brain damage. Mom said she didn't care, just get him the hell out. Maybe she doesn't remember any of that. Or maybe she does. Maybe she feels guilty for saying she didn't care, and that's why she tells it different.

When we were nine, we lived down the street from a public pool. It was the kind where you have to join for the summer or

else pay each time you go. We lived in that house for three summers, but mom could only afford for us to join that summer when we were nine. So every day we'd get up and do our chores so we could go to the pool that afternoon. Mom would always let us roam free around the neighborhood as long as we were together. We could go as far as the pool one way and Mr. Monroe's house the other way. We didn't have bikes, so we would walk to the pool, which wasn't so bad except you wear flip-flops to the pool. Sometimes we'd get excited about swimming and start running, which isn't a good idea in flip-flops. For all the skin we lost, I'm surprised neither of us ended up missing an entire toe.

One day we were swimming. Sam was always braver than me. I just liked swimming, maybe jumping off the diving board a time or two. But Sam wanted to dive. He wanted to do flips and twists and toe-touches.

"Watch this!" I looked at him up there on the board and my stomach spun. I don't know why, it's not like he'd never jumped off the board before.

"Wha'cha gonna do?" I hollered to him.

"Gonna twist around like a corkscrew an' go in backward. Make sure you watch!"

I said okay. But I didn't want to watch.

He lined up at the back of the board and took off running. When he got to the end, he jumped once, came back down, hit the board hard, and launched himself straight up. It seemed like fifty feet. My eyes followed him up, up, up. His arms flailed and he twisted around one whole time. He kicked his legs and he turned another half turn. Watching from the front, I couldn't tell that he was so close to where he started.

I yelled a "woo-hoo!" to let him know he'd done it right. I don't know if he heard me or not. When his face hit the board, I didn't even know what had happened. I thought he'd just smacked the board with his hands to show off. It was so loud, I still can't believe it was his face. I just stood there, forgetting to breathe.

My mouth ached. The lifeguard jumped in and dragged him up. When she laid him limp on the concrete, I couldn't even tell it was him, his face was so bloody. I didn't even notice how much blood clouded the water until later.

The lifeguard screamed, "Everybody out of the pool!" They can't let kids swim in the water with all that blood in it. It's not sanitary.

Sam just laid there gurgling. His eyes were closed. It looked like some teeth were gone. I ran my tongue across my teeth. I thought I tasted blood. My mouth hurt like somebody had smashed it with a hammer. I felt like throwing up.

They took Sam away on a stretcher and put him in the ambulance. My mom was at work, so we kept trying to call her. She said she'd meet us at the hospital, but they wouldn't let me ride with Sam. Mom said I should just go on home and wait. The ambulance drove off, sirens and lights all blazing. I winced.

That evening was the first time I had ever walked between the pool and home by myself. My shadow stretched out tall in front of me. There were a lot of cars on the road from people coming home after work. I got off the road and cut through the backyards. We didn't have a sidewalk. My head throbbed right behind my eyes, and my mouth still tasted warm and bloody. I kept spitting to see if I was really bleeding. When I was passing through the Cole's backyard, I finally vomited. I held it back long enough to make it over by the bushes.

When I got home, I hung my swim trunks on the side of the bathtub. I put on clean underwear and a t-shirt. I rinsed my mouth out in the bathroom sink, still expecting to see blood when I spit, but I didn't. I sat down on the couch and stared at the wall. I don't know how long I sat there.

Sam came home the next day. He had fourteen stitches in his face--four in his lip and ten above his eye. They said he had a concussion. I thought that maybe that was the same as brain damage, but mom said not to worry, he'd be okay. My head ached for three days. I could hardly eat anything because every

time I thought I tasted blood, and I'd get sick. After awhile, Samuel got back to normal, and we made it back to the pool a few more times before school started back up.

I tell you that story to make a point. We're...we were twins. A lot of times I felt what he felt. He said the same thing about me. Like when I fractured my arm at wrestling practice, he said his arm hurt for no reason, and that was before he'd even heard what happened. And one time when he fell off the stage at drama practice and got knocked out, I had that same headache from when we were nine all over again. Mom said twins were like that.

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When Samuel died, I should have felt that headache again. They said it was an aneurysm. A blood vessel in his brain that swelled up and popped. They were going to try to operate, but he died before they had a chance. The doctor said that in such a bad case, they probably couldn't have done anything anyway. I was at the hospital the whole time. I took him right away after he collapsed in my living room. Sitting there on the padded vinyl bench, I kept thinking that I would feel something. But I just sat there. And waited. Sterile. Numb. Feeling nothing.