

Mary Sauvé

M. Sauvé

Short Memoir

March 2017

Cracked Open: The Musings of a Concussed Mind

June 19, 2015. Sunny. Awesome weather for softball. Not too muggy. Slight breeze. End of the school year. Exhausted. Little did I know how this one game would influence the next year of my life. I was on fire, catching everything thrown at me at first base. Then, the big bat is up. Line drive right at me. Glove up. I caught it. Wow. Stunned. Still standing. Everyone came rushing. Oh they're congratulating me on my awesome catch! But wait. The ball is not in my glove. My head hurts. They're telling to me to sit down. Not to move. They're looking at my eyes. And then the truth. I did stop the ball. I just did it with my forehead.

Don't worry, I'm okay now, or seem to be anyway. I didn't fall over. Didn't pass out. This is significant where concussions are concerned apparently. I took myself to the hospital. Cause I'm me. The doctor ran through the standard neurological exam.

"Follow my finger with your eyes...Good. Now touch your nose with your index finger. And now the other. Good." I did as I was told. I answered honestly at the time. Cause I'm me.

"Any dizziness?"

"No."

"Nausea?"

"No. My eyesight is a bit blurry and my head hurts."

"Well, given the size of the bump on your forehead, that's normal. If any of the above symptoms occur, come to the hospital right away."

"Okay. Thank you."

Really? I thought later. If I'd taken that ball to the ankle or knee, I'd have had an x-ray right away. This is MY HEAD!!!! Why is a CT scan not automatic? I fought for one. It took two weeks.

In the meantime, I was haunted. What if something jiggled the wrong way? What is the right way, anyways, to jiggle? Outside of T & A movies and Jello commercials, there is NO context in which the word jiggle makes any sense. So most definitely jiggle and brains do not go together. What if I'm not me anymore? I live in my head: my imagination, my dreams, my knowledge, my work – oh God, what if I can't teach anymore? What the hell good am I without my brains? My whole self is in there somewhere – memory, reason, thought, language, creativity – ideas...Everything! "She was

alright”, they’ll say, “that Ms. Sauvé was, until she got her brains jiggled”. Get it together woman! What-ifs aren’t helping you here, I’d tell myself. Just the fact that you’re thinking means synapses are firing. With that, hope flickered as it does like a candle by a whisper, waiting to be blown out.

I argued with myself a lot in the interim. Worry does crazy things to a person’s mental stability. You idiot! Stop trying to diagnose yourself on the internet! *But I know I’ve got a brain bleed and a torn retina.* So make an appointment with the eye doctor already and stop trying to manufacture symptoms. *But I see flashing lights!* Probably not in a dire way...*How do you know? You’re me. Stop talking!* If I stop talking you’ll probably think we’re brain dead. *Now that’s just crazy talk.* Really? What language do you think we’ve been speaking? *Crazytown: population YOU.* You means us dude. *No. I mean you. I’m the sane one in here. Totally rational. I mean I’m even on the left side. Hehe. Everybody says so.* Yuk it up all you want. It’s all fun and games until we lose an eye – literally. Where’s that doctor’s phone number?

I saw both an eye doctor and my GP. Both doctors said my exams came back ‘normal’. I could see my CT scan for myself, no cracks, no fissures in my skull or my face. ‘Normal’ did not explain why I still felt such a chasm between how I was and how I am. As if fractured, two tectonic plates geothermically moving away from each other in the atmosphere of me. There would have to be a new normal. Some concept to bridge these two hemispheres. Sure, sure, time and rest would heal the physical, but cosmically – why did this happen? Why me? Why now? This would take a more active effort, active reflection, active meditation. Yes opposites would put Humpty Dumpty together again, just as surely as they tore me apart in the first place.

I felt like a Picasso. Fragmented – myself separating from my self. Like a soul missing from its body into the ether. My feet were ears, my hair nails, my eyes faced backward. None of the pieces fit where they used to, so now they’re all around me, strewn, and I had no idea how to put them back together again. I learned how paralyzing staring into this bewilderment is. But, like doing a puzzle by starting to fill in the edges, eventually the picture comes into focus. A whole is reborn of its pieces. It takes patience. Patience, my arch-nemesis. A karmic lesson I still need to learn.

Maybe this is the answer to: why me now? You know how you can know something in your mind, as a knowable fact, but never live that truth in your bones? I actually had to get hit in the head, holder of all my facts and truths, in order for them to be jostled loose, slowly rippling down into my body. The problem is, like goosebumps, the ripples bubble up. These hard-wired truths plump up plain as day, get challenged by your head and your heart, your intuition, and then subside. I was reborn that day, and the day after that and still for a while afterwards, and I learned patience. I really did. But then

those days get further and further apart, and, as the physical symptoms heal, the body's memory forgets along with them. And the karmic lessons disappear into the ether, until the next blow.

You see, I'm the kind of person who needs to understand something I'm going through. I process experiences, life really, intellectually, in my brain. Sometimes it feels like I'm detached from my sensory experiences, from my heart. To my knowledge I've always been this way. Grief changed that. Injury changed that. You have to be in your body. Emotion will always find a way out – through your pores, through your tears – but then, eventually, the wave subsides and you resume your nature – like it's the natural order, or imperative even. And mine is reason. Just as the geese return in the spring, addicts return to their drug of choice, Descartes circled faith... so too do I return to reason, and the circle closes back in on itself. I am not my body. The body will let me down. I am not my body. My body will fail. Will injure. Will be frail. I am more than my body. Frailty is not me. I don't do weak. My essence is strength, joy, love. These are bigger than my body. I am bigger than my body. My body is just a house, a temporary form, for me. The real me. The me who can barely be contained by this body. Temporary. This too shall pass. Keep talking. I say to myself. Maybe I'll believe me.

As pieces of yourself slowly fade away like a shedding skin – sometimes you don't even notice. Then at some point you come face to face with yourself and you no longer know who you are. See I had gotten strong again. I felt strong. Inside and outside. And then somehow lying down, worrying, seeing doctors, being in pain, not being able to BE myself, some kind of compensatory self emerged and took over. She became the new me. Frail to the core. Weak, inside and out. Shattering any bit of confidence I had built. Frailty is like a twig. Weak, lonely, isolated. Detached from its home – the limb. Out there by itself, waiting to be snapped at my weakest point. Powerless. Vulnerable. Exposed. I hate that twig. I hate feeling frail. Worse, I hate myself for hating myself for my vulnerability. You need to heal. The twig needs air, rest, to be picked up by a kid, a bird, anyone, - to have a marshmallow roasted on it, to be a part of a nest, to be thrown to a dog, to be whittled. It needs time and care to find a new purpose. You need to respect the body, and this means respecting its weak points. That is always where the enemy enters after all. Strengthen the weak points – but to do this you need to accept them, face them, respect them, so, like, NOT see them as weak. Then you can respect the twig and heal the twig. And in so doing you begin to accept your frailty as a natural part of who you are.

It's funny cause grace is kind of like a bomb, weird, but work with me here. When the bomb goes off, you're in shell shock, zoned out, in a total and utter calm because of the buzzing and ringing in your ears, you can't see straight, you can't focus, you can't hear anything. The right brain takes over and you are suddenly one with everything, a total inner calm amidst all the outer turmoil. The ability to

find that state of being, no matter the debris, the chaos, the ashes and fuses of everyday life, that's grace, the grand diffuser. Grace is not easily come by and sometimes when it does, we rarely notice. You need to be in the now – the precious, precarious presence of the present moment to feel it. When you do, it's quiet physical calm and a deep inner knowing that everything is exactly as it should be. Grace is being one with the wisdom of the universe. I never would have chosen this word for me. I'm a doer remember? Doers do. Doers don't sit as one in the moment. Doers do not observe stillness! But, when you have no choice. When you're lying down for hours a day.....

I've never been a napper. I like my sleep at night. I operate with the sun. I would probably sleep all day if I lived in Nunavut. But, with a head injury, you have to lie down. You have to rest. A LOT. Most days it was easily three hours every afternoon. More if I had been with people, or was going out to dinner. Just lying there. No action, no sleep, no productivity. Just lying there. In all this lying down, I could regain calm. Find the inner silence again. I had to learn to love the silence. Or at least try. Or so I told myself before turning the TV back on. Sometimes the outer onslaught is easier to defeat than the cacophonous stillness within the self.

Like most people, I take my health for granted. Even though things keep going wrong – from hip bursitis, to chronic shoulder pain, and so on. Then just when you think everything is alright, well you get hit in the head and you have to start the healing process anew. Just because you know how to heal, doesn't mean it gets any easier to accept your limitations. Every injury is an opportunity to face what wasn't healed on the inside the last time. Whatever is going on outside is a mirror to our inner lives showing us what we really have to work on.

In all of this I realized I had to get comfortable with the Divine feminine, not my femininity, but my feminine energy – we all have both feminine and masculine energies residing inside us – the yin-yang. The feminine is more passive, receptive, and comfortable in inaction, in reflection, in grace. Masculine energy is a doing energy – it's about action, problem-solving, giving, bravura. It's about outward strength, independence. It's how I have always lived, I realized. The feminine is communal, free, creative, vulnerable. I realized that, in my rejection of frailty, I never respected a whole side of myself. My expectation has always been to rely on myself, always giving to others but never wanting to ask for or accept help. Never wanting to let anyone down. I thought this was weak and I did not respect weakness. I literally needed to get hit in the head to be cracked open in the heart. To understand that the balance of energy is part of the synergy of life. Now I can look at the parts I once thought weak and see the strength that emanates from a self in harmony.