18 Seconds

Chris Niles

On the first day of my semester as a foreign exchange student in Iceland, I got a letter from her. It was a simple note and yet it meant the world to me. I couldn’t wait to see the beautiful smile of someone who was as caring and perfect as her. It was only a matter of time.

Time is one of those things that people cannot live without. Time is usually what makes things happen, no matter what they are. What time was creating for me was a little different than usual. As I peered back at my feet I saw that I was now ten feet from the edge of the Icelandic cliff side, my Is longboard slung in the air like an animal after slaughter, hanging there, motionless. The time that had passes since the boulder came crashing down the damp mountainside was one second, so many thoughts sprinting through the track of the human mind, all taking place in one second. I was flying, or at least it felt that way, in reality I was falling, but who has time for realism when you have already accepted your fate? I was indeed living in my own lucid dream at this moment, but it was real. Everything was real at this point in the cosmic timeline of everything. What an astounding thought it was, to finally understand what was happening to me.

I was falling, falling into the jagged teeth that burst through the treacherous tranquility of water flowing. The river seemed to be moving slowly, too slow. Why? I panicked at first, thinking that the world had suddenly slowed down to the point of near stillness. I was wrong, it was my mind, creating a mental barrier between me and the reality of things. I was making everything slow down, at least my head was. I quickly came to realize that I had close to eternity to think, think about all there was to think about. It was brilliant, that fact that I could think and think and think, about memories and the future, how the world was created and how it will come to its fiery end. I looked back at my feet, my newfound knowledge had told me that the total time has now been three seconds. I was now twenty feet from the edge of the cliff, my board now seemed like a fish, swimming through a lake made of air, swinging its tail back and forth all while spinning wildly. I was much more like a falling sheet of cloth, suspended in the air and slowly turning round and round. I looked at the river and noticed something driving along the adjacent road. A car, yes a car! What a wonderful sight it was to see something so powerful at such a slow time. Why was it slowing down? What was happening? Never mind, the car was of no concern to me now, but something about it triggered the memories of my childhood, memories that I wanted to forget.

The year was 2003 ~~three~~ when I was but a little boy. My parents were fighting, oh so violently. The sight scared me. I remember now that I was cowering behind the massive television that we had owned at that point, watching my parents with the same slow motion time that I was experiencing now. I got a sudden blot of courage; I was going to break my parents apart from each other. I stood up and time suddenly flew into full motion, I was shocked at the sudden change in motion and fell to the floor. The two figures fighting the kitchen only paused for the briefest of breaks to only shift their gaze to me to see if was alright. They then ignored me and went back to the muffled screams that I was hearing in my head. I saw the blurred figure of my mother grabbing something from a block of wood on the counter, and my dad backed a way holding his hands up as if we were to surrender a battle. He then started leaping towards my mother and she started to swing the shiny metal object and him. As time sped up more and more, I started sprinting to save my dad. You see, I loved my father more than my mother, so naturally I took his side. I remember leaping in front of my crazed mother to save my dad. I realized the risk I took and the fate that would become of me if I followed through. Too late to change my mind now. I felt a sharp pain in my left side spanning the width of my stomach and stretching to the right side. I was only just beginning my life and have already felt the sting of steel.

Falling now, I could feel the pain that I felt six years ago, spanning the width of my stomach and reaching deep within me. I looked back at my feet to see that I was now fifty feet from the surface of the planet. I also acknowledged the fact that I have now been suspended in the air for a total of six seconds.

The mind is in its most sane point when you’re staring in the face of death. This is the point is your personal timeline that the universe seems to give you all the answers to everything. It’s not the physical damage that kills you, it’s the mental overload that your brain experiences. It’s almost as if your mind is committing suicide because it can’t handle all of the answers in the world.

I looked back at the car now only to see two people opening the two front doors of the car. Slowly. I had forgotten that I had eternity to think and ponder while the world around me was moving ever so sluggish. The board that was hanging at my side was now creeping its way towards my back, spinning but slowing down. I forced time to speed up for me. I was done thinking for half a second.

As things sped up, blur entered my eyes. The people at the car suddenly started moving with the speed of a cheetah. Time slowed down. I did not tell it to slow, so why did it? The answer was already given to me. It’s almost as if the universe wants me to think for ever and ever, eventually overloading my brain and causing my evident death. My feet were now one hundred feet from the edge of the cliff. I had been falling for twelve seconds. Only fifty more feet to go and only six more seconds until the world is rid of yet another fourteen year old child.

I didn’t want to die. I sped time up to full speed for nothing more than a millisecond so that I could spin around and grab my board. Once I had it I immediately slowed time down again so that eternity could take over once more. I was still falling on my back, so I spun around on my stomach and ever so slowly rested my longboard there. The time that had passes was three seconds. Only twenty five feet to go. The water was gushing from the earth almost as if it had severed completely off. The jagged teeth of the planet now seemed more like spires that left the surface and had a height of miles. One second left. Time was slow, but something happened, it slowed even more, as much as ten times more. Now I truly had eternity to myself. Just me, falling as a lonely and lost soul that had not yet been able to love its self. So how could I love others if had never known what love really was. I pondered this question and yet the universe had not yet given me and answer. Was the question too simple? I gave up trying to answer this myself and disregarded it.

Weight was returning to my body but I was still in the same position that I had been in for what seemed like a millennia. The sudden shift in the world made me take a ride through my mind and stop at a memory. A memory that I had experienced not twenty seconds ago. I was flying on wheels. Going faster and faster until the rock had flung its self in a suicide run at me. At that moment I thought of the only person that I wanted to say good bye to. A person that I had known nearly my whole life, but had only started to speak to again.

I remember now, walking down Main Street in our cozy town. She was cold and I was cold, it was a good cold though, the kind of cold that you get when you are nervous. We went into a coffee shop and I ordered us both hot chocolate to heat our souls from the inside out. We talked and talked and talked. The world around us stood still while we rejoiced, recalling memories from preschool. It was fantastic. This is one of the true happy moments that I have experienced in my life. If only I were with her at this moment in time.

The ground approached closer and closer, still coming at me from afar. I closed my eyes and hoped that I would see her again. I heard a crack, as the maple of my longboard hit a molar of the earth. I felt a splinter fragment enter through my stomach, shredding anything that stood in its path. I felt the spire of grey stone penetrating my insides, it didn’t hurt, just felt weird, like a snake slithering through spaghetti. I heard the snap of a spinal cord splitting in half as if it were a twig. I was not cleft in two, but I may as well have been. I rested there, watching the dark red of the human’s veins flowing out into the water. My gaze shifted toward the people that were in the car. One was crying and the other held a cell phone to their head. It occurred to me that these figures of life were no more than twenty feet from my resting place. I was calm and I was happy. Knowing that all of your troubles in the world have suddenly vanished was quite the sensation. As I closed my eyes for the last time, I fell into eternal sleep with the sound of an ambulance in my mind. So much for not dying. I left with a smile on my face. My mind clocked the last time check. 18 seconds, that is the amount of time it took me to recall all of those memories and thoughts.

One day after my death, as I watched as an undead spirit, my parents received a phone call telling them of my end. My mother and father had gotten back together a year before I left for Iceland and they were now living together again. When my mother answered the phone, her eyes widened and her mouth opened. She screamed my dads name louder than the crowd at the super bowl. He rushed downstairs with more speed than could have ever been imaginable. When he got to the living room, he saw mom sitting there with a sleek house phone in her hands. He took the phone, demanding what it was that made his wife crumble like a bone less building. As he heard the man on the other end recount how the people in the car had discovered his son and the cause of my flight; his bony fingers started shaking, sending the poorly made plastic phone crashing to the floor with a similar force of. He collapsed with the thought of his only child in his mind; dead. A week later, when the two were able to leave bed, they went to the local morgue to look at the mangled body of me that was shipped there along with the letter. What they saw was indescribable. There was a hole in the center of my torso the size of over inflated basketball. Splinters of wood jutting out of the pale skin every few inches. Small fragments of stone were visible through the forest of maple. They then worked their way to my head. The grey helmet I wore was still on but had a massive crack running through the center, almost like an inside out mohawk. Something struck my parents as odd, I had the largest grin on my face that they had ever seen. Little did they know I had that grin because I went out doing the thing that I loved with the person that I loved in my thoughts. They then shifted their gaze towards my hands. The slide gloves that I wore that day were still on, the left puck broken in half. My hands were clutching the remnants of the longboard that sent me sailing off the cliff, they acknowledged the large chunk missing from the front right wheel and thought that that was what sent their child to his ultimate demise at the bottom of a cliff, skewered on a surprisingly well carved rock.

She was sitting on the couch in her sunny living room in a Saturday morning, reading the news paper. This was something that she rarely did, but due to my late return she was curious to see if something about me was there. Her reaction to what she saw was not what she wanted. Her posture slackened and the paper fell to the carpeted floor. Hands to the head and feet close to the body, she rolled of the sofa and fell to the ground with nothing but a soft thump. Her eyes filled with tears as she stared at the folded paper that bore the truth of the person she feared to be without. She was wailing now, like a baby with no food and sleep, her whole face was wet from the salty drops of water the flowed from her eyes like water falls. The carpet now had a wet patch from the tears.

A week later and the funeral was held. The casket was open and to the request of her to my parents, I was dressed in the same clothes, helmet and gloves still clutching the board. This was the first time that she saw my mangled body, shrouded in the shrapnel of hundreds of pieces of wood and stone. She too looked through my body and saw the bottom of the decorative coffin. Tears again filled her eyes and she let them fall, they fell and hit my corpse with a little plop and got soaked into my stained red white shirt. She then noticed something, a piece of white folded paper was sticking out of my breast pocket ever so little. Her head glanced back and forth around the room to make sure that everyone was comforting my parents with nods and pats on the shoulder. She took the paper out and read it, a smile filled her beautiful face and tears of both dark and joyful feelings left her eyes.

“Dead or alive, I will always remember what mattered to me.”