

The first time Johnpaul was hospitalized was the last summer our dad was alive. Johnpaul had just gotten out of jail--for exactly what, I cannot remember, there were so many incidents. Regardless he was out and back at Dad's.

As I walked up to their place I caught Johnpaul pacing out front talking to himself. His outfit alone was enough to question his sanity. A brown linen cropped vest that surely was intended for an old woman, or if not, was at least made by one, embroidered with colorful little flowers. The vest fit snug around his bare torso, and a sacred heart tattoo peeked out from the center of his chest with "Mama" inscribed across it, and a blue paisley do-rag was tied around his head. "Nice vest," I said, tugging on the corner as I reached out for a hug.

"You like? I got it over at Value Village." I smiled and asked how it was going as I hopped onto the hood of Dad's Lincoln Town Car. He told me his knee hurt while reaching down to rub it, that he'd just fallen off his bike while attempting a stunt. He went on explaining in great detail how he'd carefully picked out the right boots for jumping off his bike right after riding toward a moving car and pretending to almost get hit by it before jumping off, the car hitting the bike and his body hitting the cement. I kept my cool while listening to him tell this story several times, but panic welled up inside me.

It was the first time it really sunk in that he wasn't just wild because he was a boy. My dad often said he'd grow out of it, and our friends admired him for the wild adventures. I often had kids in school come up to me just to confirm that he was my brother and to tell me how *crazy* he was--*crazy* in a "cool" way. He was confident and fearless, and he never once cared what people thought of him. I'd steal his concert

shirts to wear to school, maneuver my way into hanging out with him and his friends and convince Mom it was okay to go to music shows because Johnpaul would be there. But all those friends matured and moved on, and Johnpaul was a 22-year old passing his afternoons hanging out with neighborhood kids.

I called mom almost immediately to tell her that this time felt different, that she really needed to do something. We took him to Ben Taub Hospital, to their psychiatric floor, where I witnessed things I'd only seen in movies--a waiting room full of people whose minds seemed to be wired unlike my own, unaware of what was around them, pacing, talking to themselves, rocking back and forth, one woman putting lipstick on endlessly while using a romance novel as a mirror. My furtive glances only made me feel like an imposter.

A doctor called Johnpaul and our mom into one of the patient rooms near the waiting area. Not five minutes had passed before I heard his voice through the closed door. "No! That's not how it went. You're telling it all wrong, Mom!" The door flung open, and I watched him spin out of control, our mom pleading with him in Spanish to calm down. Through gritted teeth, he looked at her and said, "You better get away from me." I'm not sure how long I stood there in a state of shock, but when someone tapped me on the shoulder, I turned around and the room was empty except for Johnpaul and me. He had flipped a table and was using it as a shield and yelling, "I'm going fishing! I'm not getting locked up! I'm going to Galveston!"

The doctor urged me to safety, but I refused. In defense or maybe stupidity, I believed my brother would never harm me, and I walked straight over to him. He had his

back against the wall and was sliding across it, heading straight for the exit. I reached out and placed my hand on his chest. Maybe his heart was racing, but I couldn't tell because mine was, too. I told him that no one wanted to hurt him.

"We just want to help," I said, feeling his breath on my face while he continued repeating that he wanted to go fishing. Staring into his bright blue eyes I said, "We're gonna go to Galveston."

He slowly dropped his shoulders and with the look of a child said, "You promise?"

"I promise."

In the moment, I didn't know I was lying. I didn't know he would never get the help he needed. I didn't know that what was happening was the beginning of a serious mental disorder.

He didn't go to Galveston. He didn't see Dad enter the still, lukewarm water of the Gulf of Mexico for the last time--neck deep, gasping for air from the weight of the sea on his weak lungs. He didn't see Dad make it out to the third sandbar, standing the way dad stood, his hands on his hips, proud. He didn't get to stand there with us, admiring the expanse of the horizon.