

2006 – 2007  
CBC Writing Competition

Senior Level Entry  
Category: Nonfiction  
Author: David Atkinson

Thirty-Three Seconds

I rarely do anything with school spirit, ever. It was Monday and for some reason that day was the day I went all out. That day was Top Gun Day and I was decked out with steel toed boots, blue jumpsuit, aviators and a blue hat that reads in yellow letters ‘Top Gun’.

Second year calculus, not exactly a place for the weak minded, or the sane for that matter, is where it all started. I was sitting in my desk casually talking to my friend when it happened.

Pop.

*One, two, three...*

A stabbing pain shot through the right side of my chest. Some part of me crushed itself violently in an attempt to kill me. I stopped in mid-sentence as well as mid-breath because I knew what this familiar pain meant. My right lung was collapsing.

When a submarine is taken into the dark depths of the ocean it creaks, rattles, and cries as the extreme pressures of the water crushes it from all angles. That, in a nutshell, is what was happening to my lung.

*Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one...*

As much as I didn’t want it to be happening and as hard as I was trying to suppress the thought of it happening, as well as the pain, it was happening whether I wanted it to or not.

I finished my sentence, “...My lung just popped.” With that said to my friend I stood up and turned to Mr. Chambers. As calm as I could, I spoke, “I have to go to the nurse.”

*Thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-seven...*

After that it all happened so fast: parents notified, put in the back of an ambulance and had an IV in me. I was headed to Kadlec Hospital.

The ER was clean but busy. I was determined to be relatively low priority thanks to my youthful left lung giving me more oxygen than most people over fifty-five get with both. My pain had slightly decreased and after an x-ray and several other tests I was to be operated on to fix the problem 'permanently'.

A very dark skinned Brazilian man, with his long black hair slicked back and chest hair showing would be my surgeon and when all is said and done have had the bulk of his hand inside my chest. The procedure consisted of four main steps: First, search and destroy any more bubbles, dubbed 'blebs', which had formed on my lung causing weak points. Second, abrade my chest wall, also known as the barbaric task of taking a piece of metal sand paper to chest cavity to make it bleed. Later scar tissue would form connecting my chest walls to my lung so that even if the lung gets a hole, it won't collapse. (You could imagine how thrilled I was to be sand papered internally.) Third, use slurry, consisting mainly of talcum powder, to hold my lung to the walls of my chest until the scar tissue forms. Last, leave two tubes in my chest to drain the excess blood from the 'abrading'.

It was time. I was naked, on a table, drugged up and yet awake. I was to remember nothing and experience everything. My memory blanks out.

*Fifty-seven, fifty-eight, fifty-nine...*

*Zero...*

A blank darkness fills the void I call my mind. I have trouble remembering where 'here' is or how I got here. Creeping in, from the outer edges of nowhere, something announced its

presence. Pulsating, like the solid steady beat of a drum, it swayed back and forth in my mind. It filled my thoughts and echoed off of the walls of my skull. The beat matched the familiar rhythmic beating of my heart. I groaned with agony. I was in pain but I was alive.

My eyes just barely open, saw a dark room. My parents were talking somewhere nearby. I saw a welcoming face, my Grandmother's. She knew I was awake and everyone soon gathered around me. They seemed relieved that I was alive and 'better'.

After several hours of off and on exhaustion and drug induced sleep filled with check ups and an effort to eat I examined myself more thoroughly. Technically I guess you could say I was a cyborg, part man, part machine. There were some small electronics in my right wrist constantly taking my vitals. A new IV was located on the wrist of my left arm. The biggest change was two tubes the thickness of my index finger protruded from my side and led into a box. As I took in a breath, I watched as blood came down the tubes and filled the box. Observing life fluids drain out of me wasn't a comforting sight.

The next several days were filled with check-ups, sleeping, attempting to eat, and the object that I will never forget for the rest of my life, the clock. In my room there was a large red digital clock located on the wall right in front of me at the height where the angle of my bed forced me to look. Two feet long and eight inches tall this clock filled the room at night with a dull red glow making it feel like hell. The clock was even complete with seconds. For days and nights I watched each second pass. Every second felt longer than the last.

*Thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three...*

I always found mild amusement in the clock when numbers matched like at three thirty three and thirty three seconds. Over the course of a week and a half it would be my entertainment and it would haunt my nightmares. It was a love-hate relationship. I always found it ironic that

the clock located in my version of hell never reached the time six sixty six.

The restless nights, little food, constant drugs, and an unforgettable time stretching clock became the hardest challenge I had ever experienced. The combination of these things pushed me to my physical limit and exhausted every nerve in my body. It would take weeks to recover.

Finally the day came when I got the tubes removed. The doctor's hands were fast, and before I knew it I was stitched up and ready to go home. I was relieved. It was time, and I went home.

Two restful days at home passed and things had started to return to normal. I was sleeping again. I wasn't monitored or drugged ever few hours. Slowly but surely, my appetite returned. Best of all, the clock wasn't watching me or vice versa. The painful ordeal had created a fear of the hospital. I was determined to never go back. Something inside me thought otherwise.

Pop.

*One, two, three...*