

Winner Takes All



Survivor Keith McCormick (left) hits the links with brother Pat

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My brother Pat sat patiently on a lonely metal folding chair, waiting to remove his sympathy smile and put on his everyday happy face. I was imagining my pureed peas as a hot sack of sliders. With my somewhat involuntary mind meandering a bit, I thought of the past and all the fun we had together.

When I returned to reality my aid was removing my bib. My brother stared, his eyes squinted with an intent look of encouragement, and with a combined effort we smiled. Somehow able to find some laughter, which, as always, became contagious and out of control. For the half dozen others at the feeding table, it was a moving kind of laughter that brought a puzzling kind of smile to their faces. For Pat and me, it was a stimulating way of communication that gave me the spirit and strength of character to take control and set out to regain my independence.

Laughter can be such a great tool; just a simple smile can contain a universal vocabulary as big as the universe itself. Devastating times can be very emotionally confusing. I try to remember that tears and laughter are so many times on opposite sides of the moment.

If I accepted my life the way it is instead of the way it could be then I'm living with no spirit, and without spirit there's nothing but an unexplained emptiness. I needed to get out of that indescribable state of mind; this was the hand I was dealt and I had to play it.

As much as I wanted to turn back the hands of time and get

a second chance to change the mistakes that were made leading to my stroke, I couldn't. I could only move forward, so why should I lethargically tumble through life the way I was? Why not start playing the hand I was dealt?

Of course, I can fold any time I want. Sure, go ahead, game's over. It's easy, right? I've seen people accept defeat; it's a sad sight. Defeat always seems to start with self-pity, "why me?" If I give self-pity a chance, it would certainly destroy me. Self-pity is the enemy, and if I let it sneak in, overpower me and join forces with something called depression, I'm done, finished. I'd be forced to fold and accept defeat.

Well, guess what? That's not happening here. Who wants to lose? Not me. It's good to win. Everybody wants to win. To be on the winning team is a great feeling. All I have to do is open my eyes and look around. It's all right in front of me. Family, friends, all the great people here at Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation – that's my winning team. I was so aware of my surroundings, my mind was so clear I could see that all I had to do was open my heart, let them in and there would be absolutely no room at the inn for sadness and despair. Don't forget, winner takes all.

Keith McCormick, Survivor
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