

Features



Socks, a Universal Tool


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By - Joseph Schneider,
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As the nose of the plane broke through the clouds, I saw the single most beautiful sight that in my sixteen years have ever been lucky enough to come across. The sun, hung just above cloud line, gave everything a pink tint that seemed to warm from the inside out, despite the chilly altitude. The wispy clouds dreamily refracted the incandescent light. I regret not having my camera. My ears popped. My hands started to shake. All I could hear was the incessant, never-ending drone of the engines—the rotors were so close to us in the small plane that my stomach churned with fear when I looked near them. I hadn't flown before, and even though this was the worst day of my life, this moment was perfect. I took one last look at the gorgeous display before I shut my eyes and allowed repressed emotions to run freely. My eyes filled with salt and tears began to pour like the proverbial "leaky faucet," my shoulders heaved up and down. "Are you okay?" The pilot noticed me politely. Am I okay? I nodded my head and looked behind me; she was still there, I grabbed her outstretched hand.

Thirty minutes earlier, I was asked the same question: "Are you okay?" I nodded my head but didn't mean it. I hugged my sister, the inquirer. This was, easily, the strangest hug of my life. Casey, my sister, whom I barely knew, loosely wrapped her arms around my torso and lingered uncomfortably. It was similar to hugging an overly affectionate relative whom you haven't talked to in years at a family reunion. The wind tingled my skin. A large lump painfully formed in my throat. We silently hugged at the Maryville, Missouri airport, watched by my Director of Enrollment, Robert Bryant, the pilot, whose name I cannot recall, and Maddie, my sister's best

friend. A family friend had provided the private plane; Maddie accompanied us to provide whatever emotional support she could. From Maryville, we headed southeast to Jackson, Missouri, our home.

Months before the plane ride, my brother, Jacob  taught me one of the most unimportant, yet important lessons of my life. “You take your glasses and put them under piping hot water for about ten seconds, then rub them with socks,” My brother scolds. I had tried to clean glasses with a Kleenex and received a verbal backlash. This was Jacob’s way. The matters of minutia could not mean more to anyone. I didn’t believe him. I ran to the bathroom, excited at the prospect of a new, fancy way to clean my glasses. It worked. Shortly thereafter, he imparted more wisdom, “Take a pair of socks out of your drawer, clean your glasses, and hang them on your drawer so you have a pair ready in the morning.” In his ridiculously yellow room he had figured out many great mysteries of life like this. Still hanging in Jacob’s room are Casey’s Christmas lights, full-body mirror, and posters. These feminine accessories didn’t even phase him, he truly did not care about superficialities. I now respect him greatly for this. This girly room had held discussions of politics, women, philosophy, video games, movies, our parents, television shows, music (he described Bob Dylan as a musical genius, a matter that we could never agree on), family, future plans, cars, funny videos, and, without words or actions, we expressed our love of one another. Jacob’s sock trick now defines him for me. He cared entirely too much about the smallest things that most people wouldn’t think twice about. These little things are what I now remember him by.

“Jacob died!” My sister lamented. We slept in the same bed for those first few nights. It was somewhat awkward as my sister is seven years older than myself and before then we had never been that interested in one another. Even so, it helped immensely, having someone so close. There’s really nothing better than someone to cry with, I now know. “I have to keep reminding myself that it happened.” She admitted. I don’t have to remind myself as much anymore, but at the same time I wish I did. I wish that I never had to think of my brother as dead again.

 My father has lost his mother, his brother, his father, his stepmother, and now his son. “I called Dad the other day and he was laying in his bed crying. What am I supposed to do about that?” Casey asked me after she had talked to Dad. I didn’t realize he was so emotional until he cried whenever I moved into the Academy. He cried for several

minutes. Hugging him while he cries is like being in the ocean. There are waves of emotion and feeling that somehow wash through him and through the other person. My father is portly; I am an inch or so taller, when we hug he puts his head on my shoulder and I grab all the way around him and squeeze and he does the same. Needless to say, he's gotten more emotional. Growing up, I thought that he had very little emotion because he tends to push away whenever people reach out for support. I think he's had so much loss that he doesn't want to be emotional, so he tries to avoid it.

Casey and I found ourselves alone again during another seven hour road trip, but we talked the majority of the way to and from home on the Labor Day drive. I plugged my iPod in and was playing the part of DJ and, through my music, we bonded. Casey is cool. I would never have guessed. It turns out that we have similar tastes in television, music, movies, and somewhat similar personal beliefs. Regardless, I do not like that she loves country and some rap. Casey had always been a big sister in all respects. She was never bad to me, but we had never taken the time to get to know one another. We aren't best friends yet, but we're right on track, we only need time.

Similarly, if I was asked what I thought of my parents two months ago I would have answered pessimistically. Now, they are the bravest people I know.

"Global Warming is a myth," my brother said in the most factual manner possible. This was a true statement. I laughed. I looked into his eyes and saw complete honesty, I laughed again. My brother was an idiot—worse yet—a conspiracy theorist. Then again, at 15, you think that everyone is an idiot. We were playing ping pong, some of the best memories I have of my brother. We would volley the ball back and forth for hours, long past the point of boredom. Except it wasn't, we held conversation in a way that I'll never be able to replicate. We would fight, agree, disagree, insult each other (he recognized my gender incorrectly at least once a day), and then fight some more. It is impossible to find a more perfect example of sibling rivalry.

Jacob was found deceased in his room at about 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, August 25th, 2009. He had never been late to class; he went to Southeast Missouri State University. His alarm was buzzing and he was lying halfway out of bed, my mother found him. He had had a seizure that ended his life. His drawer had socks hanging out of it, waiting for him to get up.

Jacob Schneider will be forever loved and missed. Jacob's brother, Joe, a student at

University of Missouri School of Journalism, composed this emotional essay as a 16 year old student. It is printed today for the first time in honor of Jacob, who passed away on August 25, 2009.

Our hearts are with the Schneider family, Steve (DHS '74) and Judy of Jackson, MO; Casey (an architect in Denver); and our exceptionally talented Contributing Writer, Joseph.

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