

Strength and Vulnerability

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Perm J 2019;23:19.055

E-pub: 09/20/2019

<https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/19.055>

Nelson Armour and Ted Glasoe’s traveling art exhibit, *Surface Tension: Beauty and Fragility in Lake Michigan*, was recently open at the local center for the arts. I was in town for my uncle’s unexpected death caused by a car accident, and I needed to take a break from the devastation of the moment.

Glasoe’s poignant and exhilarating photos of Lake Michigan highlighted its grandeur and unparalleled, assertive beauty. Each image portrayed a different aspect of this Great Lake’s alluring and even sometimes stupendous power. Armour altered the same images and unpacked each scene into vulnerable, unsettling tableaux of devastation. He intricately reconstructed each milieu into what would happen as a result of pollution and global climate change.

The juxtaposition of power and disaster struck me because it made evident the fragility of even the most monumental of scenes. It reminded me of how powerful and influential a figure my uncle was for my family, yet how transient and tenuous his life could be. Despite the anguish I was feeling over the loss of someone so close to me, this exhibit helped me cherish my relationship with my uncle.

My uncle was one of the strongest people I knew. He was the first person in my extended family to go to high school, and he worked extremely hard to make sure his 5 younger siblings had the resources to make it all the way through graduate school. He was the financial and emotional pillar of support that made it possible for my family to succeed. Glasoe’s images of the sheer might of nature reminded me of my uncle’s role as a pillar of strength for my family.

Armour’s images, however, also reminded me of my uncle. Six years earlier, he sustained a massive cardiac arrest, and he was in the intensive care unit for more than a week. The situation was as ugly and devastating as the altered images that Armour so intricately fabricated. However, my uncle made a full recovery, and since that shattering health crisis, my uncle’s vulnerability in that moment made him see the beauty in life, despite life’s delicate propensity for tragedy. Subsequently, he got a law degree in his 70s, traveled around the world, and wrote a biography of my grandfather. So, when I saw Armour’s images, I chose to see the beauty in them, rather than their ugliness. I saw how the images’ vulnerability,

just as in my uncle’s case, gave the scenes purpose and motivation for the betterment of nature.

This art exhibit helped me appreciate and celebrate my uncle’s life, and it helped me learn more about myself. I understandably am still sad that he is gone, but I’m happy that I was able to celebrate his life. I better understand the need to be strong for myself, my family, and my community. I also understand that being vulnerable isn’t always necessarily a negative trait. It can help open one’s mind to new possibilities. In my case, my newfound strength and appreciation of my vulnerability as a human has allowed me to gain more humble confidence in accomplishing my life goals. ❖

Disclosure Statement

The author(s) have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Acknowledgments

Kathleen Loudon, ELS, of Loudon Health Communications performed a primary copy edit.

How to Cite this Article

Mundluru S. Strength and vulnerability. Perm J 2019;23:19.055. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/19.055>

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Keywords: family, fragility of life, grief, Nelson Armour, Ted Glasoe