

The Gift of a Botched Surgery

Category: Surgery

written by Karen E. Lasser | October 10, 2022

When I was fifteen, I attended a summer music camp with my cello. One evening, during a capture-the-flag game, the boy I was chasing fell. I tripped over him, breaking my tibia and bending my fibula. Two surgeries later at a small community hospital in Maine (external reductions to avoid scars), my shin was dented. To this day, my left leg is shorter than my right, and I walk on the outside of my left foot with a limp.

My parents forced me to leave camp, and I cried for hours on the car ride home to Rhode Island—the way only teenage girls can cry. I had left behind at camp my first boyfriend. Still in my full-length cast, I auditioned for a prestigious youth orchestra in Boston in which he played the violin. Shortly after I was accepted, he dumped me for a pretty, lithe violinist. I continued to hobble around on crutches and play in the orchestra.

I had never been terribly athletic. And to this day, the botched surgery prevents me from running. I watch as my teenage daughters, who have studied the violin and piano from a young age, set aside their instruments to play on all-consuming high school sports teams—volleyball and tennis. It makes me sad that they barely play their instruments anymore.

My daughter's violin teacher (who, coincidentally, played in the same Boston orchestra, though I did not know him at the time) coaches me and a pianist, and we play Brahms's gorgeous piano trio in B major. We started playing together virtually during the pandemic. I could never have predicted that my disfigured leg would help keep me playing the cello for 37 years after those two surgeries, nor that playing the cello would sustain me through the darkest days of the pandemic.

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