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## I've Changed

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I've changed it is impossible to stay the same. A seed becomes a tree and a puppy becomes a cat and I've changed from a boy to a man. I guess it's important to repeat nothing stays the same forever. I was a boy, so lost and confused. I was tossed in a world, not placed in it like most people. I was learning how to live while learning to multiply. I learned how to change a diaper, cook, drive and learned how to catch the bus before I even started puberty. Society forced me to be a man before my body was even ready. The world is one hell of a force to be reckon'd with but even with my small frame and undeveloped muscles, I fought back. I fought when my body wasn't ready. I fought back when my body was tired. I fought back when I had nobody on my side. I fought back when I was knocked out over and over and over again. It was nice learning how Spartans, some of the strongest fighters there are, practiced leaving their children alone in the woods for a few days before returning to see if they were alive. Because I could swear on my life the same thing happened to me.

There were times in my life when I felt the world was trying to crush me and by the time I was 10, when I saw the sculpture of Atlas, I knew it was true that man in the sculpture had 2 choices, life the world or get crushed by it. Don't get me wrong, there have been plenty of times when I have been lying on my back with the weight of the world on my chest. But I fought back. Atlas had a chance to be sculpted into a man strong enough to carry the weight of the world, I didn't have that chance. I may have been alone, weak, tired, lost and frustrated. There were event times where I hated myself and wanted to just loosen my grip, open my hands and let the world fall on me. But I didn't. I fought back. Strangely, I'm no longer lost or sad. I don't feel alone or confused. I know I am not weak. Something changed inside of me. I've stopped worrying about my past and I've started living in the now. I stopped focusing on what I was going through to see what I can become. My past is full of everything. You wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. My past is full of pain, but not any pain any of you have had to endure. You may know my story and I can tell you over and over again of my struggle. But I cannot explain in words the pain I have endured to be where I am today.

When you ask someone what is the worst thing that can happen to them, they say death but that is not true. My past consists of events that make death seem like the only light at the end of a tunnel. Like when I asked my schoolmates for their leftover lunches because I knew I wouldn't eat anymore that day or when every Sunday we'd go to church, not to worship, but to eat. How every day, if I wanted to eat, I only had two selections, bologna sandwiches or noodles. How my mom, the one person anyone would love just on the sole basis of her bringing them into the world, wielded immense ignorance and abuse towards me. How she separated me from my siblings and separated them too. How I was told to shower

so my body was moist and my skin soft enough to be whipped with a thick leather belt because for some odd reason, I was a bad kid.

I've spent Christmases at friends' houses watching them open gifts. I've spent years lying about my birthday because as a child anything I got was panned or stolen by my mother. I've spent nights so hungry, the growling in my stomach prevented me from sleeping. I've been so hungry, I've eaten bread from a dumpster. I've worn dirty clothes with deodorant wiped on them to mask the smell. I've slept in a 1988 Ford Econoline for a year and half begging my mom to drive further away just so the kids I went to school with didn't see me, even though I knew she didn't have gas. I sold my lunch tickets to other students for \$2 dollars so she had enough gas to move because embarrassment meant more to me than starving. I watched my best friend's mother cry after dropping me off at a homeless shelter because her manager served her with a 3-day notice for having too many people in the house and I watched that same woman get taken away by cancer not too much after that.

I watched my best friend get turned out on drugs and stopped talking to him soon after that when he needed me the most. I have had to wash up every day for nearly a year in public restrooms. I have seen people die right in front of me, with their blood splattered on my shirt, their brains on the wall behind me and that blank stare on their face. I saw my mother choose a man over her own children and I watched her call my sisters "liars" as they confessed they were molested. My past is full of so much turmoil that suicide seemed pretty. I thought I'm already in hell, so maybe God will forgive me if I did the unthinkable. But, as I've stated before, I've changed. I now feel I have nothing more to overcome and I miss the burden from my past. I live a fast paced, do everything myself and don't ask for help type of life because it is all I knew. But I've changed. I was headed nowhere fast, not because I wasn't vesting my time in the right places, but because I was vesting my time in surviving. I've always had potential but never a chance to meet it. If my whole life and the world has been a weight on my chest, why do I remain optimistic?

I do so because I am changing. Stagnation will lead to the same results I have already experienced. Atlas never reached his full potential because he was sculpted into a man who had the ability to hold the world on his back, so long as he remained on his knees. I was thrown on my back and the world dropped on me. Unlike Atlas, I was not forced to remain there. I fought when most people would have given up. I was a boy, but I changed. Change is good because it demonstrates growth. I didn't abruptly change from rock to man like Atlas did, I grew into one and now I am holding the world above my head wondering what I want to do with it. My past may have weighed me down, but my future is limitless.