

Chapter XVIII

Reflection

In the quiet stillness of a rare calm evening, my thoughts drifted back in astonishment to what had been my life for the past two decades. Never-ending trials had melded one into the next and left me physically, emotionally, and mentally broken, calling into question my resilience to push on. I remembered that same feeling after I abandoned our sinking boat and frantically wrangled the bay's rage, fighting for our lives, and vowing Brandon would only be loosed from me upon my death. With only one arm free for propulsion, I had pushed against the vast bay's effort to bury us in the depths and fought against exhaustion's call to surrender any hope of survival. Extreme fatigue increased the isolation and loneliness, and taxed my will to push on. I will never forget the feeling of my foot's first contact with the bay's bottom, the struggle to stand, and the arm pain when I finally deposited my tiny weary traveler onto solid ground. The victory -- oh that sweet victory -- found us beaten, bruised, and battered, yet we had made it. The shoreline -- the symbol of survival -- represented an end to death's threat to drown us and ended a horrifying experience that spanned 24 hours. That fateful night's tale stays safely tucked away, only to recall its details at the summons of the curious.

Just one year after vowing only death could draw Brandon from my arms, another storm named recessive dystrophic epidermolysis bullosa set me out on a long lonely voyage. It was two months into my twenty-second year that life launched an assault, shredding my heart piece-by-piece, snuffing out hopes, dreams and clouding the lens through which I viewed the world. Fortunately, my early childhood competitiveness had transformed me into a young adult fighter and survivor that served me well to navigate life's unpredictable battering.

The years of unanswered prayers for my children and a failed marriage made me bitter and jealous toward others who lived a life I wished for all my children and myself but knew would never be. Time after time I looked to God for direction and waited for answers: the quiet was deafening. I never knew if the silence was a “no answer” to my pleading or maybe God wasn’t interested. I lived in fear every day that I would lose the battle. For a nine-and-a-half -hour stint, the Chesapeake beat on me and nearly took my life as I tried to save Brandon. RDEB, on the other hand, wasn't that kind – it relentlessly thrashed us, never resting and knew only one end game, and to that shore, I prayed we would never reach.