Love and grief

Robert William De Miguel

I think that I am not very resilient. I have endured many events in my life, but I have not recovered and restarted to my initial state. I think I have grown, and these events have transformed my life. I see what has happened to me as an evolution. Is a process rather than an event with positive and clearly negative things. But is not an individualized process. I do not believe in the statement that declares “what does not kill you makes you stronger” or “life is about overcoming barriers.” For me, has been essential to live in Barcelona and have a good medical system, to be in contact with media, and have the support of family, social and a sentimental relationship. It helps to be in a community. Without the help of other people, I would never make it so far.

 Love and grief are perhaps the most important themes in my life. But often when they are discussed, it becomes clichés. The two persons that I loved the most have left this life. But these events that can destroy anyone, my functional diversity has allowed me to overcome them. Having functional diversity helps to overcome these life challenges. In part having functional diversity due to a car accident drives me forward and feel proud of myself.

 You should not make future plans, because what matter in your life can change completely in seconds. My biography tells me that a near-fatal accident can happen at any time, and then your plans in life change completely. When you have an accident, it becomes important to react with optimism and focus on the present. To be smart does not make you happier nor helps you to anticipate and make future calculations. This way to thinking is important when, like me, you have functional diversity. Your life is immersed in constant change so there is no use to think of the future. The world is dynamic, and only counts what you do in the present. I want to share with you that I have learned in my life.

 Love has defined my whole life. I loved my girlfriend Carolina that we met during our studies on a master’s degree at Harvard University. I was studying urban design and she landscape. We shared the same working space, and we did everything together. When we finished our studies and she returned to Ecuador, and I went to California to work. For two years we had long-distance relationship, but we did all our vacations together. After two years in California, I moved to Ecuador to live with her. Together we formed an architectural studio called HAPI (Hybrid of Architecture, Landscape and Research, in Spanish). We were very happy and had plans to start a family together. But it all ended a month later with a traffic accident. She died instantly, and I was left in a coma.

I also loved my sister Carolina. She was a professor at the University of Toronto and always we spend our Christmas and vacations together. She protected me and took care of me specially after the accident. Unexpectedly and painfully, she died of an unstoppable liver cancer, leaving behind two wonderful children: Elias and Gabrial. The last thing Carolina said that she loved me. I told her on my mother’s phone —because I couldn’t travel to Toronto due to the Covid— that I loved her very much. She died in that instant.

 My functional diversity makes me understand love in a special way. Because of my functional diversity I am rejected and makes me difficult to lovingly approach another woman. My beauty standards have changed because I am in wheelchair. Is no longer important an easy and physical beauty. Beauty is not scalable. Is not possible to grade a 5 or a 10 a woman to fall in love. When you are in a wheelchair, beauty is not a measurable fact. I am rejected because people do not look at you when you live with a wheelchair.

 On top of my physical functional diversity, I have difficulties of speaking. Because of the accident my brain lost its ability to speak, although I am fluent in several languages. That is why I am clearer and more direct with my feelings with my relationships. Sometimes it scares same girls because I understand love in a different way. Now I understand that love like other things in life, is not binary. Love is not sex. I understood this declaration by spending some time with sexual assistants. I wanted a relationship, but it was something they did not offer it. That is why I spent very little time with the sexual assistants.

The world is dynamic and always changes. I live since 5 years ago with Yulene my actual girlfriend in a wonderful flat that I am reforming and managed to buy. We do everything together, and we like to go together to gym and the swimming pool. I love her and I feel happy. What matters the most for me is her well-being and her happiness. Is not my ego that seeks pleasure. What matters the most in a relationship is happiness and tenderness.

 Grief is also very personal for me. I live with death with intensity. One part is mourning for my lost sister and my girlfriend. But I am also personally grieving. Is a matter of speaking but I had two lives. The car accident has radically changed my old Robert. I am basically the same person, but my goals, status, and interests have changed radically. My current Robert has become a survival as he is overcoming the consequences of the car accident. With my diagnosis of "diffuse axonal injury" I only had a 10% chance of survival. The doctors thought that I will die and asked my mother to donate my organs. I like to say I was reborn, and I celebrate two birthdays (my birth and my accident). But, I am the same person.

My functional diversity due to the accident has controlled my grieving and is allowing to overcome my mourning. I like to take care of myself and exercise more. My mind is what worries me the most, that is why because I control myself psychologically. Before my sister died, she told me that she was happy that I share my life with Yulene and death come to all. Carolina was grateful about the life she had lived, and she wanted my happiness. I am grateful about the life I had with her and and look forward of having a great future. I will never forget the people that left us, but I want to share every moment with people. My functional diversity makes me understand grief and death in a different way. I look at tomorrow with optimism.

\*\*\*