

## INTRODUCTION: JACOB IN THE PRESENT TENSE

My son is dead, but I still think about him in the present tense. When we talk about people who have died we often talk about them in the past tense. I struggle to reconcile this when I talk about Jacob.

It may be semantics, but in my mind Jacob is not gone forever. He is still my son. I didn't *used* to have a son. I have a son. So, when I talk about him, I try to say things like: "He is a sweet fun-loving kid." I know that sounds crazy to other people. Maybe they think that I'm living in denial. But because I believe Jacob continues to be who he is, there is no reason to speak of him using the past tense. I don't want to say Jacob *was* a good boy. I want to say Jacob *is* a good boy. He didn't stop being who he is at the time of the accident.

This is especially true because I believe in a life that comes after this earthly life. And I believe I will be with Jacob again. I don't know or understand

what that will look like, but I do have faith that all things will be made new again. For the sake of not confusing you, however, when I talk about Jacob in this book I will use the past-tense verb “was” instead of “is.”

This book is about Jacob’s life, and his death. It’s about what happened on the day of his accident and about what unfolded in the following days, months, and years. And it’s about my tenuous, tortured, doubt-filled relationship with God.

You see, God didn’t answer my prayers when Jacob died. None of them. They all went unanswered. And to this day, I still experience an overwhelming silence from God.

That doesn’t mean I don’t believe in God anymore. But I don’t believe in him the way I used to.

I don’t know if God is.

But I know this: Jacob is.

So maybe God is, too.

## MY SUPERHERO

The day we found out we were having a boy, I was full of excitement and joy. I loved playing with dolls and having princess parties with the girls, but I was excited about the new experiences raising a boy

would bring—teaching him how to throw a football, fighting with action figures on the living room floor, and watching sports together on Sunday afternoons.

Jacob was delivered via C-section, so when he was born I was only able to get a short glimpse of a fat pasty baby with bright red hair as they rushed him over to a table out of sight. He was a plump little thing with rolls all over and a head full of fine red hair. When he finally blinked his little blue eyes open wide enough, we connected. That was it. This was my son, and I was in love.

Jacob brought a new level of energy to our house. The girls were quiet and well behaved when they played, but Jacob was loud and rambunctious. He was a whirlwind around the house, making noise wherever he went. When he learned how to walk, he stole the girl's high heel dress-up shoes and put them on. From the other side of the house we could hear him, clanking down the hall with those cheap plastic shoes that didn't fit his feet. A typical little brother, he put on their girly costume dress-up clothes and ran through the house laughing because he knew how much it bothered his sisters.

Recently, Brea and I were talking about how much of Jacob's personality had already begun shining through even though he was only three years old. He never reacted to anyone as a stranger

and was a happy, contented toddler. He was independent, adventurous, and curious. What stood out to me most was how tenderhearted he was. He loved to cuddle, unlike our daughters, so he got plenty of cuddles from his mommy and daddy. He wasn't shy about giving kisses and big hugs either. He was very affectionate, and everyone that he knew loved that about him.

Jacob was fascinated with superheroes. Every day, he dressed up in a different superhero outfit, or a mix-and-match of a few. Some days he'd wear his cowboy boots, blue jean shorts, and a Batman shirt and mask. When Brea ran errands with him, she often had the protection of Batman or Buzz Lightyear as she walked up and down the grocery store aisle. Brea loves to tell the story of the time when a neighbor's cow got loose and wandered into our front yard. When Brea and Jacob walked outside, the cow started walking toward them, and Jacob put up his arm like Iron Man and started making shooting noises to keep the cow at a safe distance from him and his mother.

Our relationship at first was father and son. But we quickly became playmates, and I often called him my "little buddy." As Jacob got older, building a fort and playing with superhero action figures inside of it was one of our favorite things to do together. He

gathered up his action figures and climbed in dressed as a superhero, and we went wherever his toddler imagination would take us.

Our forts were a mess of sheets secured by as many pillows as we could gather and fortified by dining room chairs and the living room couch. I usually played the bad guy and Jacob was the good guy (of course). One of his favorite action figures was Blue Beetle. I'd never heard of him when I was growing up, but he became Jacob's favorite to carry around and play with. Sometimes, out of nowhere, Jacob looked at me and pointed and called me Blue Beetle. Since Blue Beetle was his favorite and he carried him everywhere with him, I took it as a compliment.

I vividly remember a poignant moment with Jacob on one of the many days we spent together in our fort. While we were playing, I asked Jacob if he knew who Jesus was. I don't really know what prompted me to ask my three-year-old this question, but I did. He looked up at me, and he said, "Yes. He's the man at Papa's church." (Papa is the name the grandchildren call my dad.) I put my head down so he couldn't see me laughing at his answer. He was right, though. Jesus was the man at Papa's church. A few weeks earlier, we had gone to an Easter play at my parents' church where we saw a man dressed

up like Jesus. We talked a little bit more about the Easter play, and Jacob remembered seeing Jesus go up into the clouds. I'm sure this reminded him of all the superheroes he saw flying around on television. I knew at some point I would revisit who Jesus was, but I wasn't going to confuse him with that explanation at this point. So I moved on.

One of the most special times Jacob and I had together was two weeks before he died. Our family went to a bed-and-breakfast retreat for the weekend with a group of other families. We knew there was a river close by, so we brought fishing poles, including a Spiderman fishing pole for Jacob. He'd never been fishing and was excited to get to use his very own fishing pole, especially one with a superhero on it.

From the time we arrived, he begged me to take him fishing. Honestly, I'm not very interested in fishing, so I kept putting it off. Plus, I didn't expect that we'd catch anything. On our last day, Jacob asked me again about fishing, and I knew I had to take him.

All three of the kids and I walked down to the river and found an open spot in between some trees. We put all of our poles and gear down, I pulled out one of the worms, and I showed them how to put one on a hook. None of them liked that very much and asked me to do it for each of their poles. The

kids proceeded to get hooks stuck in trees and broke lines on roots in the water. They didn't know any better and just figured this was part of the deal. After several casts and no bites, Kendall and Kelsey grew tired of it and walked off. I wanted to join them, but Jacob wanted to stay and keep fishing.

While I was baiting a hook on his Spiderman fishing pole he squatted down low to the ground like I did and put his hands on his knees. He patiently watched me put the hook through the worm. He scrunched up his little pudgy nose like he thought it was gross. In the sweetest voice he asked me, "Daddy, are we fishing?" He wanted to make sure we were really accomplishing our goal. I told him, "Yes, Jacob we are fishing."

After casting and casting, to my surprise we actually caught a fish! I was as shocked as Jacob was. "Ha! Jacob, we caught a fish," I told him. I let him reel it in, and he was beaming with excitement. He started laughing at the fish flopping around on the ground.

We both felt pretty proud of ourselves. I can't tell you how glad I am that I took Jacob fishing—it's a memory I will cherish for the rest of my life. It may sound like a very simple story, but it's one of those father-son moments dads dream about. It's even more sacred to me because he died only two weeks

JASON JONES

later. Thankfully, Brea was able to sneak up behind us that day and take a picture of the two of us to capture the moment. That picture is one of my prized possessions and it's in my office next to me every day.

This book is dedicated to Jacob, my superhero.