

20% Chance of Rain, No Clouds in Sight

by Anson Pope

The Grateful Dead once said, “what a long, strange trip it's been.” That lyric has meant many things to many people, but it never meant much to me. I never got The Dead and the whole movement, but I understand the lyric.

The week began differently than any other before. My youngest son was in the hospital. He's 9 and he suffers from bi-polar disorder. The medications to this point had not put a dent in his behavior. He gets uncontrollably angry, throws things, flings curses like a seasoned dockworker, and has threatened to hurt himself and others. We have done everything necessary—therapy, shrinks, meds, even a “contained classroom” with one teacher, two aides, and a full time therapist. Still he finds a way to rage through the Risperdal, Depakote, and before this cocktail the Abilify and Concerta. So here we are; the start of the week, at St. Clare's Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Hospital.

Tuesday I get the call that my daughter is sitting in the school therapist's office having a breakdown. She wants to die, she wants to be in the hospital too and she wants both right now. This came after her mother found out she has been cutting classes for awhile even after she swore she wouldn't. Lucky for us the school therapist said she wasn't a danger to herself or others and was scheduled to see her regular therapist that evening. If after the appointment things didn't improve then it would be off to the hospital. A quick call to her shrink and he did his part. He did what all shrinks do when you feel bad--give you more meds. She stabilized.

What I failed to mention was that these two days were crammed between two very important days in my household; Mother's Day and my wife's 40th birthday. On Mother's Day I left the card I got for my wife in my son's hospital room. I also thought that the moment I woke up I said, "Happy Mother's Day," which I normally do. I didn't this time because when I woke up I was asked to let the cat into our room so he'd stop crying at our door. The cat was sad; his little friend (our son) was not home and hadn't been for days. My wife took this opportunity to try and get the cat to meow on the phone to our hospitalized son.

I never said, "Happy Mother's Day." What an idiot. Needless to say going to sleep that evening was unpleasant and uncomfortable. Monday was to be a new day.

But Monday was even worse. After visiting our son we had to run home to get him another blanket. My wife's phone kept ringing with a number that looked like one of our kids' schools. Technology backfired here. Our phones should automatically connect to our car's Bluetooth system. My wife's phone chose this moment to not connect. At first I did try to connect it. Then when it didn't work so I disconnected it and tried to call this mystery person back. When my wife kept asking me questions in my left ear, my right ear was listening to the phone receiver and the *ring . . . ring . . . ring . . .* trying to pay attention. I lost it. I snapped. "I'm on the phone," I yelled. Her body immediately tensed up and her face turned straight ahead. The car sped up, she wanted to get home and get me out of her presence as quickly as possible.

I realized there was no need to yell, and maybe five miles had passed when I apologized. This did no good. I was now to blame for every wrong in our marriage. I was no different than her ex-husband; I was the root of all that was bad in her life; I was the reason our children were messed up; I was the reason she was messed up. Before long I would likely be the reason for war,

recession, hunger, and poverty. I chose this moment to remind her that she had so desperately wanted our son. The son who now languished in the nut house. The son who now brought us great stress that one could never imagine. Just two days earlier my wife told me that a majority of parents with bi-polar children divorce because the stress rips them apart. She said that would never be us, our dynamic was too great. Yet here in this moment I'm told that I need to move out, tonight, and I am never to see our children again.

Remember this is all on Monday, the very start of the week.

We both realized in that drive just how hard this situation was. After telling my wife that I did not regret the existence of our son I broke down. I felt miserable seeing him in that environment. He's in a room full of kids who hear voices, who think they are Eric one minute and Joseph the next, and who want to do nothing but cut and dig at their flesh till the pain stops. To some the hospital is help, to others it's prison to some. One kid, no more than 15 wants to beat one of the little girls to death because she talks too loud and that bothers him. She's 10. Then there are the zombies. Kids so drugged up you wonder which is better, manic or mute.

I start crying. I'm at the edge too and I've been trying to keep it together so well. I have been putting on the strong face for my family to show we can get through this. I go to work and trudge through my day keeping it all to myself.

We're home. We hug and that fixes everything.

I'm at my desk a few days later when my wife calls to say they are discharging my son later that day. I should be there at about 5, but it ends up closer to 5:30 thanks to traffic. She calls as I turn the corner in the hospital and see the children's unit at the end of the hallway. It is Wednesday night, tomorrow is her birthday.

Our son is home. Our oldest is home from college also. It's just a few days before finals, but he's here too. Our daughter feels better. The bump in her meds has some immediate effect. My wife is celebrating her last day at her second job and still, tomorrow is her birthday.

I make sure the first words from my mouth are, "happy birthday," Thursday morning. I've hit snooze a few times. I don't have to be up until later, but I still have the alarm set to 6:30 AM. She hugs me. I kiss her. I tell her that everyone needs to be nice to her today. The sun is bright through our curtains. My wife will explain to me again how it has rained on her birthday, EVERY birthday she can remember. When we had the party for her 30th it barely rained. One large dark cloud passed over our house and let a handful of drops down. Still, she said that counted.

The Weather Channel says 20% chance of precipitation until 2:00 PM, after that, 0% for the remainder of the day. The high will be 71, the low 54.

My son sticks to my side most of the day. He's happy to be home and needs love and affection. I get that and do not withhold, but yet I still have to put the house together and dinner for my wife's birthday.

I make a marinade of red wine, honey, soy sauce, vegetable oil and herbs—sage, rosemary, thyme. I attempt to butterfly the chicken. I've got basmati rice and green beans as well. Some white zinfandel is in the fridge as is a bottle of kid wine (sparkling cider). My kids just spent the last hour making cards and wrapping the gifts for my wife while I finished up dinner. My wife sits outside in our patio and I start a fire in our fire pit. The high may have been 71, but it's dusk now and the wind picked up.

It has not rained one drop the entire day.

I grill the chicken.

My wife takes pictures of the kids and our oldest son's girlfriend as well. She's not staying for dinner, but his best friend is coming over. Everyone is calm and happy. The day is turning out perfect.

We eat. We open gifts. We have cake, and watch some of *The Lord of the Rings*. My wife and daughter post pictures to Facebook and spend awhile tagging them and my wife responds to each birthday wish on her wall. My youngest son falls asleep between the two of us. He took his medicine an hour ago and it makes him very tired. We must look like the rebels at the end of *Return of the Jedi*—triumphant music builds, the group is together and happy and then end credits and snap to black screen.

Only it doesn't end there.

Friday morning and my wife announces she is now 40 and one day. It came and went and we're still here. It's partly cloudy and it is not wet outside it did not rain at all on the big day. All of our kids are asleep in their beds. She leaves for work with my oldest. He is driving her to work then going to school to sit for one exam and will be back in the afternoon. Our daughter and I talk the entire ride to school about the schedule for the day, when she'll next see the doctor, and just what's going on. Our youngest stays home with my oldest's girlfriend. I know for both of them it's their first relationship, but she's just become like one of us and we love her family.

I decide to listen to *The Black Eyed Peas*. *I Got a Feeling* is a very cheesy song, but the chords and progression are very uplifting. There is evidence to suggest that the right combination of chords and notes in music can elicit an actual emotional response. I feel

that in this song. My whole outlook changes. Tonight IS going to be a good night.

At work they announce my promotion and the throngs applaud and congratulate me. I know I am well liked and respected without being pushy and a boss. At my staff meeting I demonstrate my vulnerability and honesty by sharing with everyone the events of the past week with regard to my son and his stay in the hospital. They look concerned, but I also see they appreciate me being so candid. It makes me a person like them who has challenges too. My announcement states that my first job will be to hire a staff. Amazingly I get to reveal in that moment that I've already hired two people. The first big hurdle is clear.

What a long strange, trip it has been, but tonight's gonna be a good night.

