

Buried
by
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Jason always had a fear of being buried alive. As a child he would often wake up screaming, clutching his throat as he gasped for air, his mind making his body believe he was suffocating in a coffin. Even as an adult, he still held this fear, and still had those suffocating dreams.

“You know,” Brian said walking home from a game of one-on-one basketball with Jason at the park, “I had a big fear of swimming when I was a kid, and I got over it by being thrown into the pool. I learned how to swim and never feared the water again.”

Jason sighed. He always heard from people who claimed to know how to help him get over his fear. “Learning how to swim is a whole lot different than getting over a fear of being buried alive. It’s not like I can just bury myself and suddenly get over it.”

“Well it can be Jason. When I was thrown into the pool, my dad did it. He was right there in case anything happened, and that made me feel better.”

Jason suddenly had an ominous feeling. He didn’t like what his friend was getting at.

“You know, I read somewhere that the best way to get over your fear is to face it. People who are scared of dogs pet dogs. People who are scared of heights climb ladders. It’s all done under close scrutiny by a friend, and it’s safe”

“Are you saying that I get buried alive? That’s crazy. I’m not doing it.”

“Alright, let me know if you change your mind.”

The next night the same frightening dream came to Jason. He was buried alive in a coffin. The same feeling of impending death, the same throat crushing feeling of asphyxiation. The only thing he learned over the years to comfort his mind was lucid dreaming. He told himself that he was dreaming, and he was able to wake himself up. This did not solve the problem, and led to many sleepless nights. Upon awaking from one such nightmare, the conversation he had with Brian crept into his mind again. Could I really be cured of this fear by facing it?, he thought. After a week of nightmares, he finally thought that he should face his fears.

“Were you serious about that facing your fears thing?” Jason asked Brian when they met up again for their weekly basketball game.

“I really want to help you man,” Brian said reassuringly, “I gave it some thought. I know of a place where we can do this, and I’ll be right there. Nothing will happen.”

“Okay, let’s do it” Jason said with much trepidation. He could already feel the cold sweat and acrid taste in his mouth at the thought of being underground.

A few weeks later they met one evening after work at a small landing behind the old cigar factory. There was already a hole dug when Jason arrived. Brian was standing by a large wooden crate, like those used to transport large machinery.

The plan was simple. Jason would enter the box, he would have a CO2 boat horn with him. He would be placed in the hole and dirt would be placed over it. He would only be there for thirty-minutes maximum. If he needed to get out before that, he would blow the air horn, and Brian would retrieve him.

Jason laid down in the padded, coffin like interior of the box. It smelled musty, like clothes left out in the rain. The ground around him was cool and damp. He tried to imagine he was simply in his own bed.

Brian gently nailed the top onto the crate and lowered the box into the ground. So far, so good, Jason thought, *I’m gonna get through this.*

Brian looked down at the box and suddenly felt foolish. He really didn’t have to bury his friend; he just had to make Jason believe

he was buried. He threw several shovels full of dirt over the box, and then to cover any light, he threw an old burlap cover over that. With not being totally buried, Jason could still get air, but he would think he was buried. That would be enough for him to face his fears. Off in the distance there was a rumble of thunder. The wind began to blow loudly and there was a certain electricity in the air. Jason went and sat in the truck. I don't want to get stuck out in a storm, he thought.

In the box time went slowly by. *You are all right, you're gonna make it*, Jason said to himself. The only thing he could hear was his own breath and his rapid heartbeat beating in his ears. More time ticked by. *When is he going to get me out of here!!* Jason blew the horn. Minutes that seemed like hours went by but Brian did not retrieve him. The horn in Jason's hand grew cold as the gas in the can was expelled in one long desperate screech. More horrible minutes went by, and nothing happened. *Where the fuck is he?*

Brian sat behind the wheel of his truck. He had come in out of the rain that seemed likely to fall. But despite the loud howls of wind, and ominous sky, the rain didn't come. All it did was hide the sound of the piercing horn.

Below in the coffin, Jason screamed. His throat was dry. He was imagining the oxygen level growing low. He was having trouble breathing. His lungs screamed for air. *Oh my god, I'm buried alive!!* he thought. And in the shadowy depths of his shallow grave, inches

from the surface, and as his friend waited for a horn he couldn't hear,
Jason clawed at his throat as eternal darkness set in.