

You shot me...

A muggy August day found me surrounded by piles of shoes in my parents' closet. The smell of summer sweat, shoe leather, and wooden wall panels would soon permeate my memory once they mixed with organic matter.

The last weekend before 2nd grade began, my friend and I were proud that we talked our parents into another sleepover. Her mother was waiting in the driveway when I stepped into my parents' closet to find my house shoes. My friend followed me into the closet and proceeded to fidget while patiently waiting for me to finish packing.

While she waited, she occupied her time by picking up the 22. Rifle propped up against the wall behind a dresser. I heard the gun shift as she attempted to hoist its weight with her small 8-year-old body. I looked up from my search to find myself staring down the barrel. I tried to scare her into putting the rifle down by telling her it was loaded, although I thought that was a lie at the time. She didn't flinch. She pulled the trigger instead.

What happened next was one of those slow-motion, fast-forward moments that are difficult to explain. I'll make a feeble attempt, though.

I felt several things all at once. I felt a white-hot stinging at the front of my arm and a warm wet something rushing out of the back of my arm. On top of the stinging of the bullet in front and the mess on the backside, I had also decided to simultaneously piss my pants and say "you shot me" with the casualty and matter of fact-ness of a co-worker saying "good morning" at the coffee maker in the break room. The second exclamation of "you shot me" had a heightened sense of urgency as the adrenaline kicked in and started rushing to my brain. I used to be embarrassed about the fact that I pissed my pants when I got shot, but now that I'm older, it takes far less to lose control of my faculties below the belt, so in my opinion, I'm a fucking soldier.

The "friend" who shot me also pissed her pants. So there we were. She was an 8-year-old who had now officially shot someone. I was a 7-year-old who had been shot, pissed my pants, broke my arm, and effectively ruined a large number of things. As the recipient of this gunshot wound, I ruined several pairs of shoes, an entire closet of wood paneling, my new school clothes (which I was not supposed to be wearing, but we'll get to that later), my plans for the weekend, the first couple of weeks of 2nd grade, my first try at cursive writing, any future attempts to snap with my right hand, and ultimately my friend, who would never be the same.

What seemed like hours but was only seconds afterward, my step-dad of two weeks (happy honeymoon) ran into the bedroom. He rushed into the closet and assessed the situation with a heroic sense of wherewithal. He ripped off his shirt like Clark Kent emerging from a phone booth and created a makeshift tourniquet. He picked me up and brushed past the frozen statue of a girl on the edge of a breakdown.

From this point, it got nutty. He ran and placed me in the truck and then ran back inside to get my mom, who was screaming "call 911" at the top of her lungs. Legend has it that he had to slap her across the face and tell her to "snap out of it" before she understood that I was chilling in the truck waiting to go to the hospital. Mom jumps in the truck, and I remember two things about that ride to the hospital. The first thing I remember is as soon as my mom squeezed my arm to try to control the bleeding, I think it flipped the adrenaline switch off because Holy hell, I knew that arm was broken. It hurt like a bitch. The second thing I remember is that we were speeding down the highway, and Mom was not a fan of my stepdad's new style of driving. I also remember what a relief it was that we had made it to the ER because the driving made me nauseous.

So they get me into a trauma room and start looking at my GSW. (That's what those fancy medical doctors call a gunshot wound.) The big stand-out moment here was when the nurse began to cut my clothes off of me. Now, I'd been around long enough to know that when my mom told me not to do something, there were going to be consequences if I did it anyway. In my mind, this situation was no exception to the rule. My mom had given me explicit instructions not to wear my new school clothes until school started, but I sure didn't listen. So there I was covered in blood and piss, and tears and whatever else it is that fills out an arm, and this nurse was about to cut me out of my clothes—the clothes I shouldn't have been wearing in the first place. Boy, I had stepped in it. I begged the nurse not to cut my clothes. I tried to make her understand that I had disobeyed my mom and wasn't supposed to be wearing them anyway. I gave her a speech about how my parents worked hard for my clothes and not taking them for granted. She countered my argument with logic and explained that the shirt was no longer a viable option for attire. I countered her counter-argument by trying to convey how talented my mom was at stain removal. She didn't care. I felt so defeated as she took those scissors to my shirt, and I could hear my mom's inevitable words echoing in my head, "I'm not mad, I'm disappointed."

Of course, she never said that to me at that moment, and I never caught one ounce of flack about ruining those clothes. Thanks for that, Mom; it's appreciated more than you know.

The rest of the story is a hazy blur of morphine, an ambulance ride, a ridiculous case of dry mouth, overconsumption of orange juice cups, a rainbow-colored cast, an IV that we named Ivan, and a trip to Chuck E. Cheese after we were released to go home.

So now I'm left with a scar and one hell of a story.