

The Drop

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As indicated by the highlighted sections, I am most proud of including a first-person perspective from the phone itself. This style of writing was far outside my comfort zone but added a unique, almost ominous depth to the narrative. The change in point of view also developed a memorable texture that broke up the otherwise linear organization.

*It briefly connects with the coarse sand before bubbly foam and relentless waves pull it under. It soundlessly slips beneath the surface, embarking on an adventure to untold depths.*

The crisp California breeze tickled my exposed ankles as I trekked across the expansive beach. Although the morning chill brought a sense of discomfort, the beautiful rays of a picturesque sunrise made the journey well worth my time. Oranges and yellows and pinks and every shade in between pierced the otherwise dreary sky, the hum of the lapping waves a perpetual undertone. I paused. I stopped both my motion and my endless barrage of miscellaneous thoughts, enjoying the natural beauty in front of me. And, as any teenager would, I fumbled in my pocket for my cell phone to capture the scene forever.

I aligned the sunrise within the view of my camera and haphazardly dimmed the brightness settings to enhance the brilliant colors on the horizon. Snapping a few photos, I swiped through my updated camera roll, disappointed by how my tiny screen failed to perfectly reproduce the magnificence before me. I sighed at my pitiful effort – I was merely an amateur photographer – and proceeded to slide my phone back into its comfy home in my jeans, rushing after my parents and sister as they approached the shoreline.

*The weight of the small box tugs it downward, sinking into the calm beneath the waves. Small schools of fish dart around the unfamiliar object as pieces of eerie seaweed float by. Water rushes into its every crevice. The charging port no longer fills the battery with green. The speakers no longer emit musical masterpieces. The ocean spares nothing.*

At first, I was hesitant. The water was bitterly cold and sent biting shocks up my leg as I dipped my toes into the outer fringe of one particularly adventurous wave. However, just as the sun continued its ascent, I too edged closer to the ocean's spray. As my family lingered, enjoying each other's company and the sunrise, the waves grew stronger, increasing in their intensity and progression up the sand. Frosty white peaks topped those still at sea.

*WHOOSH!* In a resounding crash, a cascade of blinding blue slammed into me. While I had previously taken care to protect my jeans from the water, the limp denim below my knees was now soaking. My pants legs flapped around like fish out of water, chilling my bones and infusing me with a

newfound recklessness. Although I remained mildly wary of my surroundings, I now confidently trudged along the periphery of the waves as I searched for sea shells and other ocean debris in the early morning surf.

While I scoured for hidden treasures to bring home as cherished souvenirs, my family members also engaged themselves. My parents patiently admired the rising sun from a ledge of sand several feet above the crashing waves, spared – for now – from the torrent of water. Contrarily, my sister was soaked through and playfully frolicked from one end of the shore to the other in constant evasion of my mother's concerns. The morning sea air inspired in her a youthful freedom that drew her farther and farther into the waves, longing to unlock their secrets.

Instead, I found a place of serenity despite the cacophony of sounds and scents and random ocean spray whirling around me. I was at peace. Or I was until I awoke from my blissful dream nearly face-first in the water. On one of her expeditions across the sand, my sister collided with me from behind. While her innocent dance meant no harm, I immediately stumbled to regain my footing as the sand swiftly rushed beneath me. Dripping from head to toe, a glowing grin infected my face, and I playfully pushed her right back. From afar, we may have been water spirits engaging in a ritual of the sea.

After having our fill and both soaking to the core, we trekked back to the outer edge of the water. Overhead, the sun was completing its climb into the sky, unleashing new colors every second. It was so beautiful. Everything was perfect. I knew I had to capture the moment straight away; sunrises are as fleeting as a summer breeze and can vanish in a blink. I hastily reached into my jeans pocket, which was remarkably dry despite our watery dance. And also remarkably empty. Nothing was there. I searched the other side, then my sweatshirt pocket. As I scanned the beach for my phone, I obsessively fingered every pocket of my clothes – once, then twice – hoping I had simply misplaced it or accidentally dropped it in the sand. Unfortunately, I knew my phone was gone. Lost. Forever.

*The power of the waves brings it deeper and deeper. It now understands the appeal of surfers and sailors and why they risk their lives every day to brave the ocean's strength. How incredible would it be to harness the all-consuming watery beast?*

The feeling I felt was not despair. It was more of a pervasive numbness that settled over my body like a heavy cloud. I promptly apologized to my family; I was not truly concerned about my own selfish attachment to the device but rather the spontaneous expense deposited on my parents. We continued to comb the beach, following the direction of the waves and inching farther and farther from the path on which we arrived. My stomach and mind churned in unison as I vainly attempted to process the unique experience, the unique feeling.

Regularly, phones cause stress-inducing calamities. At any given moment, a cell phone may be the most expensive possession of a teenager or, at the very least, the most expensive one on their person. These phones will be dropped. But in an instant, the fate of the screen can be assessed. A screen protector shattered or a hairline scratch may be an unfortunate reality. Or even worse, a black or purple goo will progressively leak into the corners of Instagram reels and NFL highlights. However, in these cases, the cell phone is still in the hopeful teenager's possession; it is a nuisance, yes, but a survivable one, potentially a correctable one. Even the occasional loss at a football game or dance competition is only a temporary inconvenience consisting of a return drive to said venue. But the ocean does irreparable damage and results in permanent loss. It is unforgivable.

*It finally escapes the swirling torrent of underwater terror; settling toward the sandy bottom. A rock, perfectly placed, jars the supposedly indestructible case, which was once used to protect prized memories and friends and photos. The now bare screen – never to light up its brilliant display again – makes direct contact with the very sand used to create it.*

I am not one to give up, but I recognized the search was hopeless the moment we started. Unsurprisingly, the phone was not recovered and will not be recovered ever again, unless some enthusiastic metal detector stumbles across it. As my family and I returned to our temporary beach abode, I began to truly digest the situation. I would not say that I went through the five stages of grief in their entirety, but I certainly had brief pit stops at a few of them.

Denial. This manifested as the little “this couldn’t have happened” thought, which flitted through my mind after the incident I have since named the “Drop.” Unfortunately, there was some very real and in-my-face evidence that it had most definitely happened, so I moved past the denial phase pretty rapidly.

Depression and anger. These feelings came next in hot flashes of fury – lashing out at my irresponsibility – and heavy, ponderous bouts of sadness – pitying my loss. They rotated back and forth internally, changing with every step. I felt horrible for burdening my parents with another expense, but I also could not fathom operating without a phone.

In modern society, cell phones are incremental to everyday function, whether I would prefer to admit it or not. Some people use – or abuse – the devices more than others, but our culture has become centered around the technology regardless. In many ways, cell phones are highly beneficial. For teenagers, they provide instant communication with friends, establishing stronger social bonds, as well as contact with employers, teachers, and other adults at a moment’s notice. High-quality cameras capture life’s most precious memories. Immediate connection to the internet provides answers to nearly every query one can identify. However, cell phones tote a whole host of problems, including the divisive and idealistic nature of social media, which has humanity endlessly scrolling and comparing.

For me, cell phones fall into the more beneficial category. With my busy schedule and chaotic lifestyle, my phone allows me to foster relationships with friends across the country. It helps me organize a calendar, safely navigate my car to events, and stay updated regarding my extracurriculars. I was not lost without my cell phone – not begging for a new one like a stereotypical Valley girl – but I will admit that I did long for its convenience.

Bargaining. I wish I could have bargained for a new phone ... alas, I did reflect on my mistakes, going over a series of what-ifs in my head. What if I hadn’t brought my phone to the beach that morning? What if it had been in my sweatshirt pocket and not my jeans? What if I had stayed out of the water entirely? A rolodex of mistakes spun through my head on an endless loop. However, I eventually realized I could not change what had happened, merely alter my future behavior accordingly.

Acceptance. I knew my cell phone would not be replaced for an extended duration, which turned out to be several weeks of phoneless life, but I became resolute to take better care of my new device. Although phones are easily pocketed, they are just as easily dropped and abandoned. Fortunately, my laptop was also a portal to the internet, and I could engage in certain social media platforms to still communicate with my friends. However, I will admit that I'd absentmindedly touch my pants pocket on occasion in an attempt to Google something, snap a photo, or check my email.

The Drop may have seemed traumatic, and maybe for some, it would have been: their yearslong Snapchat streaks lost, their favorite video game progress erased, or their phone contacts vaporized. For me, this was an educational experience and a funny story to hold near my heart. I didn't lose much more than those few low-quality sunrise photos I captured before the subsequent incident. But I *did* gain a sense of how I cope with grief and loss, despite it being on a small scale. I truly learned more from the Drop than I ever would have thought.

*Its journey is complete. The ocean. The phone. Now, they are one.*