

I

Love

Chocolate

Milkshakes

By: Burt Jude Lancon

A person has an internal clock installed in their brain that never has to be wound or have the batteries changed. You know when it's time to open your eyes, slide off the warm thousand-thread count Egyptian sheets and step onto the cold floor, which shocks you fully awake. That is how life has been every day of the week for me and, eventually, Jim as well.

First, I'd get myself together, then wake Jim with his favorite mixture of cold milk and fresh coffee topped with a heaping spoon full of raw organic sugar. We would have a short "how

did you sleep" conversation while he enjoyed his morning elixir, and when I knew he was fully awake, I'd hurry off to the kitchen to cook us breakfast.

Jim likes his routine, and I am quick to oblige: two well-done pieces of toast sloshed with chunky, no-added-sugar almond nut butter, six eggs, four boiled, two raw in a fresh fruit smoothy. We'd eat like it was the only life force that would keep a gargantuan beast alive to attack the approaching day.

It is like I'm living the movie Ground Hog Day as we walk the same route again on yet another seven days of the week. I clean up the kitchen fast before I pack our workout bags and then go off to the gym.

Whatever the destination was, we held hands from start to finish. Jim wouldn't have it any other way. Why wouldn't we? The love between two men is no reason to feel shame.

I am the taller of the two and the dark and more handsome one of us by half an inch. We never really compete because six feet two inches is winning enough. "They both look like Canadian lumberjacks," I have heard spoken by whispering voices.

If there is a stereotyped look for that sort of person, well, we are it with our full beards, cropped hair, and white tank tops unless covered by an oversized plaid flannel shirt if it is winter. The ruse continues with our raw denim, never-washed stretch jeans rolled up at the hem to frame our light brown suede work boots.

Jim and I are avid bodybuilders, which adds to the ambiguity. We look like bookends of brute and brawn to every side-eyeing person who gazes our way while we walk down the street, and yes, hand in hand.

On our way to work out every morning, we would pass a high-rise construction site. The second we'd get onto the chain link-covered walkway, unwelcome hoots and hollers followed us

with catcalls consisting of whistles, and some would give us a high pitch, "Yoo-hoo!". Now and then, we'd hear "Hey Faggots!" echoing off the building walls; I'd squeeze Jim's hand and say to him, "I'm here. Let it go, ignore them."

One particular morning, Jim stopped, moved in front of me so we could be face to face, and he asked, "Why do they say these things?". I smiled at him, held his face in my hands, and said, "They don't know any better. If they knew us, they'd think twice about what they are doing."

My hands still caress his cheeks when a car pulls up and stops at the curb. Two young boys in the front seat and a girl in the back with her face pressed against the window were laughing wildly and screaming something our way. The boy in the passenger seat rolled down his window, leaned out, yelled hateful gibberish, and threw a large paper cup filled with what we would soon learn was a chocolate milkshake.

How did I know it was a chocolate milkshake? Easy, it made direct contact with the side of my face. The impact popped the lid off, which propelled the liquid right into the side of Jim's face.

After I finished my barrage of curse words, flung toward the car now speeding away, I turned to Jim to find him licking his lips as the liquid flowed down his face.

My heart broke seeing the mess, but soon jumpstarted with a jolt of love only Jim could offer. With a giggle, he said, "I... love... chocolate... milkshakes!"

Jim and I went to the same high school. We were both on the football team: Jim, the star quarterback; me, his running back. We were young seniors that year, full of hopes and dreams, both on a fast track to university scholarships until one horrible night.

I was behind the wheel with the sun setting low on the horizon straight ahead, blazing in our eyes, blinding us. We hadn't a care in the world while we sped down a country farm road listening to our favorite country tunes. When it happened, we were on our way to pick up our dates for that night's fall homecoming football game.

There was no time to react. I didn't see the farm combine pulling onto the road. I didn't have time to slam my cowboy boot on the brake pedal before we slammed under it at full speed.

The first impact was not the worst; that came after the force of how hard we collided into the impending equipment, sending it flying ten feet into the air and crashing down on Jim's side of the truck.

Somehow, I walked away with only scratches, but Jim wasn't so lucky. Seconds before the impact, he had bent down to pick up his tin of Skoal chewing tobacco that had dropped on the floorboard. That action saved him from being decapitated, but unfortunately, his head slammed into the dashboard and, a second later, was crushed from the impact of the airborne thousand pounds of metal.

The trauma he suffered resulted in a subdural hematoma brain bleed or, as the doctors put it in layperson's terms, shaken baby syndrome. His brain had rattled back and forth, causing damage that no amount of therapy could reverse.

An injury like that would kill most humans, but my Jim was fit and a fighter. He spent months in the hospital from his injuries. He looked like the same ole Jim for the most part, but the accident changed him forever. The lasting results left him with the intellectual capacity of a six-year-old.

I quit football, dropped out of school, and stopped wanting to live because of the guilt of what I did to Jim.

Day after day, I'd sit in my bedroom, motionless and unable to find a reason for anything; I received a phone call from Jim's nurse. She told me Jim had not stopped asking for me.

That call pulled me out of an abyss of guilt and regret as I realized someone, Jim, needed me. I decided to dedicate my life to him, and with this, I started to live again.

I was with him in the morning when he woke and with him until night when he slept. He would not get out of bed unless I were there to hold his hand. He would not leave his hospital room without me unless I held his hand.

And now, years later and like every day of the week, we are holding hands wherever we go because that is what twin brothers do.