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# T EARING MY MENISCUS AND ALL THAT JAZZ

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When people would ask how it happened, I would rack my brain to think of a heroic scenario, or really just any normal, justifiable explanation. Anything was less embarrassing than the disappointing and sickly ironic truth of it all: I tore my meniscus while “standing up incorrectly” to the song “All That Jazz” in my high school P.E. dance class. (Feel free to pause and listen to that song and soak in the second-hand embarrassment). Just like clockwork, on the third repetition of “all that jazz,” I extended my leg to stand and my knee crumpled, giving off a sharp crackle sound. The teacher noticed a problem when the other dancers began trampling over my frozen, shocked body. I cannot remember the pain, I just remember being overwhelmingly uncomfortable, and for good reason.

The teacher called a golf-cart to take me to the health office, and I sat in the front seat clutching my knee and grimacing, clothed in my obnoxious “I LOVE P.E. DANCE” t-shirt. Upon my glorified arrival, the nurses tried their best to relieve my discomfort. They tethered my knee to scraps of metal and wood, securing it with multiple gauze wraps; my discomfort quickly transformed into a pulsating, searing pain. Not wanting to be ungrateful for their dedication and resources, I smiled at them and asked politely to call my Dad. Feeling like I was overreacting, and honestly in disbelief that I could have severely hurt myself by essentially standing up, I refused to go to any sort of emergency room and settled with a visit to the pediatrician. In hindsight, by shielding my ego with denial, I won myself a whopping ten more weeks with crutches. *Score!*

As predicted, the pediatrician gave me a lollipop and crutches and told me to “feel better.” As you can probably guess, I did not. Another visit and lollipop later, the pediatrician referred me to the local orthopedic doctor. Five weeks had passed since this embarrassment of an incident, and I was ready to legitimize my discomfort. The doctor asked me many questions about what I had heard when it happened: was it a crack, pop, snap, or rip? He made it feel like the weight of my diagnosis was on my ability to remember this trivial fact: *was it a pop or a snap?! It was a snap. But wait I think it ripped!* I settled with “crack”. He told me that “cracks” sometimes happen after “standing up incorrectly.” *Cue: Sigh of Relief.* He ordered me an MRI, and two weeks later, I was back in his office. Finally, in his crisp golden manila envelope, my diagnosis awaited.

His careful doctor hands slid the x-rays out of the folder and he posted them on the light-up board that projected my radiating tibia and femur. Waving his hand over the white, blurry mass in the middle that seemed to have all the answers,

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he concluded that I had one of the most severe tears: a bucket handle meniscal tear. My head tilted to my shoulder, my eyes squinted, and my hands nervously fidgeted by my sides; the doctor decided a metaphor would help his case. He explained to me how my meniscus was like a pancake. *Finally, something simple enough for me to understand?! My pancake-meniscus had torn in half and done a full pancake-flip onto the other side of my bone. Where does this poor guy get ripped pancakes? Still, I appreciated the relatable(?) visual.* My confusion was consumed by relief. I trusted him to use his fancy knives and needles to fix me up, and I was thankful that he justified my pain and discomfort with a diagnosis. It wasn't even solely for the sake of my knee or my mind anymore, my arms were bearing most of the burden of this injury. Although firm arm muscles were emerging from the flabs of my arms, my bruised armpits had suffered enough.

Two weeks later, I was rolled into surgery, and passed on to physical therapy (don't get me started on Doctor Olga's "rehabilitating" shock therapy). Overall, it was a collage of uncomfortable and dysfunctional situations that I learned to laugh at. Since it is no fun being injured, I learned I might as well make fun of the inconveniences and ironies along the way. I firmly believe that crutches build character (and muscles) and I reason that laughter is the best medicine. I drove away from my last physical therapy, windows down, blasting "All That Jazz".