

## Who Am I To Stop It: Brandon's Story

NICKI: I feel like we're being taped.

BRANDON: Yes, sometimes I think that is the truth as well.

[mellow music]

BRANDON: So....

NICKI: I'm thinking! Leave me alone! Geez!

BRANDON: Well, okey-doke. [laughs]

NICKI: Did you move?

BRANDON: Yes. Mmhmm....Mmhmm!! Check. [laughs]

MICHAEL: Mate?

NICKI and BRANDON: No.

NICKI: No, no.

BRANDON: But why did you move my piece back?

NICKI: Oh, OK. My bad. See? Now I'm confusing. Aw, dang it.

BRANDON: [laughs]

MICHAEL: I think you are in checkmate.

NICKI: Oh, check.

BRANDON: Dang it!

MICHAEL: Mate.

NICKI: No, it's not mate.

BRANDON: Dang it, dang it, dang it! What is it with you and checkmate?

NICKI: Yeah! Yeah!

BRANDON: It's like every check, has gotta be a mate.

MICHAEL: Every check has to have a mate.

NICKI: OK.

BRANDON: I... [sighs] I am not even going to get into this.

NICKI: Mm-mm.

[engine chugs]

BRANDON: I'd say it would be very important for me to be independent. Bus training is to go out Eastport Plaza because that place, there's lots of Subway there. There's a movie theater there. There's you know, basically everything that you could ever want in one place. And last time was the first time that I got to the appropriate bus stop and caught the appropriate bus and got dropped off at the appropriate spot and then caught the appropriate bus back and caught the right stop back, all at the same day! And it was magical. It has to be the correct bus and all that three times before they can let me go on my own.

[acoustic guitar]

[Brandon sings]

♪ Flowers out her window ♪  
♪ Rain inside her head ♪  
♪ The power of persuasion ♪  
♪ darkens the stars of purple and red ♪  
♪ And the sunlight comes through the glass ♪  
♪ But it never seems to last ♪  
♪ And this tear is but a microscopic ♪  
♪ fraction of her past ♪  
♪ Well, you say that you've got problems ♪  
♪ Well, all right, then so do I ♪  
♪ But if mine reach clear above my head ♪  
♪ Then hers reach to the sky ♪

[action movie sound effects, giggles]

This is how the song looks that I wrote after my brain injury. And this is how the song looks that I wrote before my brain injury. And the difference between the two is really kind of jarring because it's like, well, why? Why? What? I don't get it! [chuckles] But you know, it's just a fact of life, I guess.

It started off that I would just write about anything, you know? And as I progressed as a musician, I slowly got involved in the Christian arts, and I became a Worship Pastor for the church at the time. I can't play that role anymore because when you walk in the room, and your face is like, "Hey guys, how's it going?" instead of "Hey guys, how's it going?" It's ridiculous. It's just going to be difficult, is all.

PASTOR BEN: Welcome to Refuge. If this is your first time, we're glad you're here. Tonight, Brandon Scarth who's just part of our community, came up to me a couple weeks ago and said, "Man, I would really love to share my story at Refuge sometime." I said, "I would love that, bro."

BRANDON: It is a group of people who are broken, kind of like me, but in different ways, you know? I am just thankful that this group of people are here and that I can be here with them, being broken as well.

[applause]

BEN: So Brandon, tell us a little bit about yourself and maybe where you grew up and kind of just how you got to where you're at.

BRANDON: OK. I grew up in a little town called Sandy, Oregon. I wanted to be a star, as it were.

This was a lovely time in high school in a play called "The Imaginary Invalid." That's me and my mom and my sister and my other sister. I am thinking that I can still do that, but not quite as happy and such. But anyway.

I think you might have done a better job with all these photographs if you would have actually put in the information on the sides.

BETH: Where were you in the birth order?

BRANDON: I was third.

BETH: Exactly.

BRANDON: Ooooooh. I see. I see.

BETH: [giggles] I'm sorry, but that's what happens.

BRANDON: Wow.

Several things pushed me down to Multnomah Bible College, where I spent my first year getting all As in every single class. I got straight As.

BEN: I went to Multnomah. It's not easy.

BRANDON: [laughs]

BEN: What were you studying to do?

BRANDON: I was studying to be a Worship Leader and also just basically a Bible degree.

BEN: You had one year at Multnomah and then something significant happened that kind of changed your life. Can you talk to us a little bit about what that was?

BRANDON: Yeah. Well, I was— I've heard this because I don't remember any of it.

We just happened to be on the exact road that another individual was on, and he was on a lot of meth and also a lot of marijuana. And he crashed his truck into our little car.

BEN: Yeah, and you were out for a while.

BRANDON: Oh yeah. I was out for a good...[chuckles] I would say 6, 7, 8 months.

BEN: You know, this guy was on meth, doing his own thing, and he changed your life. You were in the middle of Bible college, becoming a Worship Director. You were gonna write music. All of a sudden, your life changed. How do you feel about him or about that?

BRANDON: Well, I actually— It rather surprised my mom one day when I told her that, "Hey, mom. How do I get ahold of the guy that ran into me? Because I'd like to forgive him, you know?"

BRANDON: [giggling]

BETH: He wanted to go see the man in prison that—

BRANDON: Oh yeah.

BETH: —caused the accident, but I didn't wanna go to prison and visit him. I really didn't wanna do that.

BRANDON: Ay ay ay. [sighs] You know, see, I would've loved to go to the prison and visit him. I think that that would've been a very freeing moment.

BETH: But then Brandon wrote him a letter. The whole idea was that you wanted him to know that you forgave him.

BRANDON: Yeah.

BETH: Which was pretty incredible for a lot of people that you would want to do that.

BRANDON: Yeah.

BETH: But I don't know that it was ever sent.

BRANDON: What?

BETH: I know Pam had it and—

BRANDON: I think it was.

BETH: Well, because she found out that he'd been moved, and now I don't even think he's in prison anymore.

BRANDON: Well, I know he's not in prison anymore. But I thought that she had—

BETH: Maybe she did. I'm not sure.

BRANDON: Ugh.

BETH: But it was...it was amazing, really.

BRANDON: Huh. Well, that's kinda disappointing.

It just seemed like the right thing for me to do, is forgive the guy that did this horrible thing.

BEN: Yeah. So you don't carry this burden of anger. You're a pretty joyful guy.

BRANDON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BEN: If you've ever seen Brandon at church singing, he is up front, and he is full fledge. He loves singing.

So now looking towards the future and kinda going all right, this is what my life looks like now. You're living in a community, right? What is that?

BRANDON: Yeah, yeah. It is a place for people to live who have received brain injuries.

So this is KMS. I've lived here about two years. This is the office. There's all the people in the office. You can wave to them if you want to, you know. [chuckles] It's pretty cool. It's not, it's certainly not where I want to spend the rest of my life. I would like to spend a good portion of my life traveling to all kinds of places. But it's a good place for me to start out, you know?

So yeah. So this is my room. [chuckles] Michael is my roommate. He is kind of a challenged individual because he cannot stop his hands from moving, and so that's kind of challenging for him, especially. But it's also challenging for me because then he makes a mess in a room, and... [door creaks open] I've gotta help him. [door closes]

I had decided to try and go back and to see how I would do just taking one class. And that was not very good. I got an F, I believe. That was kind of a wakeup call for me that this is probably not exactly what I'm supposed to be doing right now. I would like to get enough songs together to form an album, kind of a doorway for people who don't have brain injuries to see what does it look like to someone who has a brain injury.

My next tune will be a song that doesn't really have a title yet, at least. But I wrote it after my accident. So I hope you guys like it. [chuckles]

[strums chords]

[strums chords]

BEN: So this is Brandon Scarth live. We're gonna have him sing a song.

[applause]

♪ Hello, hello, hello ♪  
♪ Is there anybody  
out there for me? ♪  
♪ And what makes me  
so crazy up in here? ♪  
♪ I don't know,  
I don't know ♪  
♪ I'm a little crazy  
So what? ♪  
♪ So I may have gotten off on  
the wrong bus, not to mention ♪  
♪ the wrong bus stop,  
but so what? ♪

[audience and Brandon giggle]

♪ Not to mention the wrong  
bus stop, but so what? ♪  
♪ I don't know, I don't know ♪  
♪ I don't know, I don't know ♪  
♪ I do know a man,  
now I'm not crazy ♪  
♪ A man who can take all

the pains and drown them ♪  
♪ Like a rat in the  
muddy Mississippi ♪  
♪ Like a rat in the  
muddy Mississippi ♪  
♪ A man who can take all  
the joys and raise them ♪  
♪ Up through the roof where they  
oughta be in the first place ♪  
♪ I do know  
I do know ♪  
♪ I do know I do know  
I do know I do know ♪  
♪ I do know! ♪

[applause, Brandon giggles]

BRANDON: I missed curfew a couple times, actually. I was on probation for a month, and then I was off. Then I missed curfew again, and then I was on probation for another month. And that was all a terrible, horrible blah kind of thing. I could only go to Starbucks once a day.

Oh, that's a really cute puppy!

I couldn't go anywhere else for 30 days unless it was on this list of pre-approved places. And I am hoping to never be on probation ever again here at KMS. But I honestly don't know because I have such a horrible memory, and maybe some time I will.

[group singing warmup arpeggios with piano]

JIM: Let's get these chairs circled up so we can start right on time.

BRANDON: Ever since my brain injury, it has been worlds harder to write music.

JIM: The actual creation of the music or the actual writing it down?

BRANDON: I would say the actual creation of the lyrics is the hardest part. Because I can sit here and write a tune, and it'll go [strums chords, sings note names] B, E. And I'll do that again. And then I'll go to F-sharp, you know. And I can do that kinda stuff, but it is harder to come up with lyrics that are fitting of whichever situation I find myself in.

JIM: You picked up your guitar, and you played it so that you could kind of talk through it, to physically do it.

BRANDON: Yeah.

JIM: All right. Who's next?

NICKI: I can write chords really easy. I can't make lyrics though. It's like impossible for me.

JIM: [laughs] I doubt that.

NICKI: Nah. It's very hard for me.

JIM: You have never struck me as one that would fall short when it's time to share your opinion on things.

NICKI: What do you mean?

JIM: What are you trying to say?

[people chuckle]

I think that really, lyrics is just kind of what you've got inside put to music. So you've got a lot of stuff inside you. Maybe you're just selling yourself short right now.

NICKI: Hmm.

JIM: Is this the song you think you might wanna play? Or do you wanna play a different song?

BRANDON: I have lots of songs. [laughs]

JIM: I know, and I wanna hear them all.

So would you rather hear it in the piano or in an organ?

BRANDON: I'd rather hear it with an organ. Yeah, try jazz organ.

[downtempo-type music]

♪ Summer rain is falling down  
Mixing with my heart ♪  
♪ In this blender of emotion  
It's easy to be torn apart ♪  
♪ Spinning round inside  
these glass walls ♪  
♪ I wish I could  
break free ♪  
♪ But with all these  
cloudy thoughts inside ♪  
♪ The walls  
I cannot see ♪  
♪ Beautiful light, beautiful  
light, beautiful Lord ♪

[piano, singing notes]

JIM: Next week's note is F-sharp, OK?

SINGER: That's F-sharp?

JIM: This is F-sharp here.

ALL: [sing]

SINGER: You want F-sharp or A-flat?

[lighthearted acoustic guitar]

BRANDON: I don't know if you got told this about me, but I'm kind of a big deal. Kind of a big dill. [laughs]

I don't think there's anything that I miss about living at KMS. I had a good time while it lasted. And then I started having a bad time while it lasted. And then I had a bad time over the years and years that it took for me to finally grow out of that horrible, awful, no-good, very bad place. I started saying, "You know, Mom, it's been really great living here and everything. But maybe we should think about moving me out a little bit, you know?" There was a lot of time where I was frickin' ready to go. And so I said, "Yes. Two thumbs waaay up for this place."

You have no idea how nice it is to not have staff knocking on your door and saying, "You needa take your meds!" "OK. I'll be down in a second." That was one of the most annoying things after a while. I now have no roommate, as you can tell. Now, I live alone in this apartment. On the 7th floor! It's definitely a change. It is really rather nice, you know? I really like it.

I do do a lot of stuff. I'm involved with a bakery. The bakery is called Sarah Bellum's Bakery and Workshop Project.

So, this doesn't look like much right now, but it will look absolutely delicious and delectable. It'll look like a chocolate masterpiece with frosting on top and everything.

STUDENT: He's got a good sales pitch.

BRANDON: I do!

It gets four brain-injured individuals, and we make like 20-30 of these cupcakes every week. And then we go to the OHSU farmers market, and we sell the cupcakes.

Chutney!

I have a dog, and his name is Chutney.

Hey, Chutney. How the heck are ya?

He is basically working at being a full-time service animal for me. And he will basically follow me wherever I go. Anything that I do, he'll do by my side.

[Tony Starlight sings "Rocket Man"]

I also take part in a thing called ComedySportz Minor League.

TEACHER: Brandon?

BRANDON: Hello! My name is Brandon.

TEACHER: Resist the urge to fill the space....

BRANDON: People who think that just because you have a brain injury now means you're not funny anymore is absolutely bullshit. Absolutely bullshit.

[applause]

TEACHER: You guys sit down. Next two people hop up.

BRANDON: Stay here, Chutney.

TEACHER: Airplane, nice. Airplane. Here we go.

WOMAN: Agh! We're gonna crash. I know it.

BRANDON: Well, here's the thing. If we steer the plane in a way to where it won't crash, then maybe we'll just kind of run into all the trees and then land lightly. OK, here it goes!

[woman screams, Brandon silent screams]

[laughter, applause]

BRANDON: Am I normal? [laughs] What about me makes you think that I am "normal?"

[mellow guitar]

I am no longer a Christian. [air rushes in Bi-pap machine] It had a lot to do with my brain injury. I spoke with one of the pastors, and he told me, you know, "It's really upsetting to me that you've chosen to leave us!"

And I said, "Well, it's just... [toothbrush buzzes] a matter of... truth-telling, I suppose. Or...saying what I feel inside, which is that I can't believe that a God...would create me, then when I was seemingly going closer to "Him," to wipe out all of that and bring me back down to nothing. I just...told him that, that really doesn't seem like a God thing to do, you know?"

At first, I was just feeling really excited to be in this new building and with all these new things. It was just very exciting for me. But then after a while, it started to just become just the same old-same old. And then I started to realize that well, I may be in a new place, but I still don't really have any friends, you know?

It's very freeing for me to not be dealing with a God, but it is also very... well, jarring a little bit. And also a little scary. Because you're like, well, I don't believe in God anymore. So what is this life that I'm living?

[mellow guitar]