



Eyes Wide Open

By Zachary Brown

They always say, “It’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye.” This expression meant little to me until one day at school. We were all messing around and a student threw a pen. It hit my leg, and as I looked up, the second pen hit.

I went through the center of my eye.

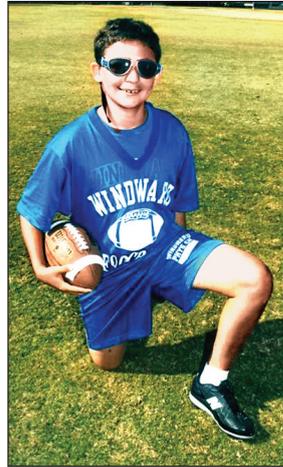
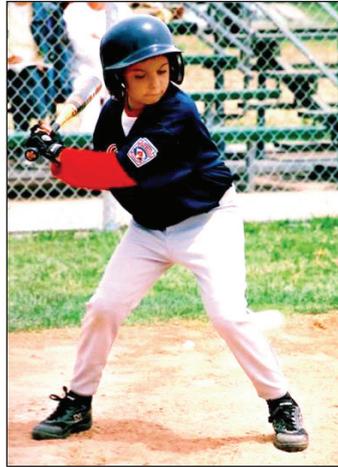
I had no idea how much one’s life could change so suddenly—just like the story of Joseph which my rabbi talked about, how his life changed the instant his brothers tore off his coat and threw him into a pit.



In the days and weeks following the accident, sadness, anger, and confusion enveloped me. There was an outpouring of love, support, and prayer—I received letters, meals, and even emails of prayer chains with my name from all over the world—but still, I was very down. The doctor had told me I wouldn’t be able to play baseball, basketball, and other sports again. The doctor also told me I’d never fully see out of my right eye, even after the upcoming surgery. Something as basic as reading gave me a headache.

I was negative to everything and everyone. I wasn’t interested in talking to anyone or doing anything I used to do. I sat at home and did nothing. I could relate to the Torah passage I’d chanted just three weeks earlier at my bar mitzvah service: the Israelites’ anger and despair as they wandered through the desert for 40 years. But I felt they were better off than I was: at least they were traveling

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PLAYING SPORTS BEFORE THE ACCIDENT AND AFTERWARDS (I’M WEARING PROTECTIVE GOGGLES).

together, while I felt lost and alone.

At my bar mitzvah, at Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles, I had stood in front of the ark and heard that I was now a man. I accepted the responsibilities of Jewish manhood and somehow I felt older and hopeful about my future.

But after the accident, I felt like a child again—scared and vulnerable. My sense of having reached adulthood was shattered.



One day the phone rang. It was a family friend asking me to help *him*. He needed an assistant coach for his son’s Little League team. His son, who had been to many of my games—I’d played second base and outfield for the Giants—thought that I would be able to help the pitchers and fielders with technique and moral support. I told him I was unable to do this...but he persisted.

I started at some of the team practices. After about 4 weeks of practices I came to realize that while I was not able to do everything I used to, I could teach others while doing some of the things I loved, such as how to hit and field, or in basketball how to shoot and dribble, the great way a ball bounced down through your legs and then jumped into your hand.

To be honest, before the accident, I hadn’t been the most grateful or cooperative person. At home I didn’t help my siblings or my parents. I was very focused on my own needs.

On the field, I got really close to some of the kids I was coaching. They looked up to me. For the first time since the accident, I felt good about myself and about how I was spending my time. I also found that, off the field, I was arguing less with my parents, sisters, and friends. I was less angry and miserable. Having

my mind on sports made me happy and a nicer person to be around, and put the rest of my life in perspective. My rabbi told me that at the end of the Joseph saga, when Joseph finally confronts the brothers who threw him into the pit, he says, “Do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me here...it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you.” Joseph could have held onto his anger for his entire life; instead, he forgave his brothers, and even found purpose in his pain.

At first, I didn’t think I could ever forgive the student who threw the pen. I knew she did not intend to hit me in the eye, but it especially hurt that she never apologized for what happened. My first eye doctor told me about an organization that helps people approach those who injured them in order to forgive them. I couldn’t find the organization. Then I thought I’d let the girl know how I felt, but as I started thinking about her side, about how she might not want to associate herself with the accident and just prefer to forget about it, I decided not to contact her. But it was an enormous burden for me to carry around such anger while trying to heal. Eventually I allowed myself to let it go and forgive in my heart. The saying goes