

Title (up to 20 words) - Flash of a life

Strapline (up to 40 words) -

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

It all hit so fast, the unexpectedness of it all disoriented me, the boom of the earth, the rattle of the building, echoed in my ear. My mind went blank for the first few seconds of the earthquake, the normalness of my day was disrupted by the sudden screams and movement. The force itself threw me to the ground, the adrenaline cut my vocal cords, no noise escaped my throat, the inability to yell, to ask for help amplified my fear. My vision became blurred, it felt like I was stuck in a tunnel, unable to see the start or the end of where I was, my lost sense of direction confused me even more. The building I worked in was not built to withstand this earthquake, and I knew it, the only thing I could think of was to get out. I had no idea if that was the correct thing to do but the crumbling sounds of the walls called for me to start running. Japan is prone to earthquakes, I've been in a few myself, but never at this scale, the alarms were blaring sending more people into panic. Alerts were being sent out warning us that a tsunami was coming, this was getting worse and worse by the minute. I didn't know what to do, whether to get out of the building and potentially face the impact of the tsunami or risk it and get to the roof top, both options were dangerous, but I decided to try my best to avoid the impact of the tsunami, so I took the stairs up to the roof.

Finding the stairs was hard enough but the journey up them drained all the energy out of me. Everything was imploding around me, windows were breaking, ceilings were caving in. The climbing process become labours fast, the constant shaking of the building made it hard to move up the steep stairs. The instant shatter of the window next to me terrified me, the sound of the glass breaking sent a shiver down my spine, I ducked trying to avoid the razor-sharp pieces, putting my arm out to protect my face. Some of the shards of glass pierced my arm, the shooting pain made me lose focus on where I was heading. The faint feeling took over my body, all my senses become impaired from the pain and sheer fear. I reached my arm out trying to grab anything to stabilise myself, to find my sense of gravity. The building then quivered harshly; the power of the movement caused me to stumble back, and before I could use my strength to stop myself the magnitude of the earthquake knocked me against the window edge, the instability meant it couldn't hold my body weight, so I fell.

There was nothing I could do anymore. I was out in the open, falling through the air. The fall was slowed, like time went stagnant. Somehow the fear went away, the fall wasn't scary, in a weird sense it was peaceful. It felt like hours went past as I let my body loosen up, people have said

before in experiences like this your whole life flashes before your eyes in seconds, but this was different. Every memory was flowing through my mind as if the whole timeline of my life was being projected. I heard my mums voice shouting my name "Annya! Annya!". She sounded like she was searching for me, her voice seemed like a light, glowing to find me in the darkness. I remembered her finding me crying in this old tree house we had in our garden, I was just a kid that climbed up there hoping to be left alone forever. I was upset over something miniscule, something irrelevant, but when she went to find me, she didn't dismiss my sadness but rather held me and tried to make me laugh. She stayed with me there for hours, comforting me. That tree house become my haven anytime something went wrong, and it was all because of my mum. This made me realise how much I appreciate her, every memory with her booms with love. I couldn't tell if I was upset or happy thinking about this, all I knew was that the memory was warm, almost protective.

Memories of my boyfriend, Tama, were also circulating throughout my brain. Unfortunately, most of them were filled with regret. The soothing memory of my mum was displaced by the dispiriting memories of him. I regret a lot, we had problems we didn't want to face so we just swept them under the rug, this didn't help us but rather drove us apart. It was hard to watch the string of memories of us growing apart and arguing, this sense of failure burnt a hole in my heart. It made me realise how I shouldn't have stayed, how I shouldn't have waited for it to get better, but how I should've done what made me happy, what fulfilled me. The stretch of the fall, the cold air flying past me finally hit me. I wish I didn't have these sorts of regrets; I wish I would've soaked in more of the love around me, I wish this wasn't the last memory I had. I closed my eyes and braced myself for what will happen next. I didn't give it much thought though, thinking of the potential doom was too unpleasant, thinking about the good was a much nicer way to go.