

Every Scar Tells a Story  
*Alex Daniels*

Somewhere I heard that Scars are tattoos with better stories. They tatter the body with markings that have come from adventures, journeys and experiences. Scars leave an everlasting reminder of where we have been in life. The three most telling scars on my body are located on both my eyebrows and my left calf. While scars appear on the surface, they have meanings that cut deeper. My scars are souvenirs of willingness to step outside the norm and live life to the fullest.

My first scar is located just below my left eyebrow. I received it while hiking in California at the age of thirteen. My group had already reached the summit and we were beginning our descent back to the campsite. About two-thirds of the way down the mountain the trail became quite steep and everyone was told to get low to improve balance. As we cautiously went around a bend, my friend Jake lost his footing, slipped and barreled into me. I somersaulted down the trail for about 20 feet then flew off a ledge and landed ten feet below. I had done a front flip in the air, landed on my feet, then fell on my face. Of course after the fall I took, this had to be told to me by my friends. I reached my hand up to my face and realized I was bleeding. When I saw the cut in the mirror the only way to describe it was “hard-core.” It looked like I was just in a fight. There was a fair amount of blood, but no tears because what thirteen year old would cry in front of his friends. This scar represents my sense of adventure. I enjoy the outdoors whether it is hiking, kayaking, or camping. Life is no fun to just play it safe all the time and I am not afraid to go outside my element.

When I was eighteen I met an amazing girl named Dakota. We instantly became friends. She had numerous earrings, a pierced tongue and two tattoos. Since I was from suburban New Jersey I had never met a girl this intriguing. One day I was looking around my high school and realized I looked just like every other kid there. That is when I decided I needed to get my eyebrow pierced, and the sooner the better. I knew my parents would never go for the idea, but I felt like a rebel with a cause. I wanted some individuality, not to be just another walking advertisement for Abercrombie & Fitch. I had always been keen to get some type of piercing or tattoo, but never had the bronze to defy my parents. Still the voice in the back of my head said, “Go for it!” I called Dakota the next day and asked her to come with me to the piercing shop. It did not hurt in the least, but maybe that was because of all of my excitement and the endorphins running through my veins. When my parents spotted what I had done to my face they sent me straight to my room. Yes, at the age of eighteen I was sent to my room, without dinner and lost my car until I took the piercing out. Even in the face of this ultimatum, I decided to leave this glorious piece of silver in my eyebrow and go to school. My friends were shocked when they saw me at school; many liked it, a few questioned my sexuality, and one girl could not stop raving about how awesome I looked. After a week of not being able to drive myself anywhere and hitching rides to work I decided it was time to remove my piercing. This scar taught me a little rebellion in life can be a good thing. Who wants to live a predictable life? To break away from conformity is exhilarating and spontaneous adventures are life affirming.

My oldest scar is the one I understand the least, but I certainly can remember what happened. I had surgery for cancer but the magnitude and significance of the event was

lost on me at the time. When I was ten, I was diagnosed with bone cancer in my left fibula. The doctors removed most of my fibula, moved muscle from my ankle up into my calf, and closed my leg with 42 staples. The scar left behind is about a foot long and with time has begun to fade. Since I was so young at the time I did not fully understand the severity of the issue. I remember doctors with serious expressions, my mother crying and visitors talking in whispers to my parents. While extended family members suddenly became religious and my parents dealt with the doctors and lost sleep, all I could focus on was making it back in time for baseball season. I recovered, left the hospital, did a couple of months of physical therapy and returned to the diamond. I pitched the final inning of the championship game, receiving credit for the save in an eight to seven nail-biter. As I have grown older I have learned more about how deadly cancer can be and how it affected my family. When a public figure passes away from cancer the news reporter will often say, “Joe So-and-so lost his bout with (type of cancer) today, he was (age such and such)”. Cancer is described as a bout because it truly is a fight. Who wants to live more, you or the disease? Motivation is needed to get through the struggle and find a way to survive. I focused all my energy on returning to a normal life and shocked the doctors with my speedy recovery after major surgery. And if I ever were told I had cancer again, I would kick its ass and get out of the hospital as fast as I could. I believe that attitude has a lot to do with recovery.

Over time I have thought more and more about my fight against cancer. I have begun to understand why I so rarely write or talk about it. Cancer is not what defines me. I am a fighter by nature; having cancer did not make me what I am today. Beating the disease was no different than my championship baseball game, just another victory. I do not want the sympathy or the looks I get from people when I tell them where my scar came from. I sometimes enjoy making up elaborate tall tales on how I received my scar. My favorite is “Oh *that* scar... Yeah, polar bears are not as friendly as the Coke commercials make them seem.” When people find out I’ve had cancer, their faces change. They get a serious and concerned look I like to call the “funeral face.” I am not a victim. I define myself by what I can do, not by what has happened to me. I am not special because I had cancer. I am a regular guy. I believe this idea comes from my father. In school I always laugh to myself when I hear teachers saying, “I didn’t go to school for eight years to be called Mister.” My father went through eleven years of school and received his doctorate in medicine but never asks anyone to call him doctor. I have even heard him on the phone telling a telemarketer to call him Brian. I have an infinite amount of respect for him because he has stayed so humble. He still thinks of himself as just another man, Mr. Daniels, my dad. He helped me realize that a living cannot be made off a title, but only through constant hard work. As I get older, I discovered that taking action is a way to reach life’s goals. I look at my scar and it reminds me that focus and drive can help me achieve anything.

. In Russian prisons, it is said that a man is nothing without the tattoos that tell his life story<sup>1</sup>. Scars paint stories on our bodies and as for me, my scars illustrate my life. Some scars rest on the surface, while others cut deeper, with meanings that I have only understood with the passing of time. All scars fade, but never leave.

Eastern Promises. Dir. David Cronenberg. Perf. Viggo Mortensen, Naomi Watts. Universal Studios, 2007.

***Commentary by Ellie Swensson  
'11, Religion and English***

*One of the strongest aspects of “Every Scar Tells a Story” is its unique voice. Alex Daniels has done a great job of establishing and maintaining a voice that the reader can both relate to and trust, which is important when reading a paper with a personal emphasis. A strong voice like that in this paper not only attracts the reader but also aids in developing coherence and unity throughout the piece. With a consistent voice, Daniels is able to connect his thoughts in a logical way, giving the paper a coherence that the reader can easily follow. Another strength of this paper is Daniels’ choice of subject to discuss his topic. Taking a physical subject, such as scars, and using it to illustrate deeper themes, such as the importance of individuality and the value of spontaneity, is an extremely effective strategy for papers of this genre. When handling subjective topics, physical examples and images strengthen the paper because the themes addressed become much clearer to the reader. Daniels’ paper effectively uses scars just as more scholarly-based works would use quotes and citations – to prove the thesis that individuality and “the willingness to step outside the norm” should be celebrated and embraced.*