

“Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story”

Andrew Hattling

*“Let me tell you what I wish I'd known*

*When I was young and dreamed of glory*

*You have no control*

*Who lives, who dies, who tells your story”*

- Lin Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*

“Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells, Your Story” is the closing song in the Original Broadway Musical, *Hamilton*. It closes the play by emphasizing that you have no control over who dies, even if it is you, and that you need to keep moving to accomplish your dreams. Last February, a man jumped in front of my car and killed himself. I found out afterward that he had already jumped in front of other cars that day. The incident put me in shock and still shakes me as I write this essay. Still, we must focus on what we can control and strive to accomplish our dreams.

The accident occurred as I was driving home from my grandma’s house. I drove her to and from dialysis last winter and was coming home after having dinner with her. The man jumped out from behind another car, in the dark, and under the only burnt-out streetlight within a mile. There was no time to react or break until after I hit him. He hit in the center of my license plate, the direct center of the car, and flew up into the windshield, forming a cocoon in the window but not breaking it. If I had been going five miles per hour faster he would have slammed through the windshield and into my face at sixty miles per hour and killed me. I understand now that I could die at any time. This is even mentioned in the bible; Luke chapter

25, verse 13 states, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (NKJV). People often put the most important things in their lives off until it is too late. Later they will have more money. Later they will have more time. The later things will just work out, but later never comes. They are left doing urgent but unimportant time-fillers their entire lives and in the end, they are left without doing the things they always hoped they would. After the accident, I started to prioritize the things that are important to me. I read the New Testament twice as well as over thirty other books and listened to over 150 hours of podcasts. And while death prioritizes the important things, it also makes you slow down and enjoy the little things in life more. I intentionally take a break from working on stuff to enjoy music, walk the dog, or visit my grandma. The accident made me realize that life is short, so I am responding by living it to the fullest.

The weeks following the accident were rough. My dad drove me to school the morning after the accident, and I could not focus. I ran over 100 laps around the indoor track at breakneck speed just to focus on something else. A million thoughts ran through my mind. I knew I was not at fault, but I still felt the pain. The newspapers did not help. They published my name and made it look like I was just another distracted teen and that the accident occurred on a sidewalk. In reality, my phone was in the other seat, the radio was completely off, and the accident occurred over 1000 feet from the sidewalk in the middle of a fenced and divided highway. I try not to care what the articles say, but I still have found myself googling myself even in the past week. Still, I have come to understand that true independence and confidence comes from within. What others think is out of your control, you can only do what you know is right every day and know that you are making a difference. Whether it is during my duties as a cross country captain, student, or at

my job I make sure to do the right thing whether or not someone is watching, and do not get worked up when people criticize me while still working to be the best I can be. I accept that I do not control what other people think and keep working to be my best self regardless.

When the man jumped in front of my car last February, it initially left me devastated. However, coming to terms with what I cannot control put my life into focus. I work to accomplish my dreams and help other people every day whether or not other people recognize it. Hamilton died after a life non-stop service to his country, and yet he was left disgraced and near-forgotten. In the end, the lasting impact of his life's work was far more important than his temporary public image. I had no control who lived who died or who told my story. Once I accepted that I could finally move on. Now I can live a life worth living and a story worth telling.