

Baltimore

Destiny: We are going to begin with our very first storyteller, her name is Darien and she is wearing an amazing outfit. She is a second year student, her first semester as a legal studies student. In her spare time, she like spending time with her daughter and taking photos of events. (aside—where’s your camera?) Bye the way, this will be broadcasted on a podcast and facebook live so check us out, right now—but she will be reading a story about Baltimore and her family. Everybody give her a round of applause.

Darien: Okay, so like she said, my story is titled, “Baltimore” and it is about Baltimore, as Destiny said, and how it has impacted my family.

Baltimore. When I think of *Baltimore*, I think of all the days where I sat and cried about how upset I really am. I sat in the dark, well actually laid in the dark, and just wept repeatedly until I couldn’t do it anymore. I couldn’t believe that Baltimore really disappointed me. What did Baltimore do to me? *Baltimore* didn’t necessarily do anything to *me*. BUT, Baltimore murdered my brother.

March 29th, 2011 was the worst day of my life. But instead of giving you the end of the story, I’d rather start from the beginning.

I remember waking up that morning in a quiet house. My house was always quiet unless my brother was on the phone screaming at his girlfriend or listening to his girlfriend scream at him. Otherwise, my mom would be in her room watching television and my dad would be downstairs watching television in the recreational room. My parents had been married for 22 years but I always thought it was strange that they stayed in separate rooms in the house unless it was bedtime. They never watched a show together or had a conversation in the same room. My older brother was the loud mouth of the house, unfortunately. It was either his big mouth or his very loud car. At the time, he had a Ford Explorer that had the biggest subwoofer in his trunk, so you could hear his car a mile away, literally. Anyway, I got up that morning realizing I was late for school and rushed out the door. I lived in *Baltimore* County but went to the illustrious Western High School in *Baltimore* City, so I always had to leave the house earlier than most to begin my journey.

I went through school not even noticing what time it was or who was talking to me. For some reason, I had an attitude that day. Surprisingly, I had an attitude almost every day at school. I hated school. I hated the teachers. I hated the idea of me wearing an ugly uniform every day. We all looked the same and if you know me, you know I am NOT, the same. One thing I loved about school were my friends. They always had my back. There were eight of us in total and we did everything together! I knew that no matter what, my friends would be the rock I needed if anything ever went wrong.

There were eight periods in the school day and by the sixth period, I knew that I didn’t want to take the bus home. It was raining, and I hated taking the MTA bus and then the subway. It took me almost an hour every day to get home on public transportation. Additionally, after I got off my last bus, I had to walk all the way up my long street to get home. It was cold outside so obviously I needed to figure out another plan. I asked the teacher if I could use the bathroom and she said “again?” as if she was annoyed that I just asked to use the bathroom once already at the beginning of class. After walking out and going to the restroom, I called my brother and

asked him if he could pick me up. At the time he wasn't working so I knew he was only a call away. By the way, he just had a newborn son, my nephew back in December. If he had my nephew with him, I would never expect for him to travel from the County to the City to pick me up.

By the time 2:30 rolled around, I was sitting in Science class when I noticed a loud thump outside. I knew it was my brother. He ALWAYS had to be embarrassing and all the girls would look outside to see whose car it was. He'd purposely pull into the front bus loop thirty minutes early just to make a scene. It was the most annoying thing ever to me. The 3:05 bell rang, I jumped up from my seat and ran outside. I was so ready to get out of there. We rode home. We got into an argument about what color we were going to wear to my nephew's dedication service that Sunday. I remember telling my brother how dumb and insensitive he is to other people's feelings and decisions. He dropped me off at the door didn't say a word and left. He knew I had tons of homework to do and he was very serious when it came down to my grades. I finished my homework, ate, showered, and got in bed.

This is when Baltimore disappointed me.

Obviously, I was in a deep sleep because I didn't hear my phone ring over and over. Around 11:30 pm, my mom came rushing into my room with the phone in her hand. She said "Brea is on the phone crying and I can't figure out what she is saying". Brea is my best friend. Brea is always the mother of my brother's son, which is my nephew. I took the phone from my mom, put it to my ear, and all I heard her say is "SOMEBODY SHOT TROY." If you haven't figured out who TROY is, he is my brother.

At that moment, my entire soul was crushed. I couldn't think. I couldn't move. I couldn't comprehend. I didn't know what to do. I was incomplete. After gathering myself and rushing to the hospital and sitting in a waiting room crying so loudly, the doctor came out and told us that he was gone. My entire life shattered. Everything around me was completely white. I could not believe it. I still can't believe it. I was enraged and at that point, I was going to figure out exactly who murdered my brother and why.

My family and I took a few days to get some information. While everyone began to plan funeral arrangements, my focus was to figure out what happened. My brother died because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. My brother died because of someone else selling drugs. My brother was in the passenger seat of a car when our godbrother was making a drug transaction. The transaction went wrong, and the buyers began to rob my brother and godbrother. While my brother put up a fight, he was shot in his head. He died in my godbrother's arms.

Baltimore disappointed me because drugs should never be a reason why someone dies. Violence should never be a reason someone dies. No one should ever be in a position where they want to kill someone because of drugs. *Baltimore* riots. *Baltimore* feels like its ok to be in such a bad mental state that you need drugs to function. *Baltimore* will KILL for drugs. *Baltimore* will kill their own friend for drugs. The person that shot my brother in the head, was a "friend" of my brothers. This was a person that I grew up with. *Baltimore* taught this person that they need to live off drugs in order to survive. When it comes down to the violence and rioting in *Baltimore*, the colors are so dark and mellow. It seems so black and dreary. It seems like a frosty winter day when the sky is gray and all we want to do is lay around and be mad at the world. The *Baltimore* that I grew up in is yellow with flowers and has people smiling and artwork. The *Baltimore* that I knew growing up reminded me of a rich summer day with many diverse cultures. So many weddings and celebrations. Today, *Baltimore* reminds me of chilly days. After

my brother passed away, *Baltimore* just doesn't do it for me anymore. Maybe that's because...*Baltimore killed my heart.*

@ 27:47 (Applause)

DESTINY: Thank you very much Charlie, I guess this would be a horrible time to mention that I took the Meyers Briggs test and I didn't really think that it was that far fetched. Im just saying

CHARLIE- I'll talk to you about it later

DESTINY- Im just saying it it said I was um an ENFJ and were very good speakers and ya see how well I am doing. But let's turn our attention to Alixzina she is not exactly sure of her semester or here but she is an established CCBC student here whose major is in business management. Her hobby also includes photography another somebody that could have brought a camera. In fact she runs her own photography business that specializes in portraits of women and men. This story is about a significant event in her life. Everybody give her a hand.

ALIXZINA: This piece is called "The Perfect Pain" and I know at first you are probably be like how can any pain be perfection but I feel like at the end of the story you will be able to understand why this pain was so perfect.

Catching me by surprise, the pain strangles me. Puncturing my fragile body into a fetal position. I feel like I can't make it and I no longer have the strength to keep going. I keep crying out for help but the pain is so strong no words come out of my mouth. I can barely walk, the pain depriving me of my ability to stand making me drop to my knees. The option to give up is dangling in my face but with everyone standing around me my pride stops me from grabbing it. Everyone keeps asking me "Are you ok?" I keep telling them "Yes, I'm fine" secretly knowing I'm not. I'm pacing back and forth trying to hold back the tears. As I'm panicking I grab the phone and quickly call my doctor trying to relay to her just how tremendous this pain is. She calmly tells me "slow down, take a deep breath and relax." I'm frustrated from the pain but I'm

listening to her and for five extremely short seconds everything seems ok, but then it hits me again like a machete being jabbed into my abdomen slowly being turned till I am almost ready to pass out. I hold my breath trying to push through the pain. The doctor is asking me questions and I am barely making out the answers I'm giving her. Every time I go to answer a question, I am smothered by a sharp piercing pain that covers my entire pelvic area and I can no longer communicate. This is the beginning stages of labor.

We rush to the hospital an hour away. Every bump, crack and dip in the road feels like a knife being jabbed into my pelvic bone. The doctor takes me into the room where they strip me of all my privacy. The nurse hands me a bag for my clothes and a thin gown for me to change into. "Take it all off and leave the back open," the nurse tells me. If I weren't in so much agony I'd feel violated, but I'm so desperate for help that I follow the directions instantly pausing every thirty seconds for two minutes during every contraction. She places two straps across my huge round belly. I can hear his heartbeat and I soon realize that this human being my body created for ten months will soon be in my arms. The warm happy feeling of love is soon interrupted by another contraction stripping the joy off my face. The doctor prepares to examine me. "Relax your muscles" she repeats over and over. I'm not sure what is more disappointing- being probed and violated or being told that I'm not even one whole centimeter dilated. She is sending me home informing me that the hospital only admits mothers that are more than four centimeters dilated. My emotions are infused with rage and misery from the anticipation of another long car ride being tortured by the imperfections in the road.

I'm doing my best to keep track of my contractions but I can't focus. My body cannot handle this torment. I can no longer wait, I'm heading back to the hospital and I've made up my mind that they are going to admit me no matter how little I'm dilated. Repeating all the same

steps as before, the nurse tells me that I am three centimeters dilated and I'm still not enough. With bass in my voice I tell her "I'm not leaving, I live too far and I can't take the pain!" just hoping that I won't get sent away again and to my surprise It works! I'm admitted in the hospital and I'm just a little closer to the freedom that my body so badly yearns for. Watching the clock as hours go by my new set of nurses are teaching me how to properly breathe through the contractions but when the pain hits me I revert to my bad habit of breathing too quickly or holding my breath. Pitocin dripping into my IV speeding up labor which just so happens to intensify my already unbearable contractions. My room filled with my family as we wait for his arrival. Getting examined again, finally get great news, I'm dilated and I'm dilated enough for an epidural. The one thing I told myself I would try to avoid so I can have a natural birth, but the thought of numbing my pain was so enticing that I couldn't pass it up.

Signing my life away I sit on the edge of the hospital bed waiting for the anesthesiologist to stick the nine-centimeter needle in my spine. I'm squeezing the nurse hand till they're the color of blood hoping I don't move and cause my own paralysis. The needle hits my bone and I could feel the gut-wrenching pain from my head to my toes causing blood to run down my back. I'm absorbing the trauma, swallowing the pain and fighting the urge to move my body away. He tries again; this time it's a success and the constant pain slowly begins to melt away and become a distant memory. I am approaching the twenty-four-hour mark and I'm so close to end I can feel it.

He is ready! I feel the pressure and my body naturally begins to contract my muscles. It is time to push! The doctor coaches me while counting to ten as the crisp pain sears across my pelvis. Groaning and growling from exhaustion I give my all and push. While being pulled on my side the doctor yells "his heart rate is elevating! If you don't push we're going into an

emergency C-section" I take what little energy I have left and give one final push. He's here, I hear his cry for the first time and my heavy eyelids immediately pop open. The nurse rushes him away and I hear them whispering and talking amongst themselves. I still can't feel my legs and I'm too weak to move. I cry out "What's wrong with him!" The nurse tries to explain in the least terrifying way that he has an air pocket in his lung and they have to use a needle to pull it out. My heart is immediately dropping to the floor, my own heart was being ripped out of my chest and rushed out the room and I couldn't even chase after it.

My mind continues to race and I'm praying that my baby boy will make it through. The footsteps approaching my hospital room door makes my heart beat faster and faster. The doctor walks into the room and proceeds to tell me my baby boy is strong, healthy, and waiting for me to meet him. He's in the NICU an eight-pound six-ounce baby next to babies who were smaller than my hand. As I walk into the room I see him covered in cords, I stick my hand through the small hole in the container keeping him from the outside world. I touch him for the first time and I feel my heart instantly become whole again. I am no longer looking for the piece of me that was ripped away. The nurse takes him out and places him in my arms. This is it, this is the moment I get to know what it feels like to have the entire world in my hands. Perfection is painful.

(Applause @ 37:02)

SCRIPT FOR:

“Not Your Ordinary Day”

37:06

DESTINY (emcee): Thank you (name here). That is an amazing story. You are so strong. Screw the epidural, just hit me over the head with a wine bottle I will inevitably be drinking if I go through that. Ok so on to our last but not least story teller, Brandon. In his second semester at CCBC studying cyber security. His hobbies include riding motor-cycles, working on cars and listening to music. His story reveals how a close knit Baltimore community can deal with a crisis. So everyone remain seated and give him a warm round of applause.

BRANDON: Ok yeah does that sound good? Okay work with me because I still am getting the jitters out. So we will take y’ all back to the summer of 2001, I woke up around 11am, just like any other 13 year-old boy would do in Baltimore City. I brushed my teeth headed downstairs to see what my mother had made for breakfast, scrapple and eggs with white toast, which wasn’t no surprise, due to it’s cheap cost and ability to stretch between the seven of us in the house. After I finished eating, I shot back upstairs to throw some clothes on and run outside to find my friends. As I left out of the door, I didn’t realize that this wouldn’t be your ordinary day.

So I walked down the front steps of my house, waving and speaking to my older neighbors who were already outside on their porches enjoying the bright, sunny day and everyday entertainment of city life. As I walked up the street, reciting the lyrics to the new Project Pat song that just came out, I see my boy Swizz sitting out on his front porch so I yell out Yurp!, which “yurp” is equivalent to saying what’s up in Baltimore. So Swizz returned the Yurp! Back as I walked up to him-- his porch and dapped him up which is a special handshake between

friends. Swizz was my best friend, he was 2 years older than me but that didn't matter because either I was mature for my age or Swizz was immature for his age. But Swizz was one of the coolest dudes I had come across since I first moved to Walbrook Junction the winter before, he treated me with mutual respect since day one. We sat out on the porch listening to Project Pat's "Mista Don't Play" album, waiting for our other friends to come outside so we can figure out what we wanted to do for the day. Not long after, we was joined on the porch by Kendall and Corey. And For a few hours we sat on the porch like some old men talking about anything that comes across our mind such as girls, the cars that we want to have when we get older and things that happened around the neighborhood. After we sat around for as long as we could we got bored and decided to go shoot some hoops up at the basketball court, so off we went.

When we arrived at the basketball court, we see that there are already people running a full court game, mostly consisting of the other neighborhood kids I wouldn't consider my friends but more so associates. We sat on the sidelines waiting for the game to be over so we could jump in and face the winning team. After about 30-40 minutes of waiting, the game was finally over only for one of the guys to yell "AYO, RUN IT BACK!", which meant it was going to be a rematch so we decided to leave. Hours had passed since we all met up on Swizz's porch, Corey and Kendall decided to go home to get something to eat and meet back up with Swizz and I later. So Swizz said "Let's go over Jamaican-yo's house", I said cool and off we went. Jamaican-yo was an older Jamaican guy in his mid-forties that lived around the neighborhood and would look out for the younger kids, dropping knowledge on us and telling us what we should and shouldn't be doing. We called him Jamaican-yo because his name was too long to pronounce. Going to Jamaican-yo's house was like going to the zoo, he had a house full of animals, he had everything from pit-bulls, to parrots, to iguanas that he would let us come in and see or play with. So As we

were walking to his house, we seen smoke billowing into the air. We began to run to hurry and see where the smoke was coming from and discovered the top floor of a house, only three doors down from Jamaican-yo's house was on fire.

Swizz and I didn't take any time to jump into action, I ran to the house that was on fire and begin to beat on the door and Swizz beat on the door of the neighbor's house that was attached. I can't speak for Swizz but my heart was beating fast from the adrenaline pumping through my veins and the thought of someone being trapped inside the burning house. So We could hear the wood crackling from the extreme heat and then a loud shatter from the upstairs windows bursting under pressure. Swizz began to bang on to beat on the neighbor's window causing it to shatter, and then the door swung open to an angry elderly man and woman of course wondering who broke their glass and why, but then they realized the house next-door was on fire. So Swizz helped the elderly couple to the other side of the street as I jumped over the railing and ran to the side of the house to grab the water hose. My heart was beating even faster as I begin to dodge falling debris that was still on fire. I pulled the hose to the front of the house and began to spray water through the upstairs window that had a beautiful, orange flame rolling out of it as if it was dancing. The more I sprayed, the bigger the flame seemed to grow when all of a sudden I see the front door fly open, it was Jamaican-yo! He had busted through the back door, checked the whole house before running out of the front door. I dropped the water hose and we both ran away from the engulfed house as the fire had gotten too hot to be even within 40 feet of it. About two minutes later fire trucks and police were on the scene, and begin to battle the blaze. We explained to one of the firefighters that no one was in the house and all that we had done to try and help the situation. The crowd of onlookers grew and I repeated my story over and over

again until I was done being asked what happened? Ironically I found out later that that was an electrical fire so the water hose probably wasn't a good idea. But I tried.

Later that day, Mrs. Cook came to my house and asked me what happened? Mrs. Cook was in charge of the neighborhood watch and also the nosiest neighbor we had. By the end of my story, Mrs. Cook had given me a hug and told me that she would be calling the newspaper to report my heroic acts. I didn't feel like a hero, just a kid doing the right thing but uh one thing was for certain, this day would be one to remember because this was not your ordinary day.