

Overcome the Podcast - Episode 6
By Christian Bowman

Everything shut down after that late November evening in Florida. Including me. Nobody wanted to jump at the skydiving center where everyone had just died. The planes lay grounded. The cafe closed. And clouds began to form.

A funeral was organized for my uncle and my brothers flew out for it. My older brother who had tried to scare me with the trumped up charges of the car accident, instantly muscled his way to try to take over as the executor of the estate. He believed he was the closest to my uncle of all the kids. Unfortunately, he was also a drug addict who planned to stake out most of everything for himself. Although I was aware of all the ins and outs as far as Jimmy's investments were concerned, and I could have stayed on to help find a broker for the houseboat and the vehicles and all of his dealings. I just wanted to run away. From everything and everyone. I resented the idea my brother pitched that I wasn't close to Jimmy after everything we had just been through, but I didn't want to argue with the rest of my family. As far as they were concerned, I was now present for the death of everyone's mom and now the only uncle we all shared. It sucks that it seemed to come up immediately: the money. Before his funeral had even begun, my brother was trying to figure out the divisions and how to cash in as quickly as possible.

Coco was isolated. I was isolated. Jimmy was gone and we had given up everything to go help him. I looked at his pale skin painted in the coffin. I didn't get to

go to any of the other funerals. I didn't really know what to think or feel. But, after this time together with him and all of the experiences he introduced us to, I understood his wounds a little bit more and how it affected his ability to feel connected. I felt more disconnected in that moment than ever before. I had been so distracted with every possible external stimulus since the accident, trying to focus as hard as I could outward and throw my whole life into anything and everything that would keep me more occupied than my own internal battles would. And so did he.

This gentle 45 year old man, James Darby, who lay silent in the box before me, in this small room a few miles away from the drop zone where he took his last jump just five years after his sister passed, this tormented soul who had taken us in so warmly and tried so hard, introducing us to a lifestyle we would have never otherwise known. To the excitement of feeling alive by risking death. To the calming peace within extreme speeds. To the wild and crazy. Truly fucking insane shit that I thought only existed in action movies and those dime store fiction books like the ones back in jail. He really brought them to life. Even stranger than fiction.

When the funeral processions finally got underway, a lot of people cried. I guess I was still in shock. I had been "still in shock" for the last five years since the car accident. But I didn't cry. In fact, I laughed. I talked about how his death certificate read between 12,000 feet and ground level. How the official cause of death was determined to be a heart attack, so he never even got to feel his neck break. I talked about his quirks and the smile that was the real light he couldn't buy no matter how much money he had.

That light that was inside of him and how he beamed so brightly when he talked about being up there in the air. Even when his head was being supported by bolts in a wheelchair, he kept looking up. I talked about how alone he was before he found this adopted family that had gathered to celebrate his life. How he would want us all to party, not have a mournful wake. How, every time he would leave the room: he would say “Drive fast, take chances!” Literally all the time, like it was a motto. I talked about how special he was to me and how much I’ll miss him. Blue Skies.

My positive memory at the pulpit elicited anger and hostility from my older brother, who found it disingenuous that I didn’t shed a tear for him. I told him to fuck off. He threatened to write me out of the will, which, eventually he did. I apologized to Coco and told her that Jimmy loved her too and I left.

My name is Christian Bowman, and this is Overcome.

Watching him die snapped me out of this external focus and instead sent me on an inward reevaluation of everything. An inward look that I had been postponing for a very long time. I ran. I can’t imagine what Coco had to go through, watching me pull away so hard and so fast. The divorce seemed to be just a few papers that I signed while I was numb. Then she was off to New York. I loved her and I am grateful for our time together. My only solace in the end of that is that she is ok now. But, I was not ok then.

Interestingly enough, my older sister, who had run away from the family years before when she was just a teenager, hired a great lawyer and came in to collect the lions share of the inheritance. My older brother still burned everyone else for as much as he could, but I was glad to see that she was still alive. I had hoped we would be able to continue a relationship but she disappeared again with no trace.

I hadn't had a chance to grieve. To really deal the with shit. I had continued to introduce distractions and pursuits that would prevent me from having to approach the pain from losing Sonia and my mom. The weight of that little girl who had died along with the grandmother was overbearing. A nightmare that was a reality. It was hard to touch. I would try to approach it and then just get shut down with so many extreme feelings that would overwhelm me all at once. I would try to cry but it was too much to even just have the one emotion stream through. It was like a constant onslaught if I let my mind be still for even just a few moments. Now, Jimmy's body was added to the imagery that would slideshow through my thoughts.

I developed a series of new self sabotaging behaviors. A sort of ghosting everyone. I travelled around and any time I began to get close to anyone, I would disappear. I met a few people that I tried to get close to, but I would become scared of getting too close. I honestly worried that if I let anyone in, they would die. It sounds silly to imagine now, but at the time, it was a very real concern. I wondered why I was so close to death all the time. Literally, right at the moment someone close to me would

die, I just happen to be there. It became a serious mental block and I backed away from everyone.

I felt cold approaching the emotions of everything. I was nice to people I met but I just felt my spark diminishing inside. I was no longer going around and being so open and sharing, I was becoming withdrawn and even silently angry at small things that made no sense to be angry about like a coffee lid breathing hole that didn't puncture all the way to breathe properly or a short table leg that would wobble and only having one napkin to either balance it or wipe the coffee that didn't flow right dribbling down my chin.

I was reclusive and becoming more anti-social by the day. It was very uncharacteristic as I had always been a strong extrovert striking up conversations with strangers and easily making new friends. I tried to push it through with acting classes from a wonderful teacher in Austin: Mona Lee. But I was still not ready. The tears had stopped falling from my eyes long ago. Years seemed to pass without a drop. Passport stamps. Deathwish jobs. I was unfocused, reckless, and questioning why I survived. I couldn't release my pain, no matter what I tried. I kept running away. I was hardened.

Then, one night, I took a downtown train to a late night show at the movie theater. I walked in and there were only a few others in the room, their faces looking forward, not at me. The lights were dark. I chose a seat a little further back to feel even more alone. As the projector began rolling the film, illuminating the silver screen

through the lens and the light, I began to allow myself respond. Watching this story play out before me. I was able to vicariously attach to the emotions of the characters.

Suddenly, I could focus on a single feeling.

As Jack let go in the icy waters while Rose called out to him, left floating alive and alone, teardrops fell. It began slow, then turned into Niagra Falls. My survivor guilt, the accident, the loss, the visions of death, fear, loneliness, it all came welling up in the most intense outpouring of emotion I had ever experienced. I found release through those twenty four frames per second. I knew that Jack and Rose were really Kate and Leo. I knew that there was a crew of people in a sound stage on the lot that were operating the lights and the dolly and the camera and sounds and I could imagine hundreds more working on it, but in that one moment, I was able to unplug and let go.

It began there, and then I began trying to balance more. Working to allow myself the appreciation of laughing with people by allowing myself to cry alone without judgement. The scales were tipped so heavy in my heart, I had to let go of some of the pain to equalize. I had to deliberately try to put myself in situations that would be conducive to finding the laughter. Surrounding myself with good people and good intentions.

I had made a few calls after I was able to breathe a little. I had a potential job offer in New Zealand, the job would have been a boat captain doing river runs between mountains. The people I had learned to SCUBA dive with in Florida were part of a US

company there and I didn't need to go through too many hoops with Visas and Permits, I just needed to get out there. I began to make my way over the Pacific. But first, I would need to stop to see Jimbeau, my stepdad, in Hawaii.

When I got back to the North Shore, some friends insisted I had to meet this girl in town. Giselle. She was a beautiful Hawaiian girl and we were instantly drawn to each other. I realized I had just been celibate for over a year and a half. But I felt a little more open since the Titanic sunk. What I was not expecting was that the first girl I would be with after all that time would become pregnant. In order to respect her privacy, I'll also refrain from too many details about the relationship. We had barely known each other. But we got married and before I knew it, I had a son.

Welcoming this new life into my world that had been so dominated by death was a foreign experience. I had no real preparation for him. But it changed everything. Looking into this baby's eyes. Feeling him reach out and grab my finger tips. Clutching him in my arms and carefully embracing his tiny little head. I never would have imagined being in that situation, and yet, here I was. A father. To a beautiful little boy. I had no idea what I was doing. I had to get my shit together.

There was the formula and the diapers and the crib and the shots and the visits and the car seat and had to get a car and the list continued to grow. I quit smoking cigarettes right away, which was not easy. I stopped drinking. I worked to rise to the occasion. My responsibilities now involved a wife and a child. It was a lot really fast. I

had just been alone to try to deal with the internal grieving process and only just recently felt a little more balanced. But now I needed to focus on someone else. And I needed to be responsible. And safe.

As things began to come to a screeching halt from one path and quickly divert to this new path, I still wasn't ready. I could lie and say I did my best, but the truth of the matter was: I was scared. Going from this whole mindset of not getting close to anyone for fear they would die to suddenly being married again with a new baby resulted in my self sabotage pattern of running but discovering the patterns finding different ways of revealing itself. I stepped up to the plate and got the job and took care of the needs on the outside, but I wasn't as present as I wish I would have been. Giselle had to step up to be more of a mother as I would disappear inside. I was there for my son, but not for her.

We drifted apart not long after getting together, and my younger brother moved out to Hawaii. He moved in when she moved out. But then moved out when she moved back in. It was a bit of a mess, but I was working and paying the bills and trying to spend time with Bodhi as much as possible. When my brother had moved out, he began living with a roommate who worked as a Stand In on a television show filming on the island: North Shore. His roommate told me I should come and be an extra and see what it was like on set. I thought back to the romance of the Titanic and how, even the extras contributed to providing me with the ability to feel again. I agreed and he arranged for me to come in during a day when they needed lots of bodies.

It was a long day. I knew it wasn't that glamorous even before showing up, but I knew that in the cut, putting those moments together allowed people to experience something. Even if just for a moment, that would bring them out of whatever they might be going through and laugh or cry or become afraid or empowered with actions and adventures. I ended up crossing a hotel lobby about forty five times and then they released me.

On the way out, I was so excited, I passed by the casting directors office and decided I would walk in to thank them for having me on for the day. What I didn't realize was: I had walked in on a casting session. I was full of energy and just intended to express my gratitude and walk out, but the director stopped me and asked me to read a couple of lines. The poor actor that was auditioning handed me his script. I said the lines and said thanks. They told me I had the part and gave me the details on where to show up the next day. I apologized to the actor, thanked them and ran out bursting with joy. Literally screaming "Fuck yeah!" when I got out of the room.

The next day, I pulled up to set. They treated me like a star. I was escorted to my trailer, then wardrobe, then hair and make up, then met my costars and the director again. The scene was a big wild crazy party in a beautiful yard on the North Shore overlooking the ocean. Lots of young hot party people were gathered around. I walked the scene in rehearsals while the crew watched and laid down the marks to establish the lighting and cameras. Then I went back to my trailer to wait. I was nervous and happy

and scared and excited and bursting at the seams. Compared to the days when I wasn't able to feel anything, in that trailer I was able to fully enjoy all of the anxiety of performance and the accompaniment of the psychology around it.

The scene seemed to be a blur, I fucked up part of my line, and couldn't take a note. But I did it! The whole thing took just a few hours from my arrival to being let go for the day. I jumped in my Jeep and raced out to head back home to celebrate. I was so elated, that I didn't see the car in front of me skid to a stop. A small fender bender, but I was so stoked on what just happened, the other car was infected by my energy and I told them what I had just done and they got my autograph before we exchanged insurance details and drove off.

It floated me for awhile. It was a huge relief to have a little extra money coming from the part and it was really cool to know that I was going to be on TV, but it was more than that for me. My little one liner was now part of this medium. This way that people could potentially find their way through hardship. However it would be, I would be able to help someone feel something.

I went down and signed up with a talent agent a couple days after filming it and officially signed as an actor. I got some headshots done and felt like I found a way to release in a way that wasn't harmful. I could feel every bit of everything, but when it had a different set of given circumstances, I didn't have to worry about approaching this

huge mountain of the accident and the dead, I could just compartmentalize things into a character.

My real job at the time was working for Starbucks. The benefits were great and the pay was able to help take care of Bodhi. A week or so after filming the scene on North Shore, I was working the morning shift at the Kaneohe store on the East Side of O'ahu. A group of people had come in to make a big order. I could hear some of the language they were using with each other and I knew right away they were a film crew. As some of them were deciding what to order, a conversation came up and I was asked about Kualoa Ranch. As the last person to order came up and gave me the card to pay, I asked if he was the Executive Producer. He seemed surprised and said yes. I told him I hope the location scout goes well and he asked how I knew they were going on a location scout. I described to him that I had just shot something for the first time the week before and apologized if I was wrong. He told me that I was right. They were on their way to scout the same valley that Jurassic Park had shot in. I thought it was awesome and told him about the director I had just worked with on North Shore. He laughed and told me he knew him. Then he told me they were trying to cast a role but hadn't found anyone yet. He asked if I would be willing to come by the office the next day to read for it. I immediately said yes and watched as they walked out. Jack Bender, the EP and Director, turning back to wave and smile as they walked out.

The next day, I showed up at the office with my new headshot I literally just had printed on the way over. He handed it to a woman in the office who said, "Great

Headshot” then handed me a pillow and asked me to mess with it for a bit. He sat on his desk next to her as I smelled the pillow and tried to feel whether it was feather or padding. I shook it a little. He asked me to say a few lines, so I jumped up and said them, nervously. They looked at each other. He said “Thanks” and she led me out of the office.

I thought it went terribly, but on the way out, she handed me a script. Had me sign a bunch of paperwork and gave me a map back out to the North Shore. She told me to show up to set and said “Congratulations”!

Again, ecstatic, I rushed home to celebrate by played Thomas the Train with Bodhi, who was now almost four years old.

The next morning, I drove down Farrington Highway and approached the set. It was amazing. They had a full airplane fuselage wrecked on the beach. I looked over and saw the lights and the grip trucks and the trailers and the gear and the people all working like a well oiled machine. I went to wardrobe and hair and makeup. I went out to go rehearse and it was massive. This giant Lockheed wide-bodied airliner was ripped apart and strewn across the beach. Then I met some of the other actors I would be doing the scene with: Ian Somerhalder, Dominic Monaghan and Harold Perrineau. I was so excited in the scene that when I went to introduce myself, I jumped up on a broken airplane wing and cut my leg open. I didn’t even realize I had been bleeding down my pants until I was back in my trailer changing out of wardrobe. It was amazing.

Lost turned out to be a smash hit and my little role as Steve Jenkins kept getting called back. Unfortunately, most of my scenes got cut from the final airing. I had hoped that maybe the takes would have made their way to deleted scenes but in the end I only had a couple of lines that stayed in the picture. Despite it being this itchy bitsy role, which I will say, I do have the claim to fame that I was the first real burial on the island after Ethan Rom killed me. I am forever grateful to Jack for bringing me on and bringing me back for one last cameo during a flashback scene with Harold Perrineau and Malcolm David Kelley. In the end, I had gotten to work on a bunch of the episodes from the first season and after it wrapped, decided I wanted to make a run of it in LA. I was going to be an actor.

Giselle and I had gotten back together and moved to California. Burbank was a different beast than I had expected. I had this fantasy that I was going to ride the coattails of the show in Hawaii and just be a shoo in for working on the lot. I'm glad I still had my job with Starbucks. Because it did not happen right away. In fact, it didn't happen at all. I spent an entire year trying to get an agent to even sign me and nobody would take a submission unsolicited. I was locked out without knowing anyone.

I had taken the Assistant Manager spot at the Sherman Oaks Galleria in the valley just over the ridge from Beverly Hills. Famous people were dropping in on a weekly basis and it was nice because nobody there freaked out about it. Ray Liotta and Brian

Cox could come in without anyone bothering them about their roles. They could just be regular people for a latte or espresso.

One of my regulars at the time, James Franco, would come in at the same time as I would get off. I would sit with him and have a coffee after my shift. We got to talking week after week and he was very nice. After quite some time, he introduced me to an agent. Finally. I had a glimmer of hope. My lease was almost up and they were raising my rent and I didn't want to stay unless I had something lined up.

I spoke with the agent, who told me he only represents A list and had a small portfolio, but he did throw me a bone. A connection to an audition for a TV show... in Dallas. He told me that the only way I would be considered is if I was an import that had already developed a name by being a local hire in smaller markets. I thought that's what I was already coming from Hawaii on *Lost*, but I was off to Texas again.

I signed with a local agent based out of Austin, as I knew Austin well. I had lived there and it was a home for me, even when I was homeless. I got the sides for my audition: it was only one line consisting of three words. Let her go.

I applied accents and emphasized every word in every way I could think of on my way up to Dallas from Austin. Let her go. Let her Go! Let HER go!... when I got to the audition, I was glad I had run it all the ways, because they asked me to give it to them multiple times in multiple ways. Auditions are such a strange thing. The room is a

much different beast than being on set. On set, you have a director to ask questions from and other actors to respond to and set design and props and world building to get you into a scene. In the audition room, it's usually a long hallway of people that look exactly like you, sitting with thousand dollar headshots and impressive resumes. A small cheap video camera, a fold out table and a few chairs. Maybe a single bright light. A mark on the floor or a chair. And, depending on if it's just a casting director alone or a producer/director session with a writer in the room, it can be a very cold method of getting the other character's lines read, to which you need to light them on fire. Literally every audition, whether you book it or not, you rip apart your performance. You think about all the things you should have done differently.

In this particular case, I felt like I snarled and my nose shook like a mad dog on one of the takes. I thought about how I should have turned left then right, not right then left. I thought about whether my fake gun holding position should have been a finger pointing gun or if I should have pretended my hands were wrapped around the grip of a pistol. I drove back from the audition feeling more nervous than I had before I went in. Everything was on the line for this one. I didn't transfer with the Starbucks job, so I was looking for work but also really wanting to continue the acting.

When I got back, there was no news. I tried my agent but they hadn't heard anything either and told me it sometimes takes time. I began freaking out a little bit, but then found a bartending job at a night club that would allow me to make a bunch of cash and still try at least. Maybe I just needed classes. Maybe I wasn't big enough. All

the self depreciating thoughts ran through my mind. Then I got the call. Prison Break loved my audition.

I was going to be Agent King for the Third Season.

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