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I'm an optimist; I believe if I work hard, things will work out OK. I try to keep a smile on my face, even when I hit life's little bumps. I also believe everything happens for a reason. A few months ago, I had a big reality check.

I was on top of the world, and it seemed I could do nothing wrong. In the final month of our WestPac 2001 tour, I was frocked to E-4, earned my air-warfare qualification, and was selected as the squadron's Junior Sailor of the Month. I also was named LPO for the first lieutenant's division when I returned from leave. In short, I was about as cool as the other side of a pillow. With every up, though, there is a down.

In my heart, I know I have no one but myself to blame; however, I did have help. Alcohol was beside me the whole time—bringing me back down to the real world.

We were on detachment in Puerto Rico, and I was extremely bored. Rum was cheap, and it became an easy cure. On the surface, everything seemed fine while I was drinking. Underneath my facade, the alcohol was eating away at me. It broke down to the point I was doing things I wouldn't even think about doing while sober. It also didn't matter who angered me. The target of an alcohol-induced rage can be a complete stranger, an acquaintance, or a best friend. In my case, it was the latter.

March 26 is a day I'll never forget. It's the birthday of my little brother and sister, as well as my aunt. More importantly, it's the day I nearly killed my best friend over a stupid argument that never should have happened.

The argument started when three friends and I sat down to play cards. We both said things we should have kept to ourselves. I eventually left the room, and the argument should have ended there, but it didn't. My friend followed me out of the room, and the bickering continued. Our argument dragged on until we returned to our room, where we started fighting.

As we entered the room, I said something I knew would anger him. He chased me out of the room, calling me names and bumping me. My reaction was to push him away from me. Unfortunately, I shoved him so hard he went through the door and into a concrete wall behind it headfirst. What happened next will be with me the rest of my life. My best friend stopped moving, his breathing became irregular, and blood started coming from the back of his head. I was scared to death.

My friend is fine now. All that's left of the incident is a scar on the back of his head—and the one in the back of my mind. He remembers nothing of what happened, and we remain great friends today. Lucky for us, a captain's mast didn't occur. In one split second, I almost threw away all I had worked for. ❏