

# The Value of “BAD”

*Under work-from-home rules, Brunswick colleagues have taken turns sharing a Thought of the Day email to buoy co-workers' spirits and to maintain our sense of community. Brunswick Review selects a few of these to share with our readers. On April 14, Austin Rathe sent this note.*

**T**HESE ARE, OBJECTIVELY, DIFFICULT TIMES. IT'S tempting to refer to the situation we're in as “bad”—and that makes sense, of course. I'm certainly not going to argue that this isn't bad. But I am going to tell you a story that might change what you think “bad” is.

A lot of years ago now I was crossing a busy street near my parents' home and stepped out in front of a car that had no chance of stopping in time. The result of this impromptu experiment into the

Tragedy isn't positive. But terrible pain and loss can enrich our lives in ways we didn't think possible, Brunswick Partner **AUSTIN RATHE** observes.

made me be nicer to people, and I was conscious my life was limited so I both worked harder and was significantly more picky about how I spent and with whom I shared my time. I began to believe, and to tell people, that nearly getting killed by a car was the best thing that had ever happened to me (emphasis on the “nearly”).

Once, when I was telling a friend this story (I talk about it a lot, I'm afraid, as some of you know), he said, “You mean like that Chinese proverb about the boy and the horse?”

Seeing me stare at him blankly, he told me the story, which goes a little something like this...

*A long time ago, a young boy in China had a horse that he adored. One day, the horse ran away, and the boy's neighbor said to him “What terrible news, that's such bad luck!”*

*The boy replied, “I'm not sure. Who can really tell what's good and what's bad?”*

*A few days later the horse returned to the boy, and brought back with it several new, wild horses. “What amazing good luck!” the boy's neighbor said.*

*The boy replied, “Who can really tell what's good and what's bad?”*

*Several weeks later and the boy is breaking in one of the wild horses and he's thrown to the ground, breaking his leg. “What terribly bad news!” the boy's neighbor says.*

*“Who can really tell what's good and what's bad?” the boy replied.*

*Not long after that the Emperor's army came to town, conscripting all the young men to fight in a war. The boy, with his broken leg, was spared conscription and didn't go to war. “What good luck!” said the neighbor.*

*The boy replied, “Who can really tell what's good and what's bad?”*

*And so it goes on...*

I've since learned that the original Chinese version of this is slightly different, but the moral is the same. The message is simple and, for me, very relevant to where we are now: Good things can come from bad things, and in fact they very often do.

The situation we're in now is certainly difficult and parts of it are heartbreakingly bad, but from this, in the end, will come new experiences, relationships and inspirations for all of us that we wouldn't have had otherwise, and that's going to be something we value in years to come. ♦

The screenshot shows a BBC News article from March 6, 2004. The headline is "Marathon man 'back on his feet'". The sub-headline reads: "A Nottinghamshire man who broke both legs in a road accident three years ago is getting ready to run the 2004 London Marathon." The article text states: "Austin Rathe, 21, from Kirkby in Ashfield, was hit by a car in Mansfield in March 2001. He could not walk for three months and at one point doctors considered amputating one of his legs." There is a small photo of a man sitting on a bench, and a "WATCH" button for a video titled "BBC's 'Having something'".

shock-absorbing capabilities of the human body was about what you'd imagine—I was a total mess. I'll spare you the specific details, but I will say that I spent the bulk of the next three months in a wheelchair and the balance of the next six figuring out how to walk again. (Fun fact: I really did have to “learn” to walk again, but you really don't ever forget how to ride a bike).

I got better, as you do, and in the years that followed both my career and my relationships all developed to be much better than they had in the years before the accident. It took a while, but after a few years I came to realize that most of what was good in my life was, to some extent, a result of having that accident. I had a sense of mortality that



After learning to walk again, Austin made the news by becoming a marathoner.