

# 60 Seconds

*By Carly McCullough*

The image of a tall, dark figure standing beside me in that little hotel room in Santorini is still the first thing I see when I close my eyes to go to sleep at night.

Come home, lock the door, get ready for bed, double check that the door is locked: these are the things I never forget to do. I might make my way to the kitchen for a cup of tea before bed or to collect the book I'm reading from my living room table and bring it to bed. I'm up anyway, and I live alone. It won't hurt to triple check.

You can never be too safe, right?

It had been another beautiful, dream-like day in Greece, a place I'd always wanted to visit since hearing stories and seeing pictures of my mom where she grew up for a short few years. The sun was always out, almost as radiant as the smile on the beautiful local in the little bookstore on the corner, and the view was like something you only ever see glistening on a postcard.

People don't actually live like this, do they?

I was. I was living my dream.

Seeing that it was one of our last nights there, the group of friends I was with wanted have a big night out in the cobblestone streets of the city, bouncing from bar to bar having the time of their lives.

I didn't want to miss a single opportunity while in Greece, so I took the seven-minute walk to the center of the city where the nightlife lit up the street. I really was having an incredible time, as one does in such a beautiful, foreign place.

I got the room key from my roommate so I could return home early, wanting to get some sleep before the small sailboat excursion I had planned for the following morning. There was only set of keys, so I made my way home, anticipating her return several hours later.

Once clean, cozy and in bed, I let myself doze off into another easy sleep as my heart fell deeper and deeper in love with Santorini.

This sleep wouldn't be like the rest.

The noise of my roommate stumbling home woke me only slightly. I'm a light sleeper, but I knew her arrival would wake me eventually. That's why I left the door unlocked, so that she could get in to the room even after I was blissfully taken away into another dream of the light blue ocean water crashing into the shore or the beautiful Grecian boy I'd met at a bookstore on the island.

The sound of her shuffling through the front door filled the room, my eyes closed but my ears half listening to her make her way toward the foot of the bed. I figured she was headed to the bathroom, or maybe looking for something from her suitcase.

The tip-toe of footsteps made their way around the bed until they stopped at what sounded like my suitcase.

Maybe she really needed something, looking to see if I had a spare Band-Aid or a hair tie, and didn't want to wake me. After all, this is my friend. If she really needs something, she's more than welcome to take it.

After what felt like about 60 seconds of hearing her rummage through my suitcase, the sound of my bedside table slamming shut resonated throughout the whole room.

I sat up immediately, and so did my roommate.

She was asleep next to me the entire time, never once moving around the room for as long as I'd be hearing so, which left the ransacking noises belonging to the foreign man in a black hood with his hands in my purse.

Sixty seconds, that's how long it took.

I heard this man enter my room and continue to search through all of my belongings for 60 seconds. With my eyes shut, not even a fragment of worry, it took 60 seconds to even begin to realize that anything was wrong.

And after 60 seconds of letting this man invade all of my privacy, all I could do when he bolted out of the room was sit there in disbelief.

I am at a loss for what to do next. Within the span of what felt like an eternity, but had to be no more than seconds, I ran through all of my options.

I could get up and chase him, which I soon realized would be rather useless for everyone involved. I could call 911, except I didn't even know the Greek number for emergency services, and it was the middle of the night.

I could curl up into a ball and cry, which is what I wanted to do most, but my roommate and I decided to call our study abroad chaperones first.

No answer.

We tried again, even frantically trying to remember which room number they were in, in case pounding on their door would be the answer.

Next, we called the front desk from our hotel room phone, and although this step got us an answer, it only resulted in more confusion.

The man at the reception desk couldn't seem to understand what we were trying to tell him. In hindsight, the quivering voice of a crying, 18-year-old American girl must've been hard to maneuver at 3:30 a.m.

After finally getting him to understand that we did not know this man and he was not a guest of the hotel, he got one of our trip advisors on the phone via her room number, a sliver of information I wish we'd had moments earlier.

That was until it proved useless, as she didn't seem to comprehend the magnitude of what had happened either.

“Are you two okay?”

“Yes,” I answered. We were fine, untouched. Technically, things could've been worse.

“Do you need me to come up there?”

The man at the reception desk piped in with a harsh “no,” assuring her that everything had already been sorted out and was under control.

As an 18-year-old girl traveling the world alone for the first time, I would've never known it was my place to say that things did not feel ok.

What did I know? I'm just a kid.

I wiped the tears from my eyes as my roommate and I somberly made our way back to our room, the atmosphere shifting as we walked in.

It was the same, yet very different.

I played the events that had just occurred back in my mind, watching from the door frame the path he must've took. Piecing the sounds of those 60 seconds together with the brief image I got of him, I retraced his footsteps.

He slid the through the unlocked door, making his way around the foot of the bed toward the back of the room. Slowly, his hands opened the flap of my suitcase, beginning to discover its contents. Next, he moved slightly to my bedside, shifting his interest toward my purse, which had been laying on the floor right beside me.

The trace of his hands touching my things resonated as mine retraced his movements.

Sitting in my little bed after all of that had just happened, the only thing I could think about was my dad.

Every single night as a child, he would check that all of the doors – front, back and garage – were locked, always the very last thing before going to bed. Like clockwork, it's something he never failed to do.

In my tiny hotel room in Greece, all I could think was how I'd never even payed the slightest attention to his nightly routine until now. It was something that happened with or without me, never my responsibility.

It wasn't until this night in Santorini that I realized I'm not a child anymore, and that it might be a good thing. I don't have my dad to lock the doors for me every night before bed anymore, but instead I have everything my parents have taught me as a person.

And no matter how old you are, you're never too old to need your mom.

So I called her, not because she could fly across the world to be there nor was there anything she could do, but because somehow hearing her tell me that everything was ok was all I needed.

Locking the doors every night is something I never forget to do now, and I still see the dark silhouette of the man who broke into my room that night in Greece sometimes when I close my eyes to go to sleep.

I also call my parents more, though, if not just to ask how their day is going, and I wake up every morning feeling more confident in who I am as a person.

A loss of childhood naivety can sound like a scary thing, but it's not.

It's hard to think about how much worse that night in Santorini could've been, but that leaves me twice as grateful that things ended the way they did. I almost feel as if it was meant to happen to me because, without a doubt, I'm a better person for it.

I know what it is to experience something traumatizing, and whether you let that trauma hinder you in life or decide to grow from it is what determines the kind of person you've become.

I'd like to think I'm still growing.