

The Day My Life Changed Forever.

To share my story and allow others to know they're not alone through the struggle of a loss.

My family, and anyone who has experienced a loss in their family.

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The Day My Life Changed Forever

My dad was a tall man who was African American with a shiny bald head, a permanent scowl on his face, a crooked smile, and a dark brown mustache with streaks of grey hair. He was liked by many people. He helped our neighbors shovel their driveways in the winter, helped them carry groceries, and cared for the neighborhood kids like his own. He worked at a shop making parts for machines and working hard to provide for his family. He worked third shift. He would be sleeping when we got up to get ready for school and work and would be getting ready for work when we got home. He would occasionally stay home and surprise my mom, sister, and I when we got home from work and school. He would always dance with me in the living room to the song "Just the way you are" by Bruno Mars, and he would watch looney toons with me. Unfortunately, my dad had high blood pressure and didn't take his blood pressure medicine like he should've, and he's no longer here because of it.

It was a cold day in Jackson, Michigan. It's the middle of February, four days after Valentines Day to be exact. My mom just got out of work and picked me up from Keicher Elementary where I went to school. She then drove us home, and we arrived at our house. She parked on the curb behind my dad's black candy painted Honda. I unbuckled my seatbelt, swung the car door open and got out of the car. I swung the car door shut behind me as I ran to the front door of the house and entered the house. Excitement grows inside my little body like a bottle of pop being shaken getting ready to explode. Nine-year-old me hung my backpack on the back of

the dining room chair, as my mom was putting her purse on the kitchen counter. In my blue jeans and pink shirt, I eagerly ran up the stairs, with the bottling excitement, happily yelling "Daddy, we're home!!" When I didn't hear anything, I said it again. That's when I reached the bedroom doorway and saw him lying on the bedroom floor face down. He had a red towel wrapped around his waist, his long legs stretched out. He was snoring like a bear during hibernation. That's when my mom reached the doorway. I told her "Mommy, he's not waking up". She then screamed his name "Keith!" He still wasn't responding. My mom then sent me to my room for a few minutes, but it felt like hours. She had their bedroom door closed. I then came back, and she was on the phone with 911 at that point.

I said, "Mommy spray him with the spray bottle." She said, "I did" and he still didn't respond. We had a nice couple that moved in next door. Their names were Ron and Stacy. Ron was a middle-aged mixed guy with brown waves, a beard, and mustache. Stacy was a middle-aged black woman with long dark wavy hair. They became friends with my mom and dad, and I would go over to her house and play with her nieces and nephews. At some point my mom called our neighbor Stacy, which was a friend of my mom's. There was a lot happening at my house at the time, so my neighbors were asked to get me. As the neighbor came over to get me the ambulance arrived at the front door; I told the doctors "I don't want you to take my dad." As tears filled my eyes, making my vision blurry. The EMS nurses rushed upstairs, and Stacy took me over to her house and was talking to me trying to help calm me down. My sister Chantel was at a friend's house before cheer practice when my mom called to tell Chantel's friend's mom what was happening. I remember being confused. I couldn't fully wrap my mind around what was happening at the time. My mind was racing, I thought he was just sleeping, but I wasn't sure why he wouldn't wake up.

Before I knew it the sky was getting dark, and my sister arrived at the neighbors' house to come get me to take me to the hospital. I was crying and my sister was trying to tell me everything was going to be okay. My world was spinning out of control and there was nothing I could do or say to change it.

After what felt like the longest ride of my life we made it to the hospital. When my sister and I got there, my mom told my sister and I that our dad had some bleeding in his brain and was waiting to see what else the doctors had to say. She wrapped my sister and I tightly in her arms. Unfortunately, due to my age and restrictions the hospital had I wasn't able to see my dad the first night we were there. I also remember sitting in the waiting room with my mom's friend as her and my sister went through the double doors to the ICU area to see my dad. That night we stayed the night there with my mom. We were in the family area at the hospital; they had long benches that were scooted together in a separate room along with a recliner chair. The nurses brought each of us a pillow and blanket. While we were in the hospital the nurses informed us and said, "If he does make it, he will either be paralyzed on one side of his body, or you'll have to teach him how to talk again." This made my heart drop to my stomach like I was on a scary rollercoaster looking just over the front of the cart at the big drop straight down.

The next day when we woke up it still felt so unreal. We stayed a couple nights at the hospital in the family room, and it was like he had been in the hospital for weeks, but it was only a couple days. We would go visit him in the ICU; he had to be intubated. It was so hard to see him lying in the hospital bed hooked up to those machines, with that tube down his throat. It all felt like a bad dream, I stood at the side of his bed and held his hand. I remember looking at him and telling him that I was there. My sister, mom, and I put little spider man, batman, superman, and other superhero action figures in his hospital room window. Then we had to leave the room for

them to take him back to the OR to try and get the bleeding to stop. Shortly after they took him back was when we got the news... "I'm so sorry, there was too much bleeding, we tried everything and weren't able to stop it". We were there with my dad until he took his last breath in his hospital bed a day or so after the operation to try and stop the bleeding. I felt so heartbroken, like a piece of me was taken. I didn't understand why he had to go. After we left the hospital for the last time without him, we spent multiple nights sleeping in my mom's bed. We were there supporting each other. We cried together, and we helped each other get through the long, lonely days. I kept our kisses in my heart. It helped me feel like I still had a big part of my dad in my heart because I "saved" his kisses. Every time I got a kiss from my dad, I would wipe it off and wipe it on my 'heart' and put fake screws over it to save his kisses. After the loss of my dad, my sister and I went to counseling to help us work through the sudden and traumatic loss, it helped a little then. However, I think now that I'm older I would benefit from therapy to properly work through the loss now that I'm able to better understand and process this. My mom did get me into counseling, which was somewhat helpful at the time, however due to my age it was mostly play therapy.

In conclusion I learned that some things are going to happen that will turn your whole world upside down and make you feel like your life is falling apart. Even though it feels this way I promise it will get better with time. When your life feels like it's crumbling lean on your family and friends, they will be there for you; Believe it or not, your family members need you just as much. Yes, even the strong ones. Even when you're hurting remember to check on your family members too. I want you to know that the storm doesn't last forever and the sun will shine on you again. Yes, it hurts. Yes, it sucks. Yes, it will keep you down for a season, but it's not the end. The person you lost is still always with you in spirit, and in your heart. They are watching over you. I also want you to remember that grief looks different for different people, and

sometimes it comes in waves. Allow yourself to acknowledge and feel your feelings but you must learn how to not let them takeover.