

The Darkness We Must Face

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR

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I am 13. Seven months ago my father was killed in an auto accident. I didn't know that my 51-year-old dad would hit the back of a semi-truck on March 17th at 9:00 a.m. I didn't know that the front of his car would be wrecked and his body would be unrecognizable. I didn't know that we wouldn't be able to say goodbye.

I didn't know that in an instant, his head would hit the wheel and he'd be dead. I didn't know that the coroner would call my mom to tell her that her husband had died at the scene. I didn't know that I would have to find out at school. I didn't know that the night before was the last time I would ever see him alive.

The biggest thing that I didn't know is that my life would be changed forever.

What I didn't know was that writing this book would be my way of dealing with loss. It wasn't an easy journey. It still isn't.

I chose to write this story to help others deal with loss. I am hoping that those who read this book and who are going through their own grief, find hope that they can get through it.

Each story is personal and different from another. In my own family, we all coped differently and had different experiences. I am not finished grieving, and while making this book is hard, it has been beneficial in dealing with my grief. Not that it is making grief easier, but it has made me stronger.

Before I wrote this book, I felt the way I grieved at times was wrong, it wasn't. I have learned that no one can grieve "wrong". Grief is something terrible that sits with you each day, and it isn't easy to get rid of, but there is no wrong way to grieve.

Naturally, there is fear for anyone going through grief and sometimes the best way to deal with fear is to have someone next to us, holding our hands. I hope my book is a way of holding another's hand to get through it together.

For me, one of the only positive outcomes of losing my dad is that I am stronger. For me, it made me realize that I can get through anything, even if there isn't a clear path. Others may not be in this place yet and that's okay. Grief is not simple, but when our hands connect, hopefully it makes it easier even if in the tiniest of ways.

Before My Life Changed

March 16th, 2022

Together as a family, warm under a cozy linen,
Laughter through a screen
That night was perfect even if I didn't know it then
He sat there for hours,

Listening to the presentation I had the next day,
over and over again

He was perfect.

Evident love between my parents,

Special love as a family
His face live and ever so full,

He was happy, really truly happy
Nothing more than a hug goodnight,

a tuck into bed too
Why did it have to be the last
It was a night the same as any other,
But this final memory I would hold
March 17th, 2022
A whisper in my ear,
To say I love you
A kiss on my cheek,
Before he left in a car, a now wrecked car
A day so pure, so enjoyable
I feel guilty now
The thoughts swirling through my head, not of him
He left every week and always returned
I was oblivious,
Sitting in a classroom, smiling like nothing was
troubling me
He was sitting in his car, **dead**.
He didn't know that,
I didn't know that
It's present now, the feeling of wrongness,
emptiness,
The feeling that wasn't present then
I had no idea, I was so clueless
I was only experiencing the best of everything.

No, No, No

11:00 a.m.

The bell rang, at the end of class
The principal came in, calmly,
You aren't in trouble. Let's go grab your stuff.
Mom's here to get you.
Maybe a surprise,
I was excited to leave
Confused I sat,
I didn't know why I would be leaving
I went along with her, to grab my things
My mother stood at the door,
But couldn't face me
Her friends there,
But why?
Then I saw her face, it wasn't the same face I had
seen that morning
It was of freshly wiped tears,

Red and terror filled
Not excited
Something wasn't right,
An instant change in my mood
The need to know
Is everything okay, I knew it wasn't
Her teardrops fell,
Mine were halted
The first storm
A blow to my stomach,
A have to know what hit it
I left the doors of my school for the next
three weeks
A thought in my mind of my brother,
Ben, is he hurt?
Words were slipping through her mouth, hard
to hear
The only loud words,
Dad was in a car accident
My mind went blank,
I was locked
The second storm
No, No, No
It had to be real, but not something I could believe
Time trapped days into minutes
I held my mother tighter
Devastation
The life I had, my life,
Seemed ruined in a sentence
A numbness came to cover my broken heart
My mind was battling between being vacant
and overflowing
My brother, not to be seen,
The crash, everything was on my mind
The future not yet thought of,
The present was still to be understood
The feeling of myself, I hated it
I was swimming in something awful,
Something new and strange
Shaking as I walked, and barely walking
It's not real,
Only a nightmare, I had hoped
Cradled on the bed as people could listen downstairs

Constant cries and hyperventilation,
Breaths barely taken as it started over at each
new word spoken
Information piled upon itself,
Questions upon questions
Talk of an unknown future,
It was without my favorite person, the
best person
I didn't want it, I didn't want to be sitting on
that bed
One conversation took hours,
Thoughts were never-ending
Cries so many, my face burned from the river
of tissues
Everything was something dreaded, everything was
so sad
Life without him,
Seemingly unachievable
Now the thoughts of him, how his life ended
No, No, No
My mother, with the strength that she was forced
to find,
We can do hard things together, a saying reinforced
from then on
An imposter in my life, one in myself
Blackouts, moments of that day I can't recall,
Almost crashing at any moment
What do you need, my mother asked
The real answer was my dad,
But the answer I gave was *a walk*
Grief was the walk, trailing behind our every step

Night of the People

Those who weren't there when it happened,
Trinkle in, like a steady stream
My mom, already trying to give me what I wanted,
which was my friends
I was allowed a distraction, even if only for seconds
Still unbelievable, my dad,
Gone only a few hours before
I tried to play a game, to be captured by the screen,
but it didn't work
I tried to express myself through paper and colors,
but it didn't work

Grief had a way of trapping me
I wanted my mom, I needed to talk to her,
But she was on the phone, she was always on
the phone
Give her ten minutes,
No, I needed her then
For a second, anger towards her,
Towards the person who had told me that,
Anger towards myself, a bad daughter,
too demanding
A breakdown, alone,
My mom was too busy
My best friend, finally.
A sob, an *Emma*,
She was crying for me
Outside, a car sped into the driveway,
My brother, Ben, was finally home
His normal, strong presence, was nonexistent,
Shrunken inside of him as he teared
The longest hug,
His shirt was spotted wet
I loved him there,
Why did I try to avoid him at times?
Maybe it was when we talked, we only talked about
the loss
Loss, I hated it
The quiet, too overpowering
More cried,
Emma, your dad was the best man ever
He was, and I heard of it all night
After my walk,
Home again, and changed again
Now every room was filled,
Strangers, family, friends
All wanting to talk to me, to say *I'm sorry*
The quiet, too hidden,
Sometimes I needed to breathe
The fresh air, free of noise,
I craved that stroll
It was calm in the chaos
A comment, that started with at least, at least
something worse didn't happen
It felt so unjust,

Were my hardships not enough?
A day when people seemed more important to me
Late snuck in as people piled out,
Those close to us stayed
My room, a safe haven
I wanted to change it **now**,
A need for it to be tidy
It was how I coped for days,
Kept a busy mind
The only thing I could control
Maybe I took it too far,
There were points when I wouldn't want to stop and
focus on reality
Everyone was gone after
Looking through his treasures, some I'd never
seen before,
It only mattered they were his
His chain, the locket I wouldn't take off
Yearbook pictures, valedictorian, thinking of him in
good ways,
I tried not to be captured in the loss, at least
not yet
Close to crashing, dreams started and soon ended
Trouble sleeping, a few hours,
It felt like I was in a nightmare anyways
A mind too full
The night was so long and loud,
Much to not remember
Emotions so heightened,
Sensitivity, ache
Many people, acted differently
I only wanted them to treat me like before,
For it to be before, not for me to be **the girl with
a dead dad**
Tragedy and stories shared with others,
A night filled with the change of loss
The worst day of my life.
My family, now glad I pushed it

Days Alone with My Thoughts

Waking up was a chore in itself
At sunrise, my home was full
Conversations with the head of the home and

pastors, not all was easily handled
I played a role in my own show,
A show of occasional laughter
A belief he found peace,
Looking over me whenever I need him
An attempt to carry on a legacy, honorable
and good,
I could never be him or do better
Diaries, I told everything to, as if I was writing
to him,
No response followed by wonders as to if I was
expecting one
Friends came by day by day
Talks of obituaries, speaking at his service
No, too much
Thoughts of his service,
Am I wrong to not speak, I'm just scared
Meltdowns on occasion,
Time spent on the floor
Sundays, of so much importance to him, I pushed it,
The messages spoke to me, they gave me comfort
Funeral to-dos,
Self-care, hair salons, shoe-shopping, all for the
wrong reasons
Plans of a first, a plane ride, support, not all did I
agree with
The first day of blooming flowers, the spring,
so pretty
While friends played at recess,
I chose the final resting place for him
Bodies underneath my feet, I felt unsettled,
A decision of unlike that day
The dead, easily sensible
Pain and, *I hope he would've liked it,*
With a simple, wooden casket
A choice to be made quickly, to see him for the last
time with no preparation
A body, **his** body
Cloth-wrapped, an unrecognizable face covered,
A hand gray and very much dead
I didn't want to touch it, **cold**,
Screamed and wept, I couldn't
That was not him, I could not let it be

My brother after a moment alone,
The worst of horror-stricken faces
More realness, came side by side with the need
to leave
A spotless house or I was overwhelmed
The smallest of things had poked my nerves
My mom was still “off limits” sometimes,
*She’s going through a lot and people help her, so
why do I feel like this?*
My emotions were taken out on the person closest
to me, her, my mom
Attempt to make it through, together
For weeks, whenever I sat in the passenger’s seat,
My imagination was in fear of crashing, what it
was like for him
Jealousy of full families, happy together,
That should still be me
Dad, I miss you, I need you

The Last Goodbye

His closed casket stood obvious at the front of
the chapel,
Pictures of him, of us, played on rewind behind it
Wanted to get away from everyone,
Are you okay?
No, I’m not
From the balcony, his picture was so visible,
Every time I thought it was him and every time I
was let down
In the four-hour event of visitors, I was present for
not even one
Not a funeral, they said, a celebration of life
A black dress, curled hair, no mascara
More from his past came this day
My brother couldn’t hold back the tears as he spoke,
It was hard but wonderful
I grasped his hand **tight** as he sat back down
Messages of him ended and led us out of
the sanctuary,
Following the wooden box and men wearing
gloves
Everyone was looking at me,
Time put in slow motion
My eyes, so glassy, I could barely make out the

black limousine

The day of the accident all over again
Silence took a seat in the car,
Driving towards his final resting place, what was
there to talk about?
Dreary and freezing, the rain drowned the already
wet faces
The casket was not hollow,
But heavy with a body
On the spot, what would my last words to him be?
I couldn’t think of anything that fit in time
I watched as he was lowered into the ground,
I still believed it was a dream
An awful moment,
Me, an awful daughter
That was until the realization that wasn’t my
last goodbye
A day awful and beautiful,
However not something to relive
A day reserved for him

Moving Forward

Eight months later, I still think of him
I’ve rarely visited his grave as it doesn’t give
me comfort
His voice and the image of him,
Has faded over time
Learning of independence,
Staying home by myself
We’ve gone through his things,
Kept what was important, and donated the rest
In some ways, it was only his things,
But I felt like I was losing pieces of him too
His advice is unreachable
I think of what he would’ve done
Unless it’s my family, no one talks about the grief,
it still looms,
Everyone seems to forget we’re still dealing
with things
Nights together on the couch, laughing,
Not like when he was here
Time has felt played with
Days still exist of struggles and stings, rage and

wanting him back

He always wanted me to be happy, I've been doing
my best, to live as he did

Love towards him, I miss him,

Everything of him, I've treasured

A new chapter has begun,

I'm going to be okay, but it feels so hard

The beauty of grief, it shows love

Hands held with people going through it together

It feels lonely sometimes,

But no one is going through it alone, I'm going
through it too

The pain will never go away,

The missing him and new challenges with the loss

I still touch and connect with the palms of
my father,

The fingertips of the eyes that see this

Months later, I've grieved anew,

Grieving the past, present, and the future

I know now that the darkness will never go away

For each of us, the darkness will always be there,

**We can face it, we can come out on the
other side**

We are still surviving

Living.

I hope I am holding your hand,

We are held by the hands of another. ■