

The Day My Life Changed Forever

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR

Madison Scott, Grade 8, St. Michael School, Canton, OH.
Kara Stuhlmiller, *Educator*; Kent State University at Stark,
Affiliate. Silver Medal, **Ohio State New York Life Award**

My dad. My father. The person who makes me laugh. One of my best friends.

It was February 17, 2019, my family and I had just returned from an amazing ski trip the night before. On February 16, 2019, my dad couldn't sleep. He was having heart problems all night. He almost went to the hospital, but he didn't. The pain eventually went away, and he went to bed. We honestly didn't think much of it because this had happened before. The next morning the whole family got up and went to my brother's basketball game just like every other Sunday in the winter.

After the game we were on the way home, and I was starving. I remembered that I packed a yummy chocolate Fudge Round that I was hoping would hold me over until we got home. Little did I know that was going to be the last food I was going to eat for the next few hours. As I nibbled my Fudge Round, my family and I were talking about our ski trip and how much fun we had and other places we could go. Then my dad stopped talking and the car swerved out of its lane. My mom took the wheel from the passenger seat and turned it straight into a ditch on the side of a highway.

She screamed, "John! John!"

She slapped his face and his sunglasses fell off. He was limp. He didn't wake up. My mom swooped him out of the car.

She yelled, "Call 911! Call 911!"

My older brother called 911 in a panic, and I took my little seven year old brother out of the car.

I reassured him, "Don't worry, buddy. Everything will be ok."

I was trying so hard to stay strong for him. My mom continued giving him CPR while tears ran down her face. She was trying to stay strong and not freak out so she quietly cried. Then our friends started to drive up because they were headed the same way home. They were in shock, but they helped right away. One of our family friends was certified in CPR and helped. They took turns giving him CPR while I paced back and forth saying Hail Marys and Our Fathers praying everything was going to be ok. Tears rapidly streamed down my face while prayers and emotions filled my head. I was sad, scared, nervous, and I was starting to get mad. Ten minutes had passed, and the ambulance still wasn't there. Then another 10 minutes passed, and they still weren't there. Finally after 30 minutes had passed, they finally showed up. Ambulances are supposed to get there fast. But this one didn't. I could feel the anger and worry building inside me.

I yelled while tears fell down my face, "What took you so long? You should've been here sooner! He's dying!"

By this time, I was hyperventilating because I was crying so hard. I felt so helpless. My friends took me to their car, but I didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay by my dad's side forever and ever. I never wanted to leave. My friend's dad, my brothers, and I said the rosary on the way home, but my mind was going crazy. I was just a ten year old little girl. I didn't know what I would do if my dad died.

When we got to our friend's house, one of my best friends was there, and she gave me such a big hug

I burst into tears. She didn't say anything; she just gave me a big, long hug because she knew I needed it. That family is like my family. They are always there for me and will always take care of me if I need it. We all went into their living room and said another rosary, but I couldn't think. Thoughts were racing through my head, *What's going to happen if he dies? There's no way he can die. Right? Right? Why is this my life? First, I lost my grandmother, who was one of my best friends, and now if my dad dies, I don't know how I could go through life.* My friend and I played games. Her mom was trying to get me to eat, but I couldn't. I was too anxious and my mind was spinning.

About an hour later my mom came to pick us up. She didn't stay, which was unusual for her, but I just thought she was scared and upset. On the drive home no one said anything. I told myself he's ok. Everything is going to be ok. It's ok. Right? There's no way he could've died. My brother looked at me and started crying, and I knew that he knew that he was gone. And that's it. That's the moment my life changed forever.

We got home and my mom took us all to the living room. Her voice cracked and tears filled her eyes. I knew she was trying to stay strong, but she couldn't because her high school sweetheart, the love of her life, her husband, and her best friend just died.

She sadly shared, "Your dad just joined the angels with your grandparents."

My heart shattered into thousands and millions of pieces. We all cried. My little brother didn't really understand what was happening. This was the saddest thing ever. He was just a little seven year old boy who's not going to grow up with a dad. We asked questions and we were all devastated. I couldn't believe my dad was gone.

The next few weeks were weird. People were in and out of the house. So many tears were shed those few weeks and hugs were given. Tears are still shed today and they will always be. It makes me sad to think that my kids aren't going to have a grandfather, I'm not going to be able to have my

father walk me down the aisle one day, and I'm not going to have a dad to embarrass me or be overprotective of me with boyfriends. But I know God has a plan for me, and he knows what's best.

Those next few weeks were hard for my family and me. One thing that I look back on is that I felt like if I cried in front of people I was weak and not strong. If I cried, everyone else would, so I tried to stay strong. I wish I didn't feel that way because now I know it's ok to cry and to not be ok sometimes. Every single day of my life I miss him and wish he were here with me. Here with me so I could color on his back with markers. Here with me so I could try to fit as many hair clips as I could in his hair. Here with me so I could feel his stubble chin on my check. But I know he is watching over me every single day and is by my side no matter what.

February 17, 2019. The day I lost my dad. My father. The person who made me laugh. That was the day I had to step up and become responsible. I couldn't throw tantrums. I couldn't be a helpless little girl anymore. I had to grow up. That day. At 10 years old. That scared little girl, that innocent child, grew up. ■