

## Eternal Sunshine

Losing a loved one is an unpredictable emotional journey that I have to take for the rest of my life. The sudden passing of my mother in a car accident has impacted my life in every known way. August 24, 2018, is the date that will subconsciously remain with me as a person. It never occurred to me that she could be gone one day, but when it happened, I was face-to-face with shock and the undeniable truth. Not only was my best friend taken from me, but also came complete annihilation that no one prepared me for. Hardships such as unpredictable emotions, having to fight in court for my mother's justice, losing my original home, and struggling to get to college arose continuously. The things that get me through each day include my acquired coping skills, my hunger for success, and my mother's legacy.

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” This is a scripture from the Bible that continues to have a reliable, comforting effect on me during my time of sorrow. The feelings I have are hard to explain without bringing up old trauma. My mom was always my provider, my best friend, and my whole world bundled up into one. She never slacked on her responsibilities: she made sure my sister and I had food on the table, new clothes every year for school, reliable cars, and a clean, stable home. My sister and I were provided for in every single way by our hard-working single mother. Not only did she provide me with physical security, but she helped me remain mentally anchored. She helped me overcome severe insecurities, supported me through my first heartbreak, and gave me all the advice in the world to help me educationally. Not only has this loss impacted me, but my remaining family is also traumatized by the loss of a good soul and a great mother. Everyone that was associated with my mother, knew that her two girls were her everything. It was always just the three of us for all of my life, and we formed an unbreakable bond.

The loss of my mom has impacted me in unbearable ways. I've never felt so alone and insecure about who I am as a person. Losing my mom made me lose half of who I am and half of my heart. When I got the news, I could physically feel my heart ripping in half. I felt a piece of my soul leave my body, and I knew it was because my mother had died and it was her leaving me. When I initially got the news in the hospital parking lot,

I instantly lost control of my legs and fell to the floor exclaiming, “ It’s not true, it’s not true” over and over for what seemed like months.

Not only did I lose my only provider but I also lost my stepfather whom I never thought would react the way he did. He has been in my life for the majority of it, to a point where I saw him as a father due to the absence of my blood-related father. But, after the death of our loved one, he changed for the worse. I found myself locked out of my own home, the house that held years of memories as well as deprived of all my mother's hard-earned possessions. I recall the last time I was able to step foot in my house, I was only able to get the pajamas my mom wore the night before the accident, one dress, and one pair of sandals she always wore. The only other things I have of hers would be what I received when I went to see the totaled car at the junkyard. As I was looking at the blood stains on the seat, deployed airbags, broken windows, I was able to get one hoop earring, one diamond stud, two CD's that she and I listened to together, and one tube of MAC lipstick she wore on her good days. Being in a war with someone that I had much love for causes me even more conflict. I wanted to be able to show people what an outstanding woman Lanika was by showing them her degrees, clothes, and even pictures that were hanging in the house. I felt as if I failed my mom by not being able to get her things from a man that didn't treat her right, and that had made her two girls' lives harder than they should be.

My mom and I had a very close bond; I could tell her everything even to a point where she could predict what I was going to say before it even came out of my mouth. One thing we talked about before was if she ever were to die what we were to do at her funeral. She knew I despised singing in front of anyone other than her and my sister, but she insisted that I sing “At Last” by Etta James. When the day actually came for her funeral service, I was very apprehensive. Not only worried about how I would sound, I was also trepidatious because my stepfather was there, and the simple fact that I had to sing at my mom's home-going. At the end of the song, the amount of pride I had was unexplainable. I felt like I made my mom more than proud one last time and it took everything in me to do what she requested, but I didn't let any trials and tribulations get in between our moment.

Two months later, my great-grandmother, Joaan Alexander passed. Not only did another one of my beloved family members pass, but the services were held at the same church, Loveland, as my mother's. Already dealing with past trauma, as soon as I walked through those church doors, I saw my stepfather. I remember having the most hatred for him to a point where it was taking the upright most energy out of me. At the burying site, I stood at the head of my mom's headstone, and I remembered her advice on forgiveness. I went up to him after not talking for months, knowing he stole my mothers 401K account in mine and my sisters name, stole her checking and savings account money, and locked us out of our own house, and I said, "I forgive you for any known and unknown wrongdoing you've done to me and I apologize for any wrongdoing I've ever done to you prior to my mom's passing and afterward." Even though he tried to make me have pity on him, I said what my mom would have wanted me to as a young mature adult, and I am proud of that. Months before I had felt like I failed my mom, but at the end of that conversation I knew I did right by my mother.

As the months go by I continue to distract myself with academics, as a coping skill, to get my mind off what happened. I take dual enrollment, which involves taking college classes while I am still in high school, not only to challenge myself but to take up a majority of my time also. I am always on the search to further my education. I am on the look for colleges where I can excel. I want to be a psychologist that either works with children that have trauma or with athletes. I want to be able to give back to my people and help them with problems that they didn't know could be helped. Not only do I want to give guidance to these individuals in need, but I want to help contribute to the lack of African-American female psychologists in California. Working with people that went through something similar to me, or even entirely different traumas, would give me great satisfaction. I am a prime example of not knowing what to do when something so tragic happens, but if I can learn about it and apply my learned skills, I can help those in need and give them guidance. By strictly focusing on my academics, I am trying to avoid depression at all costs, and I need to maintain a high grade point average to achieve the goals that I have set for myself, especially since college is coming up soon. I've been through depression before and that feeling of weakness, instability, and melancholy is something I pray I can avoid. Another activity I partake of to distract myself is mental therapy once a week. In therapy, I created a happy

place that I call Eternal Sunshine. I use this to represent a place that makes me feel one-hundred percent complete, and at peace with life. I got the idea from a song by Jhene Aiko before my mom died, and I remember it being the happiest time of my life. Whenever I think about Eternal Sunshine I see my mom in her prime, and I see myself at my happiest as well, and I can genuinely say that I will be fine and successful throughout my life. I believe in my perception of Eternal Sunshine to a point where I got a foot tattoo just to constantly remind myself that my concept of it is possible and will happen for me. I use the sun as a symbol for my mom to find that peace that I need to stay alive: the sun is always there even if it's hidden just like my mom, always here just not seen all the time.

Year after year my mom was my salvation and will continue to be.