

A father, A son

I have come to realize, at the age of 17, that life is indeed short and death is not only inevitable but unpredictable. People pass away everyday. People you never knew existed. People that were dear to you. People that were dear to no one. Death comes in all forms: painful, peaceful, slow, and abrupt. We never truly know how or when one is going to die until it is too late.

The morning of August 22 was the start of a typical day in what seemed to be a perfect life in my world. Little did I know that this day was going to take a turn for the worst. Obviously nothing is perfect, as there are flaws to everything but I had never experienced a loss as terrible as this. Before the next two days, I had only experienced the loss of a pet bird and dog which I still had a hard time getting over. Now my "Perfect" life wasn't always perfect, my little brother got tangled up in the wrong crowd at school which led to a vape and wax addiction. This put a lot of stress and tension between my parents and the whole atmosphere at home. Fights, yelling, arguments, and crying were what soon filled my beloved home, the home that used to be full of music, laughter, happiness, and peace. Because of the household negativity, I looked forward to going to school more than usual. I engaged myself in extracurriculars that involved after school activities. These activities helped me take a breather from this hard time in my life.

So let's talk about stress, stress can not only affect one mentally but also physically. My dad did not do well under stress. My father was a very worrisome and protective person. He loved and cared for his family more than anything and sacrificed so much to keep us afloat. He had recently got hired with a new company after being unemployed for a few months due to past job complications. This company saved us

from losing yet another house but they required hard work. With the hustle and stress of the new job and the drama of my brother's issues, my dad was a mess and so was the whole family.

On that Thursday afternoon of August 22, I had just got back from a vastly sweaty wrestling practice. I rushed into the house to shower and then get ready to meet my FFA officer team for Lunch and a session at the Escape Room. After my brisk shower, my hair was a sopping wet mess, my outfit didn't look the way I imagined it to, and of course I was late! I called my mom and ran to tell her that I needed to go. There I was stopped dead in my tracks. I came to see my brother and mom hovering over my dad's listless body on the floor with an uneasy lifeless gaze. The ambulance soon arrived and rushed him off to St. Mary's. There in the waiting room it was revealed to me that he had suffered an Aneurysm. This was most likely a bad result of his high blood pressure and stress. My dad was then flown to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, where they could further assess and examine all the damage. The car ride there was silent as all our minds buzzed of the uncertainty of my father's fate. Each one of us reeked of gloom and confusion.

As my dad lay peaceful and stagnant in his medical bed at ICU, his body was chaotically fighting for his life and working hard to stop the internal bleeding within his brain. It was hard to see the man that brought light to a room be so dull and lifeless. After a talk with the doctor the decision arose to pull my dad off of life support. Raymond Harold Leonard passed away August 23, 2019.

Upon coming home I felt smothered, smothered by family, smothered by people I didn't know cared, smothered by constant texts and messages, smothered by an

immense amount of food everyone brought over, and most of all smothered by the shock. Is this real? Am I going to wake up? He can't be gone. It was an exhausting day of holding in tears and mulling over the events that had just taken place hours ago. The days started and ended in breathless misery as my mom, brother, and I stowed away in our own shells of pain and sorrow.

He died a father, a grandfather, a husband, a friend, a brother, and a son. I never truly knew how many people loved my dad until he had passed. My mom was a strong woman and the death of my father impacted her immensely. She not only had to be strong for my brother and I but face many challenges ahead. As a widowed and unemployed mother she had to find a way to keep food on the table and pay the bills. She stopped her education plan in college so she could get a job to sustain our family. Before my dad passed, she was trying to catch up on her college credits so she could get into nursing school like she always wanted, however our complicated situation has made that goal of hers difficult to obtain.

Days somehow morphed into months, months that were full of persistence and dedication to School, FFA, and Wrestling. I not only wanted to be strong for my family but for my Dad. Soon the pain and sorrow turned into optimism and reassurance, I dedicated each day to my dad. Each wrestling match, each chapter meeting, and each big decision were in his honor. I knew my dad was looking out for me and I knew that we could be reunited one day. Ever since I was little, I told my dad that I wanted to grow up and be a Veterinarian. I even worked hard in school to keep my grade point average at a 4.0 which my dad was always so proud of. Now that he's gone it's even more important that I continue pursuing my goals, I know it's what he would have wanted. He

inspired me to try my best and that is what I am going to do. I know I will find a way, whether it is with help or not. I will not give up. And by doing so I hope to inspire many others to look at obstacles as opportunities to prove yourself and show the world what you got. "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." (Martin Luther King Jr.)