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The Tumultuous and Tentative Timeline of the Queer Kid in the Tiny Town

As a child, my favorite shows to watch were always the likes of crime scene investigation. These shows, such as Bones, CSI, NCIS and science in general, always intrigued me. I was interested in scientific analysis and the concept of studying evidence to connect the dots, solve the puzzle and crack the code to a crime. Then in school, because of this curiosity, I relished and passed my science courses with enthusiasm. Ever since those times, getting the degree and becoming one of these great scientists has always been a goal of mine. But of course, me being me, more than a few obstacles had to stand in my way.

Growing up, I always stuck out, even in my own family, and not always in a good way. As my brothers roughoused, rode motorcycles, worked on cars and got their hands dirty, I stayed inside with my books and homework. Being a closeted queer person in a poor, conservative family and town didn't help either. Facing bullying throughout all of elementary and middle school, and even prosecution from my own family. Bullied for the royal flush: my introvertive and bookworm nature, hand-me-down clothes because we couldn't afford new ones, and of

course my apparent lack of masculinity. This all seems trivial on its own until you see what it morphed into. Because of all of my aforementioned “unnatural” traits combined with my father’s alcohol and drug addiction, resulted in a life of both verbal and physical abuse for me and my mother by him. Getting hit by him was a common occurrence for both me and my mom from the age of 6 to 17. For more than ten years I developed bruises from him as well as watched him hit my mother, even after she became disabled and trying to heal from other accidents. This caused me to become even more reclusive and I honed in on schoolwork, doing anything to appease the abusive man in my house, and would consistently find myself being relieved whenever he left it to do god knows what.

My father came and went from the household repeatedly. No matter how many times we tried to shake him off, he would find a way to slide himself back into our lives and we would have to deal with another wave of torment. This was because he was the only solid stream of income into our lives. Fiscally, we needed him. He knew this and took advantage of it, our hands were forced and it all continued for an increasingly unbearable 5 more years.

Coming into my teens and navigating high school, it seemed it wasn’t as easy to bottle up all those emotions and put them to the side as it was in elementary school (I seemed like a master of the art then). Secret panic attacks and breakdowns, self-hatred spirals, dysphoria and flashbacks to even more traumas like being raped by my brother when I was 8 and watching my mother have a psychological break when I was 7. Everything seemed to be building up and bubbling to the surface. Then he died. My father died on January 7, 2020, two days before my 18th birthday, and he left us nothing but his medical debt. The best way I can describe the feeling

is.....strange, but it's so much more complicated than that. Obviously I am not happy over someone's death, but it's hard to be sad for him specifically, rather be sad that things couldn't be different. He was bitter to the very end, my mother was banned from visiting him in the hospital and the phrase "I'm sorry" never once passed his lips for the things he had done, he was always right. Despite everything though, all my feelings towards my father were able to be laid to rest with him. I don't need anything else, his chapter in my life is simply closed, and I strive to make it stay that way.

Arguably the worst part of death though is what happens after. People come out of the woodwork and flip their faces on a dime to be greedy, and people are playing tug-of-war with a dead man's possessions. It's a horrible experience, and I'm caught in the middle. All of this has told me that I should stop, give up, stop trying to achieve my dreams. But in spite of everything I sped ahead and rose to the top of my classes, achieving a 12th grade reading level at 5th grade, scoring top tier grades in standardized tests, and retaining an honor roll GPA consistently through the four years of my high school career, all the while aiming for the future. And now I'm here. Ready to be the first person in my family to attend college. I pushed through everything to be here, writing this, and it is an honor to do so.

I could have told my story far more eloquently, and I certainly could have, and maybe I should have. I just don't think that would have been accurate and speak true to my life. My life so far and no doubt going forward has been chaotic and hectic and turbulent, and I think this essay reflects that. This story was not to make anyone take pity on me, but rather display how far I have come and how much I've achieved and persevered. How I stood in front of everything that

told me I had no right aspiring to what I was and defied the odds. How I continued to reach for my dreams. A dream that you can help fulfill.