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*Dad & Lies*

September 25th. 1986. Twenty five years ago, today, my dad died. In our living room. To say this was a turning point in my life is cliché. But it also happens to be the truth.

I remember a night the previous February, where my mom and dad, sat me and my sister down on their bed. They were crying. Pam was only six. Me, nine. They had returned from the doctor's. My dad ended up going because he had a cold he couldn't get rid of. Turns out, it was cancer.

As we sat on the bed, my mom explained dad was sick. She wasn't doing a great job of relaying what was going on to us. I have never blamed her. She was distraught, we were young. I was upset because they were upset. I remember asking if dad was going to be ok. Mom said, "yes." She lied. I never have blamed her for that either. But I believed her.

As the months went by, all the evidence was there that things were not getting better. More and more visits to the doctor. Always a somber mood. Then there were the secrets. My mom asked us not to tell anyone. My father had his own business and didn't want to lose clients because of his health. But I was a kid. I told my best friend, Michael Treffeletti. It got back to my mom. She asked if I told anyone. I said, "No." I lied. I doubt she believed me.

He started something called chemo. I was told it would confuse him, make him tired, and he would lose weight, and his hair. This wasn't a lie. My mom would spend over an hour a night helping my dad go up one flight of stairs. Eventually there was a hospital bed in our family room.

I remember coming home from school one day. My mom took me in the family room. There was always a weight in that room. No one had to say or do anything, but walking in from the kitchen or the hallway, it was felt immediately. It wasn't something I could articulate at that time, but it was something I could feel.

"How was the game?" my dad asked me, as I sat on the chair next to him. I was confused. I was at school.

“What do you mean?” I asked. I glanced at my mom standing in the doorway to the kitchen.

“You went to Yankee Stadium today. How was it?” My mother started to tear up. I had been to the stadium with my dad before, watching Mattingly play, but that was a year ago. “Did they win?” Mom came in to intervene, and immediately my father realized he was confused. The frail, gaunt, shadow of my father started to cry. It was the first time I had seen him do that. I was scared. And sad.

As the months passed, my father withered away. Our family room was no longer a family room. Nurses came and went, and something called 'hospice' started to stop by.

One day at the end of September I was at my friend Rob's house. My mother came over. She went in the kitchen. Then she called me and Pam into the parent's room. We sat on the bed. My mom was crying. She told us dad died. I was 10 years old.

We went home. There was a ton of family there. I went into the basement and put blankets over the ping pong table. I dragged a little black and white television under it. I hid. My mom came down to check on me. I told her that I was ok. I didn't want anything. I lied.

My uncle came to talk to me. He told me I was the man of the house now. He lied too.

The next few days were a blur, but there are three things for sure I know happened. Or didn't happen. After the wake, everyone left except for my mom, sister and I. We stood in front of the casket. My mom hugged my dad. My sister hugged him too. When she asked me if I wanted to, I said, “no.” I thought I would see him again.

The next day was the funeral service. Mom asked if I wanted to go or not. I didn't.

At some point soon after he died, I forgot his voice.

These three things have haunted me.

After he passed I remember not understanding when people said, “I'm sorry.”

“You didn't kill him, why are you sorry?” was my standard reply. It wasn't until years later when I finally got a chance to console someone who had lost a loved one, did I understand the sentiment. It

translates to, "I'm sorry there is nothing I can do to stop the pain."

I got mad when people made cancer jokes. Real mad.

Right after his death my mom put me in therapy. Even at that age, I had an intuition of how to play the game. How to tell people what they wanted to hear to stay low profile. The therapist asked me a question that I would be asked repeatedly and came to haunt me. "Do you accept your dad's death?" To me that translated to, "Are you ok with the fact your dad died?" I found this fucking insulting.

I don't think these they are the sole reasons I became an addict, but it certainly fueled my implosion. There were two things pointed out to me in rehab that started the process of forgiveness. One, that I was judging the actions of a ten year old, through a nineteen year old's eyes. Second, that the ten years I had with my father, that relationship, was more than some people experience in a lifetime with a dad who doesn't die. Those things made sense to me. But to this day, they are three of the maybe five regrets I have in life.

Today, I am grateful for my life. I have been clean for a long time and believe I needed to go through everything I have to become the person I am today. I had to go through hell, walk through hell, to find freedom. If it wasn't for the horror, I wouldn't appreciate what I have today. No, I'm not ok with the fact my dad died in my living room, but I accept it.

That's not a lie.