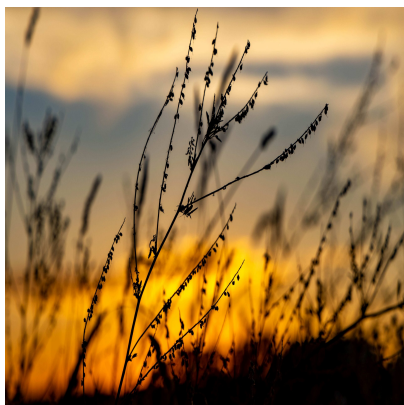




Saying Goodbye: A Father's Last Minute Parting Gift to His Son

Description

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Author's Memo

In the following vignette, I channel the moments I remember from the night before my mother died. She was going in and out of the different hospitals frequently towards the end of her life to where we knew all the different hospital staff, could tell you which hospital had the best vending machines, and which chapels had the prettiest architecture. I also channel my brother, whose name is Mike, as well as my Dad, my surviving family members, in this vignette. After my mom died, it was just the three of us for a little while and I remember always feeling like a third wheel. My mom and I were close just like my brother and father were close, so after she died, I sort of joined their father son bond. I remember feeling like they had trouble relating to me because they knew all about sports and I attended book fairs with my mother and I was an avid reader instead. They watched TV and I never did because I was always reading— when my mother died I started watching TV with them and tried to find common ground to relate to them.

'I channel the moments I remember from the night before my mother died.

My brother was a really good basketball player. One day to try and relate to them, I picked up a basketball too and then suddenly I had something in common with them. Basketball is a theme in this vignette to represent that memory of trying to relate to my brother and father, as well as the two main characters in my fictional vignette are my brother and my father. The goodbye the father tells his family is what I've always thought perhaps my mother's goodbye would have been like, had she had more

time to give us one. The pain of Mike possibly not having his father at his graduation or to hear some positive college news before his father left is how I have felt at every milestone my mother hasn't been able to be present for. The standing ovation Mike received at his graduation was an actual standing ovation I had from my high school graduation with the father's letter being something I wish I could have had from my mother as a coping peaceful parting message. Hearing his father say how proud he was of his son was a reminder that my mother never got the chance to tell me she was proud of me since I was only nine when she died.

The AutoEthnographer

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A man reading a letter [Victor Rodvang](#) for [Unsplash](#)

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Mike and his father were all ready for the big championship game. They've been working on fundamentals and Mike's shooting form for months as they've been preparing for the college scouts to watch Mike at Friday's game. They've done everything they possibly can to help prepare Mike for this moment, as this moment will determine whether he gets a full ride scholarship to the university he's been dreaming about attending since he was in 5th grade.

Mike's father was waiting outside the locker room so he could wish his son a final 'good luck' before the game started. As his team ran past them with excitement to start warming up, Mike and his father stayed behind.

"Thanks Dad. I really appreciate that. Thanks for helping me. " Mike responded as he pat his father on the shoulder.

"Mike," his father started. "You've worked so hard for so long not only in basketball, but academically, and just who you are as a person. I couldn't be prouder of you as your father. I know the last few months have been hard for all of us with me undergoing my cancer treatments and all, but you've handled everything so well. Today I just want you to go out there and focus on you and your future. Don't worry about me being sick, or your upcoming graduation, or those scouts in the stands today. I just want you to focus on playing the game that you love so much to play. Go out there and just have fun. You're going to do great. I'm proud of you son. "

"Thanks Dad. I really appreciate that. Thanks for helping me. " Mike responded as he pat his father on the shoulder.

The two smiled at each other as Mike ran off to join his teammates on the court.

Mike played the best game of his life and his gut was telling him the scouts were impressed. His mom, dad, and sister were all there at the game cheering him on, and all that time he and his dad spent practicing paid off. Mike scored the most points, had the most assists, and the most rebounds ever. He was named MVP of the championship game. As if he wasn't already on cloud nine, his team won the division championships. It was turning out to be the best day ever for Mike.

“A toast to Mike,” his father started, as his sister and mother raised their glasses. “To a great game and all of your hard work paying off. Those scouts looked impressed son. Regardless of their decision, you’re #1 in my book. Cheers.”

After the game, Mike and his family decided to celebrate by going to their favorite pizza joint. The family-owned restaurant recognized Mike’s family as they were regulars and sat them at their usual booth in the corner.

“A toast to Mike,” his father started, as his sister and mother raised their glasses. “To a great game and all of your hard work paying off. Those scouts looked impressed son. Regardless of their decision, you’re #1 in my book. Cheers.”

“Cheers,” Mike’s father, his sister, and his mother all said in unison. Mike couldn’t help but think this was the best day of his life.

The next morning, Mike got up and went downstairs to pour himself a bowl of cereal. It was Saturday, the day after his big championship game so he was planning on taking it easy today. When he came into the kitchen, he found a note on the refrigerator from his mother. It read:

“Mike. Last night your father wasn’t feeling very well so we called his doctor and his doctor recommended that we take him to the hospital to run some tests. We didn’t want to wake you or your sister, so when you wake up, please drive with your sister to the hospital. The doctor said he just wanted to run some routine tests. We love you. Drive safe.”

“Cheers,” Mike’s father, his sister, and his mother all said in unison. Mike couldn’t help but think this was the best day of his life.

Worried, Mike put the note on the counter and ran back upstairs to wake his sister up. The two got quickly dressed and headed for the hospital. They were both concerned because that was the third hospital visit their dad has had this past month.

Upon arriving, Mike and his sister went to their father’s room where they saw their mother sitting next to their father’s bedside holding his hand. Their father was hooked up to machines which made them both nervous. They could tell this hospital visit was different this time.

“Dad? Mom?” Mike asked.

His mom smiled at Mike and his sister and motioned for them both to come closer to their father. Mike could tell something was wrong.

"Is everything okay?" Mike asked.

"Sweetheart, they're here, " Mike's mom whispered ever so gently in their father's ear.

Mike's father in a weakening way slowly opened his eyes to turn towards his kids. He smiled at both of them and started, "Hi guys."

Mike and his sister half smiled and waved back, as they sensed something was not right.

"I'm so sorry to do this to you all, after everything I've already put you guys through, but it doesn't look like I'm going to be able to hang on much longer. They ran some tests on me last night and my numbers aren't looking too good. I'm so sorry guys, but I might have to say goodbye soon."

Upon arriving, Mike and his sister went to their father's room where they saw their mother sitting next to their father's bedside holding his hand. Their father was hooked up to machines which made them both nervous. They could tell this hospital visit was different this time.

"What are you talking about Dad? You've been doing great with the cancer treatments this whole time. The doctors even told us so." Mike nervously stated.

Mike's father smiled at Mike and motioned him and his sister to kneel down beside his bed.

His father continued, "I love the three of you more than anything. Being your father and your husband has made me the happiest man alive. I'm so proud of you and your sister and I know you both will go far in life. Mike, whether you get the full ride scholarship or not, keep chasing your dreams. The same goes for you Sarah, as I know it's your dream to play the violin professionally. Thank you for letting me be a part of your lives. "

Now sobbing, Mike questioned, "What about my graduation next week Dad? Are you not going to be there? What about the scouts? We don't even know their decision yet. I don't want you to miss all that. "

As a few tears started rolling down his father's face, Mike's dad smiled and continued, "I won't miss anything that ever happens in your life Mike. I'll always be with you. In your heart and in your memories."

'...it doesn't look like I'm going to be able to hang on much longer. They ran some tests on me last night and my numbers aren't looking too good. I'm so sorry guys, but I might have to say

goodbye soon.”

The four just sat there and cried while holding one another.

Mike's father passed away peacefully the next day in the afternoon.

The funeral was shortly followed by Mike's graduation, all within a week, something his mother had to really convince Mike that he should still go to, even though he lost all desire to want to walk at graduation. He just lost his father, and even finding out that he was indeed granted the full ride scholarship that he and his father worked so hard to achieve, didn't cheer him up.

As reluctant as he was to attend his graduation, Mike's mother successfully convinced him to go to it.

The football stadium was packed and everyone seemed happy and excited to be there— everyone except Mike that is. It was his rows' turn to get up to receive their diplomas on stage. Mike slowly walked up onto the stage not really caring about his diploma. His school principal read off his name like he did with his other classmates, but then told everyone he had an announcement to make, as he paused reading the other names.

“Great, ” Mike thought. “I already don't want to be here, and now they're going to make me stay on the stage longer than I have to for a random announcement.”

“I love the three of you more than anything. Being your father and your husband has made me the happiest man alive...”

His principal started, “I have a letter that Mike's late father who sadly recently passed away asked us to read on his behalf when he received his diploma.”

Mike's heart stopped. He looked at his principal in disbelief, then turned to find his mother and sister in the stands shaking their heads in reassurance to let him know that yes indeed his father wanted to do this for him. Mike swallowed hard, as he knew tears were coming.

His principal pat Mike on the back, as the crowd went silent, and started reading,

"My dearest son Mike. I'm so proud of you. Not only for your graduation, or for receiving your full ride scholarship to the university of your dreams, but I'm proud of the young man I've watched you grow into all of these years. I'm proud and honored to have had the privilege to be your father. I'm so sorry that I can't be here to help you celebrate, but remember what I told you. I'll always be in your heart and in your memories. Congratulations son. Celebrate the closing of one chapter of your life and get excited for the arrival of the next chapter in your life. I love you Mike. I always have and always will. Love, your father"

Mike and even his principal were both shedding tears. Mike could even hear people crying in the stands. At that moment, people started slowly standing up and clapping. It wasn't just one row, or one section—it was every single person who had a seat. They were standing and clapping for Mike. Mike was crying. He had never felt so touched in his life. He wished his dad was there in that moment, but remembering what he said, he felt his dad in his heart.

"I won't miss anything that ever happens in your life Mike. I'll always be with you. In your heart and in your memories."

His principal gave Mike a hug while everyone was still clapping for Mike. He turned to Mike and said, "I bet you're wondering how your dad knew about your full ride scholarship. Your basketball coach personally called the scouts to find out their decision after the game. After he heard the good news, your coach personally called your dad right away because he knew your dad was sick. You want to know what your dad's response was after the coach confirmed your scholarship? He told coach that in his heart he already knew his son nailed it with flying colors. Congratulations Mike. Your dad and everyone here is extremely proud of you. "

Mike just looked up at the stands in the stadium still feeling touched by everyone still clapping and cheering for him. In that moment, all those cheers and supporters reminded Mike of how his dad was always in the stands and on the sidelines at all of his games, practices, and awards ceremonies over the years. He suddenly understood and even felt a little peace that his dad would still always be there on the sidelines and in the stands of his life, just instead of physically being there for Mike, he would be there in his heart and memories from now on.

"My dearest son Mike. I'm so proud of you. Not only for your graduation, or for receiving your full ride scholarship to the university of your dreams, but I'm proud of the young man I've watched you grow into all of these years. I'm proud and honored to have had the privilege to be your father. I'm so sorry that I can't be here to help you celebrate, but remember what I told you. I'll always be in your heart and in your memories. Congratulations son. Celebrate the closing of one chapter of your life and get excited for the arrival of the next chapter in your life."

I love you Mike. I always have and always will. Love, your father”

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3. Volume 3, Issue 4 (2023)

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