Meet Death, My Closest Acquaintance

When people ask me about it, I tell them I don’t remember. I do this mostly to save their pity, but also to contain my feelings of guilt and pain. If I’m being perfectly honest, I do remember bits and pieces. A green car on fire. A first responder asking my name. And my four-year-old frustration over not being able to say it correctly. Bits and pieces are the only memories my mind allowed me to retain on the day that changed my family’s life forever.

I have tried to make sense of the ordeal, and comparing it to different forms of tragedy is the only way it has ever made sense to me. I think there are two definite types. For example, some tragedies are drawn out, such as a beloved family member dying of cancer. The period of time for grief goes on and on like a never-ending cycle because there is never a right time for someone to die. In such a case, there is time for hope, which, in a way, is cruel. Then, some tragedies are instant, like when a child goes to school that day and doesn’t come back because of a school shooting. The pain is instant, a hard jab to the gut, and makes everyday pain seem small. My first and most traumatic family tragedy was instant, something I don’t believe anyone saw coming. No one in my family could have predicted my father’s sugar would be low or that he fell asleep at the wheel for that reason. The only thing we did know was the way we felt and how terrible the pain was.

I don’t know why I survived with only minor injuries. I don’t know why I really can’t remember anything before the age of four. Sometimes, especially when I was younger, I wanted to know “Why me?” Was I saved simply because I was younger and had more to add to the world? Was I meant to go through this? Did Death decide to take my father for other unknown reasons? I am that student raising her hand every time, hungry to know the answer and be right. Except my questions will never have any answers. And that is what has haunted me ever since I’ve been old enough to want to question everything.

Since then, I’ve entered a stage of just wanting to know about my dad. Who was he? From time to time, my mother will tell me little traits I have that he also shared, such as our shared compassion, quirky jokes, and effective ability to mediate. I am like him in ways I don’t fully understand yet, which makes me feel immense frustration. I wish I could open
my mind up and let the thoughts of childhood flow in, whether the memories come fast like a race car or slow and steady like a stream in the spring. Anything would be better than nothing at all. I do believe, no matter what, that my dad would be proud of me regardless if I can remember him or not. He would admire my dedication to school, which he helped to inspire. I give school my all because I want to give everything to the world that I can and live life fully in memory of him. My dad is my inspiration even if he isn’t here.

As I grow and mature, I’ve noticed the way teenagers today are with their parents. Teens today, some whom I’ve observed, deflect everything their parents say, choosing to make their parents feel upset or embarrassed rather than making them proud and invested. Common phrases spoken of parents on social media are “They just don’t understand” or “I don’t deserve to be treated like a child.” I don’t think a lot of people realize what it’s like to have half of their parents taken away, especially at a young age when understanding the situation is at an all-time low. A lot of parents are taken for granted, I feel. Even though these people, whoever they may be, watched, cared, sweated, cried, and gave up everything they had for their child, people still find a way to dismiss this and focus on the worst actions their parents may have taken. I know frustration with parents is inevitable and no one is immune to it, but admiration and unbreakable family bonds should help to balance out the loathing and exasperation any teen feels.

Whenever I feel like I may break, a coping mechanism that I’ve used is to characterize Death as if it is a real, prominent symbol of humanity's darkest days. It can be blamed and judged; it is the one thing we humans have all had or will have happen to us. Death has not been any friend of mine; rather it acts like a relative I see yearly. An acquaintance of sorts would be a more correct term. Not only has Death taken away one of my parents, but also father’s father, two great-grandfathers, and recently my beloved dog, Daphne. Some would see this as coincidence, while I believe Death has chosen our family as one of the many that face too many funerals. I have cried too many times. I have dressed in all black too many times. It makes me weary and paranoid, always thinking the worst will come and that it will happen to me. I will try to recover, if not for myself, then at least for my living family and my former family members watching over.

Ultimately, it’s the little things that affect me the most. I will never hear my dad talk about sports with my brother or exclaim to him how the Buckeyes won the National Championship. I will not sleep with my dog in the warmth of my bed or nearly fall off the bed because of her habit of hogging the bed. I will not hear my grandpa laugh pitifully and rather obnoxiously over my grandma’s terribly unfunny jokes. My great-grandfathers will not call me to talk about my future. My dad will not be at my wedding or tell his grandchildren stories about their mother’s embarrassing childhood moments. They are gone, never to return. I have come to accept this, somehow, though I don’t know the way
to fully forgive Death, or whoever is to blame, for everything.

So many past dates will live on for me, but I choose to look ahead. I will not forget what I have lost or do the dishonor of forgetting where I came from and who I am. David, Jim, Paul, William, and Daphne deserve all the happiness and comfort that may come from wherever they are now. I really do hope they’re happy and okay. I really do. That way, Death does not, cannot, claim victory ever.