

*The Kid from Summer Street***Chapter 1**

All summer Dad had talked about joining me on one of my late night walks, however I'm not sure if either of us believed he'd be able to. But one day near the end of August he found himself trying to match my slowed pace along the battered sea wall of Plymouth Long Beach. He can't really walk like he used to, and he had to take the car most of the way, but I was just glad he was here. I think he was too. Though it was a little bittersweet, because between the seagull squawks and the crunch of the rocky, sandy mix between my very sandblasted sneakers, he started to talk about his dreams. Well, his old dreams I guess.

Cause he looked at me, with his replacement front teeth jutting out just the teeniest bit (hockey accident, it's a whole thing), UMass Dad cap still on tight, thick glasses glinting and begins his spiel:

"I always got excited about us going on runs and stuff together. I thought we'd take off from the house and then when we got to the end of the beach I'd stop and just let you keep going!"

Of course, he can't run anymore, maybe a brisk jog for a dozen feet but that'd be pushing it. So I didn't know if I should tell him how much I would have loved that too. I didn't get a chance because he kept going.

"When I was living on Summer Street me and my buddies would run all the way out to the end of Long Beach and dive straight into the water. That coooooool water hitting your face after hours in the sun, beautiful. None of this place was roped off back then, you could go anywhere you wanted, man."

He had started to slow down at this point. His walking pace, that is, he was just barely getting started when it came to talking. But I kept getting distracted because the sea breeze was absolutely decimating my own glasses with the sand our shoes were kicking up. And of course water was starting to leak out of the holes in the back of my string bag. We were so far out onto the beach the air itself tasted salty, but I'd been out here so many times this summer I was mostly used to it. Out here, there were no houses, no people, just a whole lot of sand and the ocean. Turn to your left and you could see Plymouth bay, but to the right, alllll blue, baby. We'd left behind Sandy's, the seaside restaurant right on the beach, but the smells of (somewhat) freshly fried seafood weren't gonna leave us anytime soon. Suddenly, my Dad's voice had pulled me back to reality as he was really getting into it now.

“And THEN Sparkplug's girlfriend started ramming the back of the car cause she was PISSED about something! He kept telling me to drive and get the hell out of there but I just got out of the car and told him that this shit was his problem. I walked allllll the way back home in the freezing cold Cole, there was snow everywhere! I was rubbing my hands together like there was no tomorrow! But Sparkplug had been getting on my nerves lately I had figured this was as good a time as any to get him back.”

I was no stranger to these tales of his youth, back when his “old parts” as he now calls them were not so old. He misses those days. When I was growing up he would always express jealousy over my ability to bounce all around without waking up with debilitating back pain the next day. These days, any “new part” of his is made of metal, and he has got a lot of those. Regardless, I get stories from all the decades, and over the years I have compiled a general

timeline of all the enthralling occurrences that help make up his lengthy life. Because back in the 50s and 60s, he was a wild kid, and in the decades beyond that he sure as hell still acted like one.

July 29, 1952.

Donald Peter Matinzi was born at Jordan Hospital in Plymouth, Massachusetts. That was a good day, for me especially, since it eventually resulted in my existence. Thanks for that one, Donny. Anyways, Dad looks a little different now compared to when he was born (71 years ago for all you mathematicians out there). A good bit taller I suppose, with thick, rounded spectacles that are probably older than me. He always wears blue jeans and his trademark red jacket, even inside the house because he is far more suited for the heat than cold. His face is framed by short black hair and a “UMass Dad” baseball cap that sits atop his head at all times. Seriously though, *at all times*, like, it is a problem at this point. I would know, because that little red hat floats in with him every time he enters my bedroom doorway, ready to regale me with legends of his past.

That is one thing Dad loves, *stories*. Real ones though, all about his illustrious past (and sometimes present). His wide array of stories could dazzle even the most jaded audience once he confidently asserts “Now this is a true story!” before delving into the fantastical tales of his past. Of course, I had heard many of such, but that hardly meant he was out of them. Once one began another would soon form, resulting in another appearance at my bedroom door from where he had disappeared just seconds before. He was far more than just a storyteller of course, no matter his skill at it. Thankfully, he was my dad. And I say thankfully because it was certainly a stroke of luck to have him as my father. Who else but Donald could boast all day about his early rises and then fall fast asleep next to me at 7:30 as soon as the Celtics game starts. But outside of his

questionable sleeping habits, he was a phenomenal father growing up. One who always sought to spend time with his boy, no matter how distressed, overworked, and exhausted he may have been. College has put a damper on that, but over the past few months we have tried to make up for lost time.

Dad grew up under the care of his parents Louis and Teddy Matinzi. Louis was a World War II veteran, a recipient of a Purple Heart who did not share my Dad's affinity for stories. He never spoke of the war, or what happened during it, just prayed to himself that his kids would never be in the positions he was forced into. Teddy was the mostly stay-at-home mom who raised him. She was 100% Portuguese and a believer in uh... firm discipline. Dad didn't fear his teachers or his principal, and was fine navigating his (numerous) run-ins with the police, but even he didn't mess with Teddy, nobody did. And when he wasn't getting an earful in very passionate Portuguese that he only kinda understood, he was off involving himself in all kinds of nonsense.

Dad grew up near downtown Plymouth in a small white house on Summer Street. He was right by everything he needed; bars, basketball courts, you name it. Downtown Plymouth is crazy, busy as hell and people hustling everywhere. Back then all the tourist traps with seventy dollar sweatshirts had not sprung up yet so it was just bars on bars on bars. In Dad's words: "It was the place to be mannnnnn." Music was always blasting, people were yelling, all of which is my nightmare and Dad's dream-world.

Basically, from what I could gather, it got pretty rowdy down there. Dad would tell me that when he was at a bar he would always stand near a window with a chair nearby. That way he could break the glass and get out of there if he needed to. He never explained why he didn't just

stand near the door so he could leave without causing structural damage. I assume he just liked making a grand exit.

Dad was telling me once how he was walking downtown past all the bars and then CRASHHH a guy came flying through the glass doors at the entrance to one of his go to spots. They shattered, but the guy didn't seem too concerned about that. He looked up groggily and just said "Oh hey Donny! Help me up man."

"Hey Luke, the fuck you doing?"

"Shut up shut up just help me out."

Dad helped him up then Luke ran straight back into the bar to get back to the absolute brawl that was going on. People were throwing haymakers, chairs were getting tossed around like baseballs, it was wild. So of course, Dad went around and headed in the back entrance, and found the owner Jake at the end of the bar who Dad was buddies with. Jake was a middle aged guy with a receding hairline and thick ass glasses. Jake was hanging out and talking with the employees, and they were all paying zero mind to the chaos unfurling 20 feet from them. Dad walked up to them, asked what was going on and just got back a few non-committal "Oh you know how it is."

Dad did in fact, not know how it is but he shrugged, ordered a beer, and sat back to watch things play out.

When he wasn't old enough to watch bar fights, one thing Dad had always had was *ball*. Basketball that is. Walking down the Summer Street sidewalk as a kid on a brutal summer day, Rawlings ball under your arm towards the courts knowing you would be playing all day with the other neighborhood kids, that was the *shit* for my Dad. He wasn't a tall kid, around that 5'7

range, so pick up games weren't easy. Hard to be taken seriously as that one small white kid on the court, but he managed. People used to just call him "white boy," but that would become a more affectionate term than it sounds once they realized he could actually hoop. Whenever he told me about those days he made *sure* I knew that he could touch rim, fondly recalling exclamations of "white boy can jump!" that would echo across the court. He played other sports too but he *loved* basketball. Even as he grew up he would get into tournaments with buddies, and from my point of view he organized some absolutely ridiculous teams. Get your notes out kids because to truly help you understand how unfair this was I've gotta give you a little history lesson. Right now, professional basketball in the states is played in the NBA, but back in the 60s and 70s the ABA was right there with it. Two leagues, effectively competing against each other. And while the ABA and NBA ended up merging in 1976, the ABA had some insane ball players throughout its 10 years. Now, I don't know how, but my Dad was friends with a guy that was playing in the ABA at the time. Dad was gearing up to play a summer tournament with some buddies, and since it was the offseason he figured he would give his friend Johnny a call. Johnny was in the ABA. Johnny was a tall dude. Johnny was really fucking good at basketball. Now, my Dad played for and was also the coach of this team. Think Bill Russell but a foot and a half shorter and with 11 less championships. Thankfully he didn't have to be Bill Russell to properly coach this team, because it was a pretty simple job. What he would do is get the guys in the huddle before games, look them each in the eyes, and tell them to pass the ball to Johnny. Yeah that was it. Johnny barely even tried to shoot either, he would just keep throwing passes all over the court to wide open players. If the team needed him to, obviously he would score, but that was kind of cruel to subject the other teams to that. Needless to say, they smoked everyone and won

the tournament. When you are working with someone who is so ridiculously good at something that you can't even understand it, good results just kinda happen on their own.

Back in the day Dad and Sparkplug would tinker around for hours in Sparkplug's barn, souping up whatever vehicle they could get their hands on. They built out a number of hot rods in their time, basically all of which my Dad wishes they had held onto. And of course, when you are working with something that can go *so* fast, you have gotta test it out a bit. And when you test it out, you might have to take a couple cars at once, just to... compare their speed. Yeah, he got busted for drag racing a lot. Most times, he was able to weasel his way out of any major discipline. But he brought upon quite the reputation with the local police, particularly one Officer James who would typically bust him and Sparkplug for drag-racing their new toys. A fine or night and jail was not what he feared though. A far, *far* worse punishment was something he had not thought to be on the table. Because after being caught *yet again* he received the usual spiel and ticket. But, the interaction culminated with Officer James offhandedly mentioning he would stop by the house later to inform his mother. A terrifying threat. Death was surely imminent. Protests arose and his heart sank further and further as his frantic citing of the Eighth Amendment, clamoring that this was cruel and unusual punishment, fell on deaf ears. Upon his return home nothing immediate occurred. However, right around dinner time a knock at the door came, and he soon heard the words: "Oh Officer, what a lovely surprise! Please come in. We were just about to get started with dinner." This was torturous of course, perhaps against his natural rights. Continuous pleasantries were exchanged, and dinner was served, he was unable to enjoy his meal for obvious reasons. Officer James only eyed him but continued to be quiet about their encounter. As his visit came to a close and they all went to the door, silence engrossed

them. Panic ensued as my dad was sure his time on this earth would soon end, but Officer James simply turned his head and said, “Have a nice night Donny,” with a smile, before leaving the house. Dad was drained. And, not long after that, Sparkplug bounced to Florida. Turns out when you illegally buy drugs and you don’t pay your dealer, they get pretty upset about it. Wild. Dad didn’t drag race after that, his buddy was gone and, well, the fear of God had been struck into him.

Back then, if it wasn’t the roar of engines destroying my Dad’s eardrums then it was the musical notes coming out of thirty different speakers at max volume. Dad was quite the music man as a kid, and still is. He hooked up all his instruments and speakers in the basement of his house, aka, “the man cave”. And that collection was always growing in size (as well as in price). In the evening he would head down there, throw on his headphones (speakers were reserved for when the parents were gone), crank the hell out of the volume dial on his record player, and listen to The Beatles or Stones for hours. Those sessions are undoubtedly why his favorite word these days seems to be “What??” But he was more than just a listener, he *loved* to play. He was playing bars with his various bands starting at 15, fingers gliding along the fretboard of his Fender Stratocaster or making their way across the keys of his massive B3 organ. Bringing that thing to his “gigs” was a nightmare but he just enjoyed it too much to stop. As the years went by his music playing days continued, except he was actually old enough to be in the places he was performing. While many bands came and went, he repeatedly asserted the prominence of “Basic Black,” which was by far his most popular one. Him and “the guys” had been generating a lot of buzz, getting articles written about them, “the whole nine yards.” “We were bad, Cole” he would say, with it being important to note that bad means good in this case.

One of his favorite nights was playing at Handlebar Harry's with his boys. They were booked to go until midnight (closing time), "but the place couldn't get enough of us!" he'd tell me. Fire safety regulations be damned because people were standing anywhere they could because the place was so packed. The building was shaking, and people were dancing on top of the bar and tables, screaming along to whatever their drunken minds thought the current song was. As midnight approached, the guys weren't sure what to do as things were not slowing down. Soon they spotted Harry (the owner). He was parading around the cash register amongst the ruckus, gleefully counting bill after bill and jamming them into his overflowing pants pocket. He looked over at them, smiled, and pranced back to his office. He had them keep going for 3 more hours. They were invited back there a lot.

Dad got a lot out of music, but way more than just good vibes and jam sessions. Because music is how Dad met Mom; Lee Matinzi. Mom grew up in the Berkshires, which is out here in Western Massachusetts. I suppose you'd describe her as a free spirit, always looking to get outside and do whatever makes her happy. Way back when Dad was playing a concert with whatever band he was in at the time (he was in so many bands give me a break), and spotted her in the audience. Who knows why she was in Plymouth at the time, but it was a good thing she was cause they got to talking after the concert, became friends, and after years of that they began dating each other. Mom's family *loved* Dad, her parents being Margery and Selwyn Atherton. But that might've been because he was at their house a few times a week fixing whatever miscellaneous thing had broken. They were both tennis players, had met and gotten married at 20 (much to their family's annoyance), and had been together ever since. Dad hit it off big time with Selwyn, who was an interesting character. Selwyn's nickname for as long as I can remember was

Grumpy. That is what I and all the grandkids called him and I feel like that one is self explanatory. Marge also thought he was great of course, especially since he was always coming over to help them fix stuff in the house that had broken (this still happens decades later). What I'm getting at is, when he eventually proposed to and married my Mom everybody was happy. Marriage was smooth sailing, and after many many years of preparing themselves to have a child, Mom and Dad, at ages 41 and 49, had me.

Chapter 2

December 6, 2001.

I was born. Dad stopped going out for gigs after that. He didn't stop playing music though. It is just that instead of playing it for screaming, drunk mobs of people he played it for me. Well, he played different kinds of music around me. He'd play on his acoustic guitar a song that he wrote just for me. All the words of it are lost on me now but I know they aren't for him. Sometimes when I'm home I'll hear him on the other side of the house softly singing it to himself while he strums along. He smiles while he plays it.

We would get up to all kinds of shenanigans together. Sometimes it'd involve my PlayMobile sets, of which I had a bunch. My favorites were an expandable medieval castle and a big shipwreck with buried treasure, each came with a bunch of mini action figures. I had a few characters that I really liked, and I gave them a grand assortment of names. There was Halfbeard and Blackbeard the pirates, Chicken Legs (no I will not explain), and Skully the LEGO skeleton. Dad and I would place them in all kinds of precarious scenarios as they tried to escape the evil castle or rescue the princess, which was usually Chicken Legs with pink slime placed on his head.

I tried to follow my Dad's path growing up, and dove right into sports. And I did initially share the same enjoyment, participating in baseball, basketball, soccer, and archery. Archery and soccer were absolutely terrible. My archery instructor must have thought he was prepping us for the Olympic trials because he took that *way* too seriously. Soccer just sucked, I don't know what to tell you. And I retired from baseball at the age of 5 to pursue other interests; "hanging up the

cleats” one might say. I played “organized” basketball, but that was very early on so I don’t know if organized is a word I would use to describe it.

However, we did have a hoop in our driveway that we (him) would set up at the end of every winter. We would head out early in the morning and play all the way up until the school bus came. At that point I would sprint up the driveway, my green, turtle themed backpack bouncing up and down as I made the quick ascent. And once we got our dog Blaze, he would do whatever was necessary to join us. This often constituted peeking out the window that looks over the hoop and staring at us with sorrowful brown eyes until we allowed him to come out. My dad’s coaching and pointers about shooting form would be interrupted by pure chaos. Once Blaze arrived, he would ferociously attack the ball, trying to bite into it and pick it up, however he mostly just managed to roll the ball around and steal it away from us much to his glee. It got to the point where we would bring out a second basketball that we would not use, just so we could give it to him as a distraction. My dad and I would roll it all the way up our driveway for him, and he would go barreling after it. Eventually he would conquer the beast, keeping it still in the grass while he lay next to it, far too self-absorbed to roll it back to us.

While this took place, Dad and I would be locked in an intense one on one game. We would play to varying scores, typically around 11 or so. I can still remember the first time I dared to challenge him.

Sweat collecting on my forehead, I eyed the basket. I moved forward, dribbling the ball out of his reach. He swiped his hands at the ball to no avail, as I made my way inside the three-point line. Back to the basket I backed him down, and then swiftly turned around, raised the ball above my eyes and faded from the basket, throwing it over his outstretched hands. It

hung above our heads for what felt like minutes, spinning its way through the air, towards the basket that towered over me.

Swish.

An overwhelming sense of victory filled my mind, witnessing such a difficult shot pay off with my dad not standing a chance against my skills. I was gaining ground, my comeback started then. I could taste imminent victory; I had never been closer.

Final score: 1-11.

Basketball wasn't my forte. But I liked tossing our tiny football back and forth for hours, going until it would get so dark we couldn't see the ball anymore. At that point Mom would come out and turn on the back porch light for us, and we would try to squeeze out any extra minutes we could. Dad would stand by the house and I would run all around the yard catching passes and going for unnecessary one handed snags. Over the years these throwing sessions would get a bit shorter, before they stopped altogether. Dad's arm just couldn't handle it anymore, but that was okay.

Holidays were another thing he loved when I was a kid. He certainly still does, but he would do a little extra back then to help me believe in the "magic" of it all. Magic. He loved talking about magic, how we all have magic that makes us extra special. I never fully understood what he meant, but I like to think of magic as that extra little piece that makes Dad, Dad. That

special part of him that would cause him to wake up early on Easter and hand draw rabbit footprints to place all around the house for me to find in the morning. The part that would hand write letters from Santa in gold, flowing letters that would be placed on top of my gifts when I woke up.

It did not even have to be a holiday. Sometimes he would just draw dinosaur footprints before I woke up and place them all around the house as part of some treasure hunt for me to engage in. I would parade through the halls with him as we looked for whatever lay at the end of the trail, usually a tiny new action figure or something.

He would volunteer at my elementary school too. Nathaniel Morton Elementary School. It was over a hundred years old, a fact of which the staff was quite proud. They would be sure to tell all visitors, but you could work it out by yourself just by looking at the place. It was where Dad used to go to school, but back then it served as the elementary and middle school for Plymouth. Whenever there was an open house and he was in the building we would all walk around and he would tell us about his various exploits. As far as I could tell, nothing had really changed about the place since he had graduated.

Regardless, Dad would volunteer in 1st and 2nd grade when I was a part of Mrs. Muñoz's class. He would usually get set up with a special table they had in the hallway outside the classroom. He would teach us how to spell things like the days of the week, and we got stuck on that one for a while. We all wanted to be the first one to spell Wednesday correctly from memory. It was the most impressive one due to how dumb it is. If memory serves correctly it was in fact me who got it first.

Dad would also be there on field day, where all of the classes got assigned to different teams and pitted against each other in furious battles. Grand displays of agility and strength such

as tug of war and balancing an egg would determine the victor. While I was trying to look inconspicuous and get out of some of the events that I did not want to do, Dad would be going around handing waters out to everybody because they held this thing in *June*. It was brutal. Dad being there though meant that he would drive me home instead of having to take the bus, which was glorious. Walking past the throngs of kids waiting for the school buses to join the high status “car line” of kids waiting to be picked up by their parents was an unparalleled high. It saved me like 3 minutes at most compared to taking the bus, but oh what incredible opportunities those extra 3 minutes provided to me. I could... well, I don’t know what I could do but it was still great!

Dad didn’t always have time to come in though. He worked at DCR, the Department of Conservation and Recreation when I was a kid. He got to work up in Myles Standish State Forest, with tall, gorgeous trees and park land that stretched on for forever. There were ponds, wildlife, angry tourists, the whole shabang. He liked it there. But when I was 8 Dad started a new job. He was still at DCR, but now he was the “park manager.” He oversaw, well, the parks up in the forest. The guy who had worked there beforehand had done it for decades, knew all the tricks and how to get it running smoothly. Didn’t bother to give Dad any tips though. So Dad traded out the angry tourists for angry employees. Mom would stay at home with me, and Dad would head out to Myles Standish State Forest to go lose his mind for the day with all the responsibilities he had. Despite its ambiguous name, DCR handled a lot of stuff. My Dad, in particular, handled a lot of stuff. I heard *quite* a bit about his experiences working for them. A young Cole Matinzi even tagged along on some occasions. On those days they would just throw Dad before they needed him, usually outside his normal responsibilities. I got to watch as a lady got *very* pissed

off at my Dad because they had traveled all the way from New York to stay at one of the forest campgrounds and there were none available. That was a good time (it wasn't, she was scary). That was hardly the most wild experience he'd had because of his job though. He had worked there for years and years prior to me being born, so he had seen and done some pretty crazy things.

Now, Thanksgiving is a wild time in Plymouth, Massachusetts for obvious reasons. First site of the pilgrim settlement, the Mayflower, you know what I'm talking about. On one particular Thanksgiving my Dad, alongside other members of DCR, were down at the waterfront near Plymouth Rock. With all of the tourists milling through the area, it was necessary to have some kind of authority there to dissuade anything too crazy. It didn't always help but usually it was enough. *Usually*. Dad dealt with some commotion every few years, but one year in particular it got real rowdy, and I got to hear about it years after the fact.

"I was there at the Rock with a bunch of people, but right next to me was this huge dude who towered over me and everyone else. Nice, soft spoken guy but looking at him he was scary as hell. Now things get a little rowdy around the rock on Thanksgiving but man this was an interesting day. I started to hear a bit of an uproar and when I looked to my right I saw dozens of Native American protestors storming across the streets. They were heading right for us! I was freaking out, this was *not* in my job description and I am *too small* to get thrown into this tidal wave of people, man. This whole time the big guy had been hanging out next to me, and after a second I felt his hand engulf my shoulder. I looked up at this guy and he says 'I think it is time for you to leave, Mr.Matinzi.' Very smart man he was. I would have thanked him but I was too

busy getting the hell out of there as soon as possible! I gave some extra thanks during dinner that night.”

I never found out what happened after Dad got told to leave, because he got the hell out of there pretty fast.

Back when I was 12 Dad got another promotion at DCR, becoming the regional manager. In short, being the regional manager meant that he would oversee much of Plymouth’s public land. It also meant that existence was pain. Because the previous person in the position had half a dozen assistants that they took with them. So Dad got no assistants. He was quite literally *the* regional manager, there was *nobody* else. It was okay though, because they gave him a free Blackberry phone. He was on call 24/7 and knew no peace, but he had a free Blackberry phone (it had tetris and I was very jealous of it).

Unfortunately, Dad’s free Blackberry phone had a habit of going off late at night, to which he would have to head over to the state forest for who knows what. I came along a couple times; I needed to be there to protect him from any evil night time monsters. The forest was scary at night, darkness and tall trees did not make for a good time. So, after confirming that Dad was not in (significant) danger on these late night trips to his office, I graciously chose to let him venture out on his own. This whole arrangement lasted for a little while, and I never could really tell but Dad was struggling. Too much work in too short of time with no time off is actually pretty bad for you.

But still, I wouldn’t have known that. Dad would come home every day, and right away it’d be time to “Sing and play and dance.” That was when he’d put his “ZZ Top Greatest Hits”

CD into our CD player and we'd dance together around the huge carpet in our living room. I would always try to follow the path of the faded flowers on the rug, circling around over and over and over. I'm sure he was exhausted, but I like to think that he looked forward to that time all day.

Eventually though, I think it all got to be too much. I was talking to Mom one day and asked her "Why is Dad always going away?"

She told him that, or at least I think so. Because not long afterwards Dad was sitting me down telling me that he was going to retire. I didn't really know what that meant but he seemed pretty pleased about it. Eventually he emphasized that there would be more time to sing and play and dance, which got me on board pretty fast.

They threw Dad a big retirement party, and the whole family went, including extended family, cousins, and a bunch of people I didn't know. It was out in a big field and I mostly camped out by the mini buffet because there were no other kids there. They had guys grilling food, Cape Cod chips laid out everywhere; the buffet was the place to be. The actual party was in the middle of nowhere though. We were surrounded by wheat fields and nothing. Essentially, I was trapped, and surrounded by adults. I got talked at by a bunch of Dad's employees and coworkers who would come up and pretend like they knew me when I had never met them before. I had just wanted to eat food and chill, was that really too much to ask? Eventually it was speech time, so a couple of Dad's coworkers gave speeches about him and how awesome he was, which was valid. He is very cool. Then they had Dad go up there and give a speech too. I never really understood that, like it is his retirement party, the last thing you should be doing is punishing the guy. But I digress. Dad managed to keep it together in a way I definitely wouldn't

have been able to and pulled off a nice speech, thanking more people than I could count. I had actually tried counting but the guys at the grill had come out with a new round of hot dogs so I got... distracted.

When it was all said and done though, Dad was happy. So we were all happy. We got to go home, hang out, and Dad did not have to head into work the next day. Or any of the days after that. It was weird. On that Saturday, I ended up getting out of bed before he did. Around 9 in the morning I could hear the hallway floorboards creaking as he moseyed on into the living room. His hair was astray, bed head was at maximum craziness, but he had a little smile on his face while he poured himself some coffee and stared at the clock on the coffee maker.

Even though he was retired, Dad didn't fully stop working. Because we live in an old farmhouse that's been in my Mom's family for a longggg time. It used to be the summer house for everyone, so it's got more beds than anyone could ever need. But, it is old. A bit too old. So something is always going wrong, something that Dad now was on a mission to fix. He had too much time on his hands so of course he had to fill all of that time by climbing all over the roof to fix the shingles, redoing the entire shed, and more unnecessary necessities. His main project was always the garden though. We had a big vegetable garden out in the yard where we'd grow corn, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, and other miscellaneous stuff. Dad was at constant war with the rabbits and especially the woodchucks who would snatch up the food and stare directly at the house while they ate through it all. He would put out traps all around the garden with some food to lure them in. Once one of them stepped in it'd close, Dad would rush out there, grab the trap, and throw it in the trunk of his car. Then he would drive up to [location not disclosed for legal purposes] and let the woodchuck go free. Despite this, he theorized that the woodchucks would

always find their way back to the yard. They never seemed to go away, and he swore that he could recognize a specific one that he had named “Chips.”

Grumpy, my grandfather, loved the garden too. He would rumble down the driveway in his big red truck, overshoot the edge of our driveway by about 5 feet, tear up the lawn, and then “supervise” as Dad would get to work. Supervising was an intense job that required a wine glass, the reclining lawn chair, and any dessert we had on hand. If he had been able to get his hands on one he would probably have grabbed a megaphone too so he could relay his “helpful tips” to Dad with ease.

As you can imagine, Grumpy wasn’t exactly a jubilant individual, but you could kinda tell if he was pleased. Mainly that was when a wine glass was in his hand, but on occasion I’d catch a glimpse of him out in our backyard before either Mom and Dad had noticed he was there. He would be sitting out in one of the lawn chairs, eyes closed, with the sunlight casting down onto his face, and just a hint of an upward curl at the end of his lips. He liked listening to the birds out there, all the different calls and conversations they were having. It was his own little world. Sometimes Dad would be out there with him too though, just resting together in the sun. Usually, once Dad was done for the day he would lumber over to where Grumpy was and sit down next to him. They would proceed to talk for at least an hour about various gardening techniques and strategies. Not once were they able to devise a way to keep out the rabbits, or those damn woodchucks.

Their biggest victory was (almost) getting the birds to stay the hell away from our blueberry bushes. We had four huge blueberry bushes right next to the garden, but at first you wouldn’t even know they grew anything. Once those berries started coming in the birds would pluck them all off. They didn’t even wait for them to get anywhere close to ripe and blue, they

didn't care. Purple, sour blueberries were still blueberries to them. I mean, I like them when they're sour too so I understand that.

But eventually, Dad and Grumpy wanted to put a stop to this. They bought a big net from Home Depot and put up a bunch of posts around the bushes. Then, they (my Dad), would climb up on a ladder and stretch the net across the various posts until the whole thing was covered. After a little while, we had blueberries again! They weren't being stolen by the birds anymore, but they still did their best to be as annoying as possible. What the birds would do is find a way to get inside of the net, and then get pissed off and start flapping around in there until we noticed. Then we would all have to go out and try to coax the bird out into the actual open air, which it of course refused to do. This would happen constantly, and the new blueberry desserts that we gained from having the net up seemed like less and less of a positive trade off each time we went out there for another rescue mission.

As the years went by, Dad got less enthusiastic about putting up the blueberry net. Grumpy was just as insistent as ever that it should be up there, but his biggest contribution to actually getting that done was explaining to my Dad in length how he is actually doing everything wrong while sitting in a chair in the shade about 20 feet away. Yeah, that tended to be the theme with Grumpy. But Dad dealt with him. I'm sure Dad gave him some shit when I was out of earshot to even the playing field, but still, I don't know how he did it. I mean, Grumpy was a character.

I would mainly see him on holidays as a kid when we would head over to my grandparents to have a big dinner with the whole family. When Grumpy wasn't saying something marginally concerning he was usually hanging out in his big chair positioned in the corner of the tv room. Nobody else sat in Grumpy's chair. But, once it was time to leave, I would dare to

approach. Usually, I would cautiously walk over, then, while he eyed me down I would lean down and give him a big hug while saying “Byeeeeee Grumpy.” I would get a few grumbles and a gentle pat on the back but he never actively protested against this ritual so I think he secretly enjoyed it.

Chapter 3

November 24, 2023

Dad got another surgery. This one was supposed to be good though. I mean they usually say that and the results vary, but maybe they'd be right this time. Dad can't walk very much anymore, and the doctors seemed to think it was because of a titanium bolt in his leg from one of his past surgeries. So after that had been inside him for 20 years or so they finally got rid of it on a random Friday morning. At 6:15 in the morning to be precise. I think Dad was more annoyed about getting up so early than having to deal with the surgery.

I was asleep when they left and asleep when they got back (listen, it was Thanksgiving break), but I walked out to Dad lowering himself into our rocking chair with his crutches and a big bandage on his leg. In the grand scheme of things, he said he was doing okay. Eventually he got himself into the main bedroom, and Blaze, our excitable goldendoodle, insisted on parking himself next to Dad on the bed to keep him company. The crutches stuck around for a day or so until he graduated to an old cane. Mom tried to get him to chill out and stop moving around so much but that didn't do much to stop him. She'd try to tell him to stop puttering around without somebody to help him and would mostly get some grumbles in response. He wasn't exactly big on the whole idea of bed rest. Overall though, the doctors seemed to be right, it was good this time.

I was sitting with Dad and he told me that he'd asked the doctors if he could *keep* the titanium bolt that they took out, but they told him they had to send it off to be sterilized. I mean personally I would never want to see that thing again in my life, but that's just me. Regardless,

he seemed pretty pleased with the whole thing. They had him on some painkillers but nothing too strong. He wasn't exactly comfortable but the worst part had been the first day and as the hours wore on things had started to improve.

Eventually, while he was telling me all this he finally started to get at what I think he had been wanting to tell me this whole time.

"You know, I think what got me through a lot of this was thinking about next summer. I was thinking that my leg would finally be okay, so I could start walking with you to the beach and stuff. Not as far as you usually go, but I'd come with you for a little bit! I thought about that a lot when we were driving home from the hospital, how maybe we would be able to finally do stuff together again. That'd be nice."

Hearing that made me happy. Cause I want that too, man. I want that like hell! Some of my happiest memories are sitting out there on that beach at night last summer, just staring. Staring at the twinkly lights across the bay that reflected on the waves, hearing *Between the Bars* coming through my phone speakers, and catching bits and pieces of the live music they have going downtown with nobodyyyyyy else around me. And it's not that I didn't want anyone around, it's just that being alone doesn't make me lonely. But I like it when the right people are around. And Dad is one of the right people.

I wrote about Dad a year ago. Wrote 17 pages about him for a class. I read parts of it, changed parts of it, and people liked it, which was good. I wrote about how I loved him in a way

I might not always say out loud. Cause I struggled to say that kinda shit to him, and I don't know why. Cause like, he deserves to know, ya know? He deserves to know how fucking good of a Dad he is but back then I couldn't just sit down and tell him so I sat down and wrote it. I wrote myself into corners, backtracking, redoing, editing. And eventually I found out you can't write 21 years of love, or at least I couldn't. But still, I took that paper home from college and kept it in my desk. It sat there for a while, nearly a year. I still wanted to give it to him, but didn't know if it was good enough. And also didn't know if I could handle showing him a portion of how I felt.

But on the night before last Father's Day I took it out. Because the fear of him *never* getting the chance to read it finally won out. I left it on Dad's spot at the dining room table and went to bed. I woke up and Dad had already read it. We didn't talk too much about it, but he gave me a big hug, and told me how it made him laugh, smile, and cry. It was nice to know that he had liked it, I couldn't really tell how much but still, it was nice. Mom wanted to read it, and so did a couple members of the family, and they did. But Mom told me that Dad was reluctant to let it go.

He told everyone to be careful with it because it is the object he loves most.

I don't think he understood that it was stored on my computer...but still, that was sweet.

Dad likes to bike all around, or well, he used to. He still hops on the old stationary bike every now and then, and he has started to ride around town when the weather is good. It is very apparent whenever he is getting ready to head out. He will first throw on his old black racing shirt which is this worn down stretchy fabric that still has one of his old race numbers taped on it from back in the day. Next the compression shorts come on, followed by his tinted prescription glasses, or as he calls them, his “shades.” From there it is time for him to pick out one of his many bikes that are specialized for all sorts of terrain but to me look the exact same. Then, he straps on his oversized red helmet that tangles his hair like you wouldn’t believe and he is *off*. He is not as fast as when he was in his prime, but that is probably for the best. I have heard numerous times about the speeds he would reach back then, or just how fast he was in general. He would go out riding with his racing buddies all the time back in the 70s, and some of those dudes were pros. They got paid to race, not Dad though. But still he would head out there on his fixed gear bicycle, which had no fucking breaks, and speed along with them.

“Oh Cole I was out there one day with my buddy Whitey and his friends and we were cruising. And let me tell you, I was *fast* man. I was up next to them and Whitey turns to me and is like ‘Watch this.’ Then he looks to his friends and is like, ‘Hey guys! Donny is riding a fixed bike and he’s still up here with us!’ They started losing it! ‘A fixed bike, a fixed bike!?’ they were saying. Those things can’t stop so once you are moving you are *moving* let me tell you. They thought I was crazy! Well I kinda was. But I was fine! I basically never crashed with that thing.”

Dad crashed sometimes, a little more than he would typically like to let on, but I still heard about them. A lot of the time I found out about these crashes when my Uncle Mark would

come over. Mark is Mom's brother, and he would ride all the time when he was younger. Dad and him bonded over their various bicycle-induced injuries while Mom and I would both sit there trying not to wince too much. Since they have mostly stopped riding they talk less about injuries from their biking adventures, and more about their new injuries from, well... existing I guess.

When Dad was first teaching me to ride a bike he always told me to not mess too much with the front wheel brake.

“So, if you're going too fast and you try to pop that brake, the tire will stop going forward, but the bike won't want to! So it'll lift itself off the ground and throw you right over the handlebars.”

“How do you know that's what happens?”

“Well bud I'm an experienced man. I was riding down a hill when I was a bit older than you and tapped the wrong brake. My hands were still on the handlebars but I went right over them and it didn't feel very good once my back hit the asphalt. You're smarter than me, so I know you won't do that, but I figured I'd tell ya just in case.”

Mom made me put on all sorts of pads when I first started riding. Probably would've made Dad do the same thing if she could. I would trot out onto the driveway with these red and blue knee pads, elbow pads, and my sparkly red helmet with flames on either side. I thought I looked cool as hell. Shit she probably would've made me wear shoulder pads too if she could've

got her hands on some. I also still had training wheels on at this time, it was essentially impossible to fall off but she wasn't messing around.

We had picked out the bike I was gonna use at Toys R Us the week before. I loved that place. We would walk in there and I would be zooming all around, first to the nerf guns, then to the LEGOs, then to the RC toys in the back left of the store that were all against the wall. We wouldn't buy any of them, they were just cool to look at. But that day we were on a mission for a bike and we found it. We got this yellow and black one, small enough for me but not too small. I could grow into it a little bit. We got it home and Dad and I were ready to get going. Mom outfitted me in my armor and eventually came out to watch. I think the anticipation was too much, like if you think a train wreck is about to happen you might as well just go and watch it unfold to be sure. So on that day, there I was, bubble wrapped from head to toe with the biggest smile on my face ready to go blasting around like Dad had always told me about. But when I got started I had no idea what I was doing. Getting on the bike, let alone actually riding, was hard enough.

I planted my right foot on the ground and tried to get my left leg over the top of the seat. Dad kept telling me to "swing the leg, swing the leg!"

Like dude, I don't know what that means. But eventually I got onto the seat and boy oh boy was that thing uncomfortable. The pedals also did not want to cooperate. I kept jabbing my feet into the little holsters and those straps would go every which way except onto my foot. By the time I got everything situated I was already sweating. But Dad held the bike steady the whole time. I had requested this specifically because I had been worried it'd tip over; and yes there were still training wheels. He waited patiently for me to get acclimated. Eventually I started pushing the pedals forward and he guided me along. My hands were shaking cause I was

gripping the handlebars way too hard, but I mostly kept them straight as I meandered across our driveway. Dad was amped.

“Buddy you’re doing it, you’re doing it see!?”

Looking back I really wasn’t doing shit I was just kinda moving my legs and hoping for the best. But the encouragement was sweet.

For being as experienced as he was you’d think Dad would have stopped getting himself into sketchy cycling situations but unfortunately that was not the case. I think most of the time he did it on purpose, just to see how much he could tempt fate before it got annoyed. Years ago he told me for the first time about the steepest road he had climbed. He was out riding one day in New Hampshire, going up and down mountains when he got to the base of his final climb for the day. He veered off to the side of the road, looked up and saw a straight shot from where he was standing to the top. The road didn’t fuck around, it didn’t curve or wind it just plowed straight through the trees and up near the peak. Drenched in sweat and with his body begging for mercy Dad had looked down at his muddy bike and immediately started pumping his legs because he was almost assuredly insane and thought the climb would be fun.

Unsurprisingly there were no other riders taking this route, there were strictly cars and a couple buses on the journey with him. A few of them took notice of his presence, spotting the crazy dude with foggy circular frame glasses and long black hair that was trying to escape from the confines of his helmet. Double, triple, quadruple takes ensued when they got closer and realized the bike he was on was not a motorcycle and he kept chugging along. But his favorite interaction was about to come.

You see they led field trips to the summit of this place, taking kids from the local schools all the way up to the top to check out the views. So there were some school buses amongst the crowd of cars that flanked Dad as he went up. In one of these buses one kid in particular took notice of him, and forced his window down. Dad could hear the bus driver immediately start yelling at him for not asking permission first but the kid clearly didn't give a fuck cause he just started waving at Dad while his mouth hung so far open it was practically scraping against the asphalt.

Soon, the other kids took notice and as kids do they ignored all authority and put their windows down so they could cheer Dad on. That damn bus must have had wind whipping all around it but they didn't care. They had something new and exciting that gave them a reason to get off those sunbaked brown bus seats. That road started roaring with the sound of kids screaming, cheering on "Glasses man! Glasses man! Glasses man!" as they so lovingly dubbed him.

Dad couldn't really look over long enough to give more than a wave because he was pretty spent already. He had to keep on pushing but his little peanut gallery kept him going long enough for his dumbass decisions to not catch up to him. Slowly, his bike started to flatten out, leaving behind the absurd incline. He hadn't even realized it because he had just been staring at the pavement the whole time, too scared to look up and see how much he had left to go, but Dad had gotten *all* the way up. The school bus full of kids was far down the road at this point, they had sped on past but Dad could make out their necks craning out the windows. A distant eruption of noise ensued once they saw him, which earned a hasty wave from Dad. He waited and waited for them to finally be out of sight before he wobbled over to the side of the road and collapsed in a heap of exhaustion.

Other times, Dad's shenanigans ended less triumphantly. Typically I found out about these from Mom before the ride over to the hospital to go visit him. I wasn't a big fan of these car rides. Mom trying to keep herself together, me getting stressed because I could tell she was trying to keep herself together; generally pretty low vibes.

During summer break following my freshman year of college I woke up like normal. I had slept in until 11:30 am, and figured I would get an early start on the day by getting out of bed right then instead of engaging in my typical hour of stalling my exit from my blankets. I got out into the living room to see Mom on the rocking chair, anxiously staring at her phone. She saw me and started speaking to me quietly.

"Dad got into another accident, a not very good one. I just got back from the hospital but I'm going to go up and visit him again. I just wanted to be here when you woke up. They're only allowing one visitor right now per person so they won't let us both in."

Dad had been out riding in a little charity event. Some woman in front of him braked too hard and collided with his front tire. Dad tried to grab at her bike's frame to keep her steady but ended up toppling over. The results weren't great.

One major concussion.

One fractured arm.

A dozen more knee problems.

One scared boy, thinking about how his Dad had almost crashed for the last time.

Mom left for the hospital.

I stayed at home.

I waited until she had left, then I let myself fall apart. I cried for two hours. I just felt like a scared kid, thinking about what might have happened if there wasn't a helmet between Dad's head and the pavement. That day was probably one of my worst days, and maybe it's a privilege to say that, one of my worst days being a day where I only *almost* lost someone. But I don't know man.

Dad dealt with a lot of problems from that accident, some lingered, for a while, but eventually he was okay-ish. Well, as okay as he's been these past 20 years or so. I kinda wasn't, but I didn't say anything about it. Didn't exactly want to remind him of the accident. But man I thought about it a lot. Just thought about loss and why it scared me in general I guess, entering my little existential arc or whatever.

Cause I mean, I'm afraid of a lot of shit. I don't fuck with spiders or heights. Especially not bees, I hate bees. Like, just let me vibe why are you stinging me when it kills you. This is literally a *net negative* for both of us.

Idiots.

One time last summer I was walking over to our lawn chair with a nice book and some water. It was beautiful out, I was thriving. I was thinking I was gonna go hang out, get some nice fresh air and *vibe* for a little while. But then this fucking bee stings me for no reason. It wasn't

even like I stepped on him cause it wasn't on my foot, it was on my elbow like what the fuck man?

Okay yeah, so, fears. Death is the big one I think. Not my own, mainly cause I just don't think about it. Creeps me out. But I think about it when it comes to other people, or pets, of course. But Dad dying is the thing that scares me the most. So every time he gets close I shut down. I try to be optimistic about everything, to the extent that it definitely annoys people. Like, I have gone through some *rough* patches to say the least but I'm always grabbing at something to hold on to, to still make me happy. I don't think I'll be able to do that when Dad dies. When he goes, a part of me is going with him, I think. He's given me a lot of love. I don't know what I'm gonna do when it stops. Just like that. I just hope that I will still be able to be happy again, eventually.

Cause I'm pretty happy now, way happier than I used to be. I'm a completely different person than I was two years ago, but in a good way. Like, the best way. I'm definitely better at handling shit. I've fought with my thoughts for so long that I've figured out how to beat them, and if I know I can't I wait until somebody else can help me with them. It makes life a lot easier. I've still got a ways to go, but I've come a long way too and I make sure I acknowledge that. But it's gotten to the point where I kinda forget how I was. I don't miss who I used to be, I'm just scared of falling back into those old ways and I think Dad dying would make that happen. Maybe the joy would fade again, I'd be back struggling to get out of bed every day. Sad, like I used to be. But, that's not something I want to find out for a long time.

But he died in my mind a lot. For sure. That scenario has rolled around in my head for years, it's never really gone away. And despite all that I've never found one where I'm kind of

okay after Dad finally stops fixing all the things in the house that don't need fixing. After he stops investing himself into "projects" that don't make sense. After he stops trying to get back into cycling for the millionth time. After he stops waddling over to my bedroom door at night to say "Love you buddy."

Maybe I'll turn to religion or something when it happens. Gaslight myself into thinking I'll be able to see him again. I think that would help, believing I could have another conversation with him. Believing I could tell him about how the Patriots still suck or how I love him; one of those two probably. Or I could tell him if I'm still in Plymouth, or if I've screwed off to Europe or something. But then I really think about it, think about how I am and how I operate. How I probably couldn't ever be a religious person. Cause like, odds are I wouldn't be allowed to swear or anything.

So fuck that.

Chapter 4

February 16, 2024

I took the bus to Puffer's Pond and walked around the trails there. When I'm anxious or overwhelmed I like to go for walks. It helps a lot. The pond was frozen so sunlight bounced off of it every which way. And when it wasn't going directly into my eyes it was beautiful. I don't remember what had been bothering me but it started to go away the longer I was out there. I think nature might just be where I'm supposed to be.

I crossed the bridge, the river below moving slowly as ice chunks crowded it. The trees were pretty to me, they were very tall sticks cause all the leaves were gone, but I feel like whenever I get happy things sparkle so everything looked pretty then. I was texting Mom and Dad pictures the whole time, which they always get excited about. They were telling me to be careful, like usual, but they were pleased I was off having fun.

I don't know how easy it is for Dad to talk about emotional stuff. His dad never did, so I think he was raised not to. He tries now, but I think it's still hard. So when he does say something I know he means it. He texted me something like that when I was out on the trails.

"I know you enjoy being with all your friends and that you like being out at UMass, but if ever you want to come home some weekend, even just for a day, all you have to do is let us know and we'd be glad to come get you. I know that's a given, but just wanted to let you know we love you and miss you! You are always in our hearts."

That shit *broke* me, man. Usually I can handle being away from home, waiting until break or parents weekend to see Mom and Dad but sometimes how much I miss them really comes out and that brought it right on. I'm glad I was the only one crazy enough to go walking out there while it was 20 degrees out, cause otherwise people would have been really confused seeing a guy decked out in layers getting teary eyed by himself in the woods. But I'll see my parents soon, in the meantime I'll just keep sending pictures.

Dad loves photography. He has got more cameras than I could count. Good ones too, I know cause of how bulky they are and how much he fiddles with the lenses. He knows all the fancy words, all the little rules that make a good picture. There's a bunch of pictures on those things, all from way back in the day. I know he took one of them to Woodstock. The actual Woodstock in '69, not the shitty one. He described that place as just pure insanity. Everywhere you looked just people, people, and more people. Sounds like hell to me but he loved it. Apparently everyone started pouring in after breaking through one of the fences on the outskirts of the place. Shockingly, that was how Dad got in but he still claims that he had bought a ticket already so it didn't matter. He posted up with his beach towel on one of the hills and took it all in, staying there until they finally started kicking people out. He had wanted to meet up with his buddies who had also gone, but after trying to find each other for about an hour they realized that locating a 5'9 white guy with John Lennon glasses amongst a mass of hundreds of thousands of people who all fit that profile would be impossible. He tried to get shots of the stage but all you

can really make out is a sea of heads and a very distant platform. But hey, the pictures spark the memories.

Mine bring me back to the beach, back to feeling like I'm at home. A lot of them look the same but they make me remember so I keep them.

Dad likes my pictures. The pictures I take on my iPhone SE that loses focus on anything that's over a couple hundred feet away. It's a pretty standard assortment of photos I send him. Beach. Beach. Beach. Waves. Beach. Beach. Oh fuck there's the moon. Beach. Beach. Beach. Blurry mess of lights cause getting that shit to focus at night is a problem. I'll keep that one to myself.

Maybe he just likes them cause I am the one taking them, or cause I only send pictures of things I find really pretty, and it can be hard to actually fuck up a picture of those things (and when I do I don't send those).

I've realized that I tend to have the same hobbies as Dad. Guitar, video games, photography, drawing. Well, I "play" guitar in the same way Dad "runs" these days; not very well. But I still kinda enjoy it. I don't really know what I'm doing, I couldn't name any of the chords but I fuck around on the fretboard and it makes sounds that are kind of recognizable sometimes.

Dad tried to teach me during COVID but I think it was difficult for him to understand what it's like *not* knowing everything about an instrument. Cause he's known all this stuff for over 50 years, so some of the basics slip through the cracks. Especially when he's trying to think of how to explain a bar chord and I'm just trying to figure out how to arrange my fingers into the ungodly position he has his in. So that didn't last too long. I just ended up looking at YouTube

tutorials for various songs. I would jump from video to video, watching about 5 minutes of each, or at least until they got to a part that I could not replicate. As it stands I almost know like 2 songs, and should definitely just start learning the actual basics but what fun is that.

Dad also plays video games. Well kind of. He likes watching me play games. His favorite is Rocket League: an annoying game where you play soccer with cars. I tried teaching him how to play it once and that did *not* go well. He couldn't hit the ball he would just kinda drive around in free play the whole time. He did a little better with Fortnite. I was in Amherst when Mom sent me pics of Dad with my old headset on, looking absolutely dialed the fuck in while swimming aimlessly in the water. He texted me later saying he had fallen into a river and couldn't figure out how to get out of it. He swam for 10 minutes and then died after getting 36th, which honestly isn't too bad. He was pretty psyched about it.

We used to play all kinds of games together. Particularly Mario Sports Mix on the Wii. That game was sick. You could play basketball, hockey, volleyball, and some other modes I can't remember. Dad picked Princess Peach every time, still don't know why, and I picked this little Cactus dude cause he was the fastest character in the game. We would just spam alley oops in the basketball mode on unsuspecting AI. It was great. But that game was so insanely unbalanced.

There was a specific court that was some gameshow, arcade type shit where the floor would light up and there were noises blaring and colors everywhere. Like, a casino with a child filter put over it or something. Randomly made shots could give you like 20 points so Dad and I would pull from deep when those bonuses were going. That court was specifically when you played against Bowser Jr, who was this tiny little dude who wouldn't fuck off. His voice was

annoying so we would beat his ass like 200-20 every time out of spite. Princess Peach, pulling up from miles out, right in Bowser Jr's face was a sight to behold. Straight cash each time.

I've gotta play that game again with him. Or at the very least beat his record on the 3 point shootout in Wii Sports Resort. He texted me about that the other day, asking if he still had the record on it. He knew damn well he still had the record on it. He fucking knew. 27 points out of 30. That's what he had. I don't even need to check to remember I've had that number etched in the back of my head for years. Dad and I used to play each other in that all the time. If I got to go first I would just restart the game if I started off badly or with a miss. If I did it too many times he would start to get annoyed. When he was player 1 I never let him restart, obviously. That would be absurd.

I *will* get that off him at some point.

And there's drawing too. Dad first went to college to be an art teacher, and he was for a little while. I think the students got on his nerves eventually so he moved away from it as a job, but he still enjoys art. He has helped me out with it for a while. I had a project in 4th grade where I had to draw a big picture of an influential figure. I had gotten assigned Martin Luther King Jr. and could not draw a person to save my life. So Dad created a "guide" for me, which just meant that he drew it all for me and then I colored it in. Everyone in class was very impressed and I gave no clues as to how the hell I had managed to turn something in like that.

Dad likes to draw little pictures on Mom's birthday cards and gives them to her. Sometimes I get those too. Last time it was a big picture of Blaze who was absolutely staring me down when I flipped to the backside of the card. And years ago I played this game called "Draw

Something” where you would get a word and you would have to draw it for another person to guess on the app. You could play with buddies or just random people. I played it with Dad and Mom for a while, I think for a few months, but I eventually stopped cause it got pretty repetitive. Except I think it scratched some kind of itch for Dad cause he never stopped.

The game kept track of how many drawings in a row you and whoever you were playing with had correctly guessed. Dad got like 3000 drawings in a row with this random guy called “Black4D.” I still remember the name cause he always talked about it. Not once did these guys use the chat feature to talk to each other they just vibed for years sending drawings back and forth. Honestly it was kinda funny. I don’t think they play anymore which is a shame, but basically Dad is definitely still an artist at heart.

I draw in a different sorta way.

My buddy Drew hates birthday gifts. Well, gifts that he knew the other person paid for. Cause then he gets all worked up about how he owes that person now. He’s fucking weird. I still got him gifts anyway cause I knew it would piss him off. But eventually I just started drawing him random ass things for his birthday. I would make some weird collage of all the stupid pictures or inside jokes we had cultivated over the past year, decide not to color it in because that is too much work, and then give it to him whenever the hell I remembered too. It’s a good system.

I also draw stuff for people I like. I hesitate to buy people flowers cause they’ll wilt eventually. I like to draw them instead. But now that I think about it, every girl I’ve drawn flowers for I don’t talk to anymore.

Maybe I should stop drawing flowers.

Chapter 5

I like to think of myself as Jessica Chastain.

Well, kind of. More so her character in *Interstellar*. Murph. Fucking love that movie. Planet is screwed cause of dust, Murph's dad gets roped into going through a wormhole with some strangers to save the human race, then they're betrayed by a dude literally named MAN?! Crazy shit. Oh and Timothee Chalamet is there for a second.

Anyways, Murph's dad must leave. He must. He has to, there's no other option! But she begs, she pleads for him to stay. What could she do without him?

Some messages come through from him, sure, but he's not there. He's not there next to her, holding her, squeezing her, telling her he'll be okay and that they'll be okay and that they'll see each other again.

There's a scene, midway through the movie. I've watched it dozens of times. Like, I'll finish it and then just start it again. Murph's dad gets back to the main spaceship, and due to a bunch of science-y bullshit that I don't wanna explain, decades have passed on Earth while he's stayed the same age. He's got a lot of messages. They span 23 years. Murph had sent one message.

In it she just cried. Wishing her Dad would come back. I would watch that scene, and cry, wishing I would never have to miss Dad. I never told anyone that. Not either of my parents. I didn't want them to see me sad. So I would take my phone and go into the bathroom. Get the shower going, watch my little 3 minute clip that had all the emotions I'm terrified of feeling one day, and then cry until the shower water got fucked and became ice cold.

That was my weird sorta way to cope, cope with the fear of Dad being gone. He would be in the next room over, of course, but God would I miss him when I was feeling that water cascade down onto me, tears mixing and going with it.

She does okay while he's gone. For some reason that never really stuck until now. But she manages. The pain is there, sure, but the pieces of her dad never truly left. Maybe I should pay more attention to that.

Murph's dad comes back eventually. Spoilers, sorry, but he does. She knew he would too. Cause he promised her he would.

Dad promised me he was never going anywhere too. One time, a few years ago. Okay, well, it was when I was 7 years old. And I was getting over a fear of magicians. I thought they just took people and made them missappear (my way to say disappear for some reason). I couldn't make it through a full act without getting scared so I never saw them actually bring anyone back. I thought magicians just went around snatching people up and putting them into their hats or something. I explained the horrors of this to Dad *in length* but he seemed a little skeptical. He asked preposterous questions such as "Why would they televise people making others missappear completely?" or "How could a person fit inside of a hat?"

Ridiculous.

But eventually, when these irrational doubts of his began to wane, he explained to me that "I'll never ever go anywhere buddy. I've got you for forever, I promise."

So in a way I still hold on to that. I'd like for it to be true. I really would. Like, maybe I'll see him again after he dies. Somehow. Probably not the heaven thing, cause I'm still not into the whole religion vibe. Maybe in my dreams, I don't know.

Cause that couldn't just be it, right? He can't just go away one day and then never come back. He has to come back, he's always come back. Every time I'm scared he's gone away forever he comes back. He starts to feel better, eventually. I mean something else ends up happening, eventually. But he handles it, right? He'll keep handling things for a long time. Yeah. He will for sure. Cause his parents lived to a combined average age of 80. So that means I have at least 8 more years left! And if I love him more I'll be able to get more than that. Yeah that would help. I just need to be better. Say more nice things or do more things with him or try to help him heal somehow I don't know how. All the little, and big injuries maybe they would stop. Or maybe I tell him he can't go.

I wish he talked to me about what hurts.

I wish I talked to him about how it hurts me. But I don't. I should, yeah, but I don't know how that conversation could ever go. Like what would I even say?

"Dad, I am in constant fear of your impending death and it is tearing me apart from the inside."

"Wait what."

Maybe I'll become a magician and stash Dad inside my magic hat and never let him go. I could set him up pretty good in there. Maybe some cable television and a tiny little chair. He could watch the Celtics that way.

I don't actually think Dad has 8 years.

I don't think he has very long at all. Which is a shame. Well, worse than a shame. A whole lot fucking worse. It's a reality that I don't want to face, and have refused to face ever since I started writing this paper. I knew it, deep down of course, but I kept it deep enough to where I could still forget it, at least sometimes. I miss the days where I never thought about it at all.

Cause yeah it'll kill me.

Him being gone might as well mean me being gone cause I won't be the same person after it happens. For the past 22 years it's felt like at all times, no matter where I was I could feel his embrace, him protecting me, him there for me, because I could always tell that's what he wanted. I could tell because of the way he talks, the way he looks at me, the way he texts me goodnight and I love you every single night when he's not there to say it in person.

What will I do when those arms slip away?

I'm scared. I'm so scared. And every day I get more scared.

I got so scared that I wrote this. This, as in, this paper. Because I didn't wanna write this as some sorta tribute to Dad. Well, I did, I wanted other people to know about him, cause he's the best, but there was more.

Chapter 6

Dear Dad,

In truth I always thought of this paper as my goodbye to you. Where I could talk to you in a way I still struggle to in person. Where I could say goodbye to you in a measured (well kinda), but emotional way. Because I know that when the time comes where I *actually* need to say it I could never say all the things I'd need to. It's still tough to say everything out loud, even though I desperately want to.

But I love you, man. And I've said that many times over but there's a difference between saying it and *really* saying it. You helped me so much, and I know you're going to keep helping me too. Trust me, I know that, I just want to get all this out before you can't help me and I can't talk to you.

If it's not already clear, I remember every single thing. All the nights you spent sleeping on the floor outside my bedroom, cause I was too scared to sleep by myself but still wanted to feel like a big kid. *All of the times you sat with me while I was stressed the hell out cause of school, trying to help me through whatever problems I had.* All of the times we stayed out in the backyard way too late, throwing the football around until we could barely see it against the dim glow of the porch light. *All of the times we bonded in the living room by being overly pessimistic while watching the Patriots.* And all of the times you tried your very best to take an interest in the things I cared about. Even when they were a little (or very) out of your wheelhouse.

I still remember you asking about the kinda music I liked, then seeing you over in the corner of the living room a few hours later, with your tangled, Apple earbuds in, blasting Post Malone and trying your damn best to get into it. *Since then I'd point out when he was dropping*

new music and I think you actually got kinda excited about it. That made me so happy, seeing all the little ways you cared.

And you know, because of that, I still worry sometimes that I wasn't good enough for you. Not that I believe you think that way, but just, all the things you did it felt like I didn't deserve them. Maybe because I struggled to show appreciation and stuff. Again, just another reason I wanted to write this. Cause I know you're like me. Always doubting yourself and getting anxious and shit. It's not very fun is it? Yeah, it sucks. Anyways, figured I'd take this time to try to get rid of that, or well, as much as anyone can. Because when I heard I would need to write a long ass thesis for graduation, I thought a decent amount about what to do. Eventually, I realized, I could either write a ton of sad poetry and make myself upset, or, OR, stay with me, write a whole lot about you, *still* probably get sad, *but* at the end of the day I'd still be writing about you, so I'd be happy in some form. And, I could use it to make you a little happier too, maybe.

Because I know your doubting thoughts might linger no matter what, but that's not gonna stop me from saying you did the best job raising me that anyone ever could. Nobody could've done it like you, man. No way. There was never anything bad. Never. Everything about you was and is good. And again, you're like me, so you're gonna doubt that that's true. But it is so let yourself enjoy knowing that. I want you reading this thing over and over until you can finally admit to yourself that you're everything anyone could ever want. Nothing is better than you.

I feel like every kid goes through that phase in their teens where they hate their parents or they're always mad at them or whatever. But not me. And that was annoying too, cause I still had all those emotions pent up, all the feelings that would lead to me being mad at the world and all the cliché teen stuff. But when it came to you that culminated in me just being annoyed at the fact that you were *too good* for me to ever hate. Couldn't live out the classic teenage arc of slamming my door cause I'd gotten all pissed at some random comment. The first world problem to end all fucking first world problems, trust me I know.

But, yes, this whole thing is a goodbye, in a very very roundabout way. Just, a goodbye where I write about all the crazy stories you've told me, so that when you read this you'll know I never forgot one. You always thought I did, cause some days you would get all excited while on one of your tangents and start to tell me one of the tales that I had already heard long ago.

And I let you. Every time.

So I figured, you wouldn't mind hearing those stories again, just with me talking about how I remember them. And I thought, along the way, I'd get to tell you a story for once. Sure, the story is about you, but I think there's a difference between you remembering all the things you've done with me, and me telling you, in writing, how I looked at you like you were a star every time I saw you.

And we'll get some more stories in too. Have some tales to pass down to my kids maybe, where I can tell them all about you, and the shenanigans we got up to. I still need to make more

of my own adventures with you. And I don't know how long we have to do that. I'm hoping it's a while, but, if it isn't, just promise me that we'll walk to the beach together this summer, just like you said. We can walk slowly, that's alright. And if that's all I get, I think I can probably be okay.

And if you can't make it, I'll carry you out there with me.

Love,

Cole