Dartmouth College

College: Dartmouth College

Question: Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.

December 30, 1982: My parents, my uncle, and I were flying home from visiting family during the Christmas holidays when I was one year old. We were in my father’s small plane and planned on landing at an airport near our home in Vermont. There was zero visibility but a light on the instrument panel indicated that we were approaching the airstrip. Everything went dark suddenly, and the plane started shaking as if it were being enveloped by a tornado. My father had miscalculated our altitude, and we had dropped below the tree line. We crashed into a thick forest. Both wings were ripped off by the large pine trees, the woods clawed at us until we smashed into a tree, killing my father.

Although the death of my father was almost impossible to come to terms with for my family, everyone who knew him felt he had lived each day to its fullest and that he would not have regretted a minute of his life. He tinkered with electronics in high school, building a robot in his free time. He took a year off from college to devote himself to campaigning for a politician in whom he believed strongly. He created a computer program, which was revolutionary at the time that could help analyze the demographics of voting districts. My father installed a wood stove and built a solar hot-water system on our house, so that we only had to pay $2.00 for fuel during the oil crisis. All of these accomplishments are what many people dream about and never have the drive or confidence to try. If my father had put these things off he never would have felt fulfilled.

At the same time, I have also grown up with a screaming hole in my life; a chasm that is so deep it forces me to take notice. It reinforces how easy it is for someone’s life to be so fulfilled one day and suddenly over the next.

By understanding the fragile nature of life, I realize how important it is to appreciate all that is around me while I have it. This is to my advantage because since I have grown up with this understanding, I have taken a positive, happy outlook. I can be fascinated by street sewers and where they lead to at the age of three, to the concepts that underlie calculus and advanced physics. When my peers ask me how I can be cheerful in the physics class at 8:00 in the morning or when it is 3:00 A.M. and I am not yet finished with my history term paper, I never know how to respond rationally. Should I tell them it is because my father died when I was one year old? I think they would not understand.

Although I cannot recall my father on a personal level, he has inspired me for the seventeen years of my life. I know I am on a mission to live my life to the fullest, to inspire others with my enthusiasm for all things bright and beautiful, and to appreciate every moment just as he had.