

I am who I am because of you. This is something that I made sure that I said to him as much as I could before his death. I wanted him to know without a shadow of a doubt that he molded me and he shaped me into the person I am today. And not by force or hovering over me, he did this by standing by me with his calm presence and accepting demeanor. He allowed me to make my own mistakes. He never questioned me or told me I was wrong, even when it was clear to both of us that I was. He was always there, a quiet calm in a sea of chaos that is this world.

He was there for the highest points of my life and the lowest points of my life. When all of my hard work and dedication to riding horses had culminated to me showing at US nationals and I won, he was there. He had flown across the country to watch me ride a horse in a circle for thirty minutes. He knows nothing about horses and could barely pick me out when I was in the show arena, but there he was, running through the dirt and hot summer heat to be the first to hug me and congratulate me on a dream come true.

A few years ago when I was in an accident that left me hospitalized here in Indiana, he was one of the first phone calls I made. He lived in Santa Fe at this time so I called him only to keep him updated and let him know that I would be okay. I was never expecting him to drive to the airport and book the next flight to me in the hospital making it in record time. He stayed in town with me providing support through my healing process and making his famous chicken soup. He showed up for me always with his peaceful composure letting me know he was there but never pushing.

When I was in college and home on fall break I invited friends over to my parents house while they were gone. It had been professionally cleaned and newly listed on the market for sale. My neighbors next door had overheard us getting too loud and let us know that my parents had been contacted. I braced myself for intense anger and instead was met with a text from my dad that simply read "hey, whatcha doing?" I remember reading that text in those moments where I knew that I had messed up and feeling a sense of gratitude that he never shoved it in my face or made me feel bad about it. He simply wanted me to make it right and move forward, and I did. These small moments helped me carry myself through life making my own mistakes, making it right, then moving forward.

After his diagnoses our world was drastically changed more than anyone anticipated it would. But truly how do you ever prepare for something like this? Our reality was rocked as we know it, especially his. Our safe and peaceful bubble had suddenly burst unleashing a whole new life upon us that we were not ready for. Then, one by one, friends and family rallied around him and subsequently us. People came to visit, wrote letters, sent cards and packages and told him what an impact he had made on their lives. He was in awe of everyone coming for him. He died knowing how much he was loved by each and every person here. Life is unfair and tragic and heartbreaking but in the moments where it can be the most tragic is where I believe you can also find the most beauty. And having friends and family coming to be with him and with us was beautiful and will forever remain a light in one of our darkest times.

Dad, you would have been the best grandpa. You taught me an immense amount about living while you were here with me on this earth. Because of you I will raise my children with a soft calm presence always letting them know that I am there but never pushing. Because of you, I squeeze every drop of happiness out of life that I possibly can. Because of you, I am a social worker who strives to help others find their joy. Because of you, I am who I am.