

First-Person Essay Sample

Picking Up the Pieces

The words, “she’s not gonna make it,” are seared into my brain. Everything I’d ever known to that point, shattered into a million pieces within a moment. Five simple words spoken in a hurried, choked voice. Delivered to me in a waiting room adorned with cheap, plastic flowers and cheesy hospital décor destroyed me. My step-dad stood helpless in a self-embrace clutching one arm in the other. At first, I didn’t think I heard him right, like I had on ear muffs, until my aunt’s sobbing came piercing through the muffled words and she touched me.

“Shelly, come here, sweetie.” Aunt Jo said. She wiped away tears running down her cheeks, but I recoiled from her.

“No! No....You can’t do this.” I replied. My tender voice held a firm, frightened tone.

“The doctors said she’s gone. It’s just the machine breathing for her.” He replied. Sounding as if he hadn’t slept a moment in those passing months. His face wore a look of exhaustion mixed with shock to hear himself say it all out loud.

“I’ll take care of her. Please...don’t do this. I can take care of her! Please!” I begged.

The finality of it all, her death, my death, surged the room as I put forth the final fight to keep my mother alive. Still, death won the battle—the decision to turn off the machines had already been made and had sealed both our fates. Twenty-four years later it still echoes deep from the dark corners in my mind. From places I learned to close off over the years.

I taught myself early how to keep distance from people, relationships, even myself, after the trauma of losing my mother at 14 years old. It has cost me tremendously in my ability to

form close, lasting relationships with anyone and in the wake of her death a monster of self-hatred woke that haunted my every step without her presence to guide, protect, and reassure me.

Today, I am a far reflection of that broken girl. Sometimes I often wonder if I would have this life at all had it not been for her untimely passing. Would I know determination if not for this well of immense pain to draw such a strong motivation to succeed and honor her? Would I know the power of perseverance, and have found my own strength, had I not endured that debilitating loss so long ago?

It is both a blessing and curse to bare; but, one that I have managed to find a purpose in. There have been many battles, some lost and some won, before I finally defeated those demons. At the end of it, I was able to find that lost, broken girl and pick her up in a loving self-embrace. I am a survivor. She is a survivor. Now, we are a force of love, encouragement, and motivation that seek to find others surviving the battles and help them defeat all that is holding them back from living their true purpose.

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