

This I Believe

I believe that everything happens for a reason. I believe in finding strength to smile through your tears. I believe in the friendships that bloom with tragedy. I believe in burning hatred. But most of all, I believe in finding it in your heart to forgive the person that hurt you the most.

"Papa, I'm home!" I don't hear the familiar response. I don't hear a response at all. No dishes in the sink. Front door locked. His bike is in the side yard. My home is empty. What a disappointment after three days without even a word from my best friend.

I check in his room, his bed is made perfectly. I go on the back porch. He must be doing more yard work. He isn't here but one of his favorite shirts is hanging on the **handrails** still wet from the rain a few days before. I pick it up and inhale. This has always been my favorite smell. Sweet and musky. My nose tingles, I can't wait until he comes home from wherever he is so that I can see that familiar grin and get squeezed to near death by a colossal bear hug. My search is over thanks to this smelly shirt. **Something to remind me that he isn't too far away.**

Maybe an hour passes before my grandma comes into the office to speak the words that will reverberate in the depths of my heart forever. "Sweetie," voice shaken and soft "I found your dad. He's slumped over in the back shed, ice cold!"

When these hopeless words finally unscramble themselves I don't quite know what to do, say or feel. I'm numb, I'm cold. I'm hot. I'm mad, scared, confused, and skeptical. It couldn't be him, he's young. It couldn't be him, he was doing so well. It would never be him. He loved me too much...

My chest is on fire from screams and uncontrollable sobbing. It isn't until sirens blare that my worst nightmare swallows reality.

When my dad died I lost faith. I no longer believed in people or the higher power my dad so looked up to. I gave up on everything that I was hoping would change thanks to his newfound outlook on life. I lost the person who meant the most to me in the blink of an eye and he was never coming back.

It took me eight long months to emerge from a coma-like depression, eight pain-staking months of tears and silence for me to realize what my dad had given me. He had given me the gift of **forgiveness. I believe in the importance of learning from adversity and using those lessons throughout**