

My Life Story

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I never understood what it meant to be depressed.

I was 7 years old when my father died. I felt this hate and anger all the time. I didn't understand why my attitude changed. I didn't want to talk to anyone, I wanted to be alone all the time, I wouldn't even talk in school sometimes to my mother. I sat in my room thinking about how my life could have been with my father.

When I was a baby, my father robbed us and left me on my own. The day he did it, my brother Quinn wanted to spend the night at his friend's house, so he asked my dad. My father told him yes, but Quinn thought something was odd. He came home anyway.

As Quinn walked up to the house, he found the door wide open and the house a mess. I was asleep on the couch. I was a baby, I was my father's baby. How can a father just do that to their child? My dad had took all of the money that we had in the house, all the cellphones and other electronics.

As I got older, I always wanted to see my father. I would bug my mom about going to visit him, but we didn't have a way. We ended up going to Chicago some months later, but I don't remember what for. When we got there, she took me to my dad's house. He lived in this complex that was nice for a man on his own. My dad was a handsome man and very smart.

As the day went on, I stayed with my father. He taught me how to make a paper airplane, he showed me one of his music videos and he took me to a carnival. Being around him was weird; I wouldn't call him dad. If I wanted to start talking to him, I would start off the conversation like: "Hey, can we do this..." "How long has it been since..."

My father died. The Chicago police contacted the Iowa police to deliver the news to me. I cried for hours. I fell off the couch and let it all out. I know I didn't know my father that well, but I still felt this pain in my heart that my life just changed.

I bought a silver Claddagh ring the day after I found out about my father. I needed some closure. I never took the ring off until one day I did and lost it. I cried once again. I felt like my father was gone all over again. I went to Silver Spider in downtown Iowa City to replace it. I couldn't find the same ring, but bought one that was a little different.

Over the years I showed my feelings less and less. I kept everything built up. I was an angry person for a while. I shut down so quick when people would question me too much and make me upset.

My uncle. Jason R. Dawson. Also known as Jason "Snipes" Dawson. My uncle is my world. He means everything to me. He's like my father in some ways. My uncle made sure I never had to

ask anyone for anything, I never had to go out with my friends and have them pay for me. He never liked to see anyone suffer. He helped people as much as he could.

I remember one time my uncle and I were on our way home and we seen this homeless man on the corner by the Riverside McDonalds. My uncle gave the man all the money in his pocket. He always did that—he never liked to see anyone beg if he knew that he had it. In the summer, my uncle held kickball games every Saturday in the courtyard of where we lived. All the kids would be so excited to play and win prizes. Some of the prizes were ice cream, \$5, toys, food, trips to the mall. He would take so many kids to the movies. He loved kids, he loved everyone.

The end of my freshman year was when everything started. People who watch and listen to the news may know about my uncle. My uncle made some bad decisions selling drugs. Now he is dealing with the consequences.

My uncle was taken away from me when my teenage years had just begun. The police came and destroyed the house. Everything was broken: all the cleaning supplies was dumped on the floor, all the food was smashed and spoiled. The house took like a week to clean but we still didn't have everything out. Some weeks later, the police came for my brother. I was really heartbroken. My brother was all I had left. My brother's girlfriend was pregnant and had to go the hospital. I remember my mom telling me she went into a diabetic coma.

At this time my mom felt like she had to give up, but she couldn't because she has a daughter. My mother's life turned upside down, but not in a good way. She became depressed some months before I did. Seeing my mother so down and unhappy made me feel some type of way. I hated everyone, I never talked in school. I stopped talking to my mom for a couple days, and I was always angry.

A couple weeks later, my mom decided we were going to move to Portland, Oregon, where we have some family. I begged my mom not to move. I didn't want to leave—I'd have to make new friends, and I didn't want to live with people I haven't seen since I was a baby. We ended up cancelling the move for many reasons. We stayed with my aunt [in IC?] for a while, which we'd done before, but my mom didn't want to stay too long.

Three months had passed, and we still didn't have anywhere to go. I told my friend about my situation and he told me he would ask his mom if we could come stay with them. I asked my mom how she would feel about living with one of my guy friends. I didn't think she would agree with it, but she did. Our parents talked everything out and we moved in. My mom and I slept on the floor downstairs. It wasn't much, but better than sleeping in our car like we'd been doing some nights.

My mom eventually went to the shelter and I stayed with my friends. My school schedule and work schedule didn't work with the shelter schedule. A few months had passed and I was still living with my friends. Over this time, my mother and I wasn't talking as much. My attitude started changing: I was becoming more independent and speaking up for myself. My mom thought I was getting brainwashed.

I wasn't getting brainwashed. I was just learning to speak up and not shut down. When my mother and I would argue, I would never get the chance to tell my side of the story. It was always, *Hold on, I'm not done talking, be quiet, don't talk to me like I'm one of your friends.*

I would get so mad at her, I'd go in my room to hide in my closet. Then this feeling started taking over my body. I was lazy, I didn't talk. I thought about killing myself but I knew I had things to live for, so I kept pushing.

Eventually my brother got out of jail and my mom told me to stay with him. I didn't have a problem with it—I just thought it'd be the same thing, arguing all the time. My mom and I got the basement, but after a while, I didn't want to sleep down there anymore. I always asked if I could stay the night out. One day, I went to my brother's house and took my stuff and left. I was moved back and forth between my three friends' houses, right next door to each other.

After about two years, my mom, still not on great terms, ended up getting a place. We started talking more and going out more. I started working at Hy-Vee, and I helped her pay some bills and buy the things we needed. We got closer as the time passed. Every time I got paid, I made sure we went out, just to have something to do and not be stuck in the house all the time. My mother is my best friend. I always wanted that mother-daughter relationship I'd seen my friends have with their moms. But I knew that my mother and I were different, that we couldn't be like everyone else.

It is now 2019 and all I want is to be happy. All these things made a really big impact on my life. I've grown in ways I can't explain. The things I went through make me want to become a social worker. I want to be able to help the kids and parents that need someone to listen. It's the little things that count to warm up someone's heart. Someone helped and changed my life and I need to change someone's myself. Living life is easy, it just depends on *how* you live your life.

I learned that everything happens for a reason. I believe my reason was so I can be strong and live up to my name Kasey, which means brave. There are times were you're going to struggle—you just have to keep on pushing if you want to make it out. You have to make sacrifices sometimes.

I wanted to make it, and now I have. I turn 18 on March 23. I graduate from high school on May 25. My adult years are beginning, and now I'm ready to live my life the right way. The next day is never promised.