

Finalist 2 Story

I can't remember the last time my mother truly smiled. Through the years, I'd catch an off-guard laugh, or a genuine smile radiate from her before she'd realize that her teeth were showing and try to cover it up. It always brought me so much joy to catch those moments as a kid... I loved her smile... and I remember feeling so much heartbreak when I realized she was trying to cover her teeth because she was embarrassed.

As my mother's daughter, I'm probably more biased than most that my mother is one of the most beautiful women I know. Outside of raising my brother and I, she has also helped to raise so many other children. When I was little, she worked in daycare and as I got a little older, she began working with special needs and autistic students as a Supportive Instruction Paraprofessional and is still in that role. Each one of those children were her world in much the same way that my brother and I were as her own kids. Growing up, my brother and I never wanted for anything. My parents lived on a small paycheck to paycheck income but, we never knew that as children. As a 32-year-old woman, looking through my photos I see so much of my mom in me and in all of those photos I'm smiling. I'm smiling because my parents put the future of their children over themselves time and time again. They chose us always. We had braces for beautiful smiles and new shoes for school while my mom suffered through tooth pain and my dad gorilla glued his work shoes back together. As a parent, you sacrifice for your children time and again without question or regret. As a child of parents like that, you would do anything in the world to give back to those two loving and selfless people that made you who you are.

On September 16th, 2020, my father was taken from this world in a tragic car accident caused by a reckless driver. He was my best friend... I heard his voice almost every day for my whole life and then he was gone. I never got the chance to say goodbye or to thank him for everything he'd ever done for me. I was left with a tiny urn, a song he wrote me and thousands of wonderful memories. In losing my dad, my mom lost her best friend and a part of herself forever. The heartbreak of witnessing that as her child is indescribable. It shatters you. After that day, it felt like the joy had just been syphoned out of the world... But my mom... even through the worst time of her life, I can still see that smile in her eyes.

From the moment I took my first breath, my parents did absolutely everything to give me the world and to make my life beautiful. My mom gave me life and raised me to be the woman I am. She gave me my smile. I want to be able to give her a smile that she can be proud of. I want to give her photos she can look back on and feel joy, not embarrassment because of her teeth. I want her to feel as beautiful every day of the rest of her life as she has always been to me.