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A true feeling of defeat can oftentimes feel like a lack of hope, an end, a loss. Initially, I found examples of defeat in the cross-country races I was beaten in or in the student government elections I lost in. While one may see these as adequate examples of defeat, I find that these experiences were all too temporary, too meaningless. Defeat has more weight to it. To be defeated feels more permanent and emotionally tied than simply losing a race or an election. So, when I reflected again on my life, I had to look at the more uncomfortable and difficult moments. June of 2020 was one of the hardest months of my life. While this month and year were increasingly challenging for everyone considering the circumstances of our world, the pandemic is not what defeated me this summer.

At the age of 50, my dad passed away from chronic liver failure. The word chronic is an important word to highlight. Chronic is defined as “persisting for a long time or constantly recurring”. For my dad, a lifetime battle with alcoholism was chronic. Since I can remember, my dad’s disease has been a battle I have been fighting. As a child, my father’s alcoholism amplified marital problems that eventually lead to a divorce. I remember feeling that although the alcoholism won that battle, it wasn’t going to win the war.

Time persisted on and my dad was just that, a dad. He supported and loved my sisters and me unconditionally and worked to maintain a relationship with us. However, alcoholism and I were still in a fight. When my dad was drunk, he was not the dad I knew he was. It wasn’t until I was a junior in high school that my dad admitted that he had a problem. He worked to fight the disease and turn his life around. I felt that we were finally going to win the war. However, it seems that we were too late.

Although my dad was able to make changes, his body was not able to recover. When my dad passed away this summer it was very sudden, unexpected. I never thought that we would be defeated by this disease, that alcoholism would win. Following my father’s death, I felt hopeless. My father and I had a difficult relationship at times, but he meant so much to me and was a support in my life that I didn’t think I could live without.

Since it has been less than 4 months since I lost my dad, I can’t say that I have completely recovered from the defeat. The truth is, life is hard. What matters is that we don’t let our identity become a reflection of how we have been defeated. I am not just a girl who lost her dad. My dad is not just a man who suffered from alcoholism. I am a strong woman who has overcome many challenges in life, a person who believes in faith and no longer takes things for granted. My dad was a great dad who loved his kids and always helped others despite needing help himself.

We can’t control everything that happens to us, and we aren’t going to win every time, but we can control how we react to situations in our lives. I am choosing to celebrate the time I had with my dad and the things he taught me. He taught me that we don’t have to be defined by our struggles and that the most important thing in this life is to simply love others.

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