

Dear Dad,

Today my son turns 16, and it's a really exciting time seeing him grow into a young man now. I can see so much of you in him which makes me happy because I get to see my dad again, living. Although today should be happy, it brings back all the memories of everything I went through when you passed because I too was 16 at the time.

It was horrible seeing your health deteriorate, being broken down from the strong dad that I always knew, to this man that was barely able to move and I know how much that killed you deep down inside. I was young, I thought I knew what death would be like. That the actual death would be the hardest bit and then it would get better. Well I was wrong. I couldn't have been more wrong.

It took me a while to register that you weren't coming back because the whole thing felt so surreal. We knew you were dying and initially I got some comfort in the fact that we got to say goodbye. But that was comfort soon turned to numbness and I didn't know how to deal with you not being around. I was outgoing, always running at 100 miles per hour, but I lost that drive when you left us and I became shy and I retreated into a shell where I felt safe, not pushing myself, not getting into any danger because I became scared of everything in this world. Mom was the same. She struggled. I could hear her crying most nights. Watching old home videos of us. Anything to see and hear your voice again. I'm not sure if it gave her any comfort or just made her miss you more. Either way, she was completely broken.

After a year though, that pain eased a little. Mom found some strength in her to get up and keep moving and that pushed me to do the things I wanted in my senior year. But in doing the things I wanted, there was something missing. I wanted to come home and tell you that I made the cheer team, or that I met a boy that was going to take me to prom, or that I passed my exams, and I was graduating. I wanted you to be there so I could see that proud look on your face. But you weren't there and that hurt me deeply. I felt so far away from you and you started becoming a memory rather than person which I hated and the pain of you dying turned into anger. This anger became a driver for me though. I studied hard. I travelled the world, and I threw myself into everything that I did, just to make sure that you would be proud of me.

It was heartbreaking seeing mom on her own when I came back to visit. She didn't smile like she used to. She just pottered away in the garden or baked for the Saturday markets. But she didn't look happy doing any of those things. They were just things to fill the time and space that seemed endless and empty.

There were times that I just needed you there when I was crying to just hold me and tell me it would be okay, even if it seemed like it wouldn't. But you weren't there for me when I needed you. And in those times I think that's where I struggled the most because my friends could go and see their dad. But I couldn't.

I eventually met a man called Michael and we got married. He had to ask for mom's blessing instead, but I know you would have really liked him and trusted him taking care of your daughter. Our wedding was beautiful. I had my dream wedding. The only thing not making it perfect was you not being there. I wanted you to see me all grown up in my dress. Walk me down the aisle. But you weren't and there's nothing I could do to fill that empty feeling that day. Not long after I got pregnant and we had a little boy that we named Noah, after his grandfather. It absolutely breaks me that you cannot meet him. That he will go his whole life not knowing the man that raised me. The man that taught me so many things that I want to teach him. The man he is named after.

Becoming a mom has given me so much insight into the world that you and mom lived. All the happy moments that you can't even put into words. Nothing compares to the feeling of him looking at me with the biggest smile, reaching out to hold me. And now I know how you felt on the other end of our hugs.

On the other end of my achievements. On the other end of everything that made me sad. On the other end of the relationship.

It took me many years, but I have come to terms with you being gone. It is part of my life. I wish I never had to experience and live through, but it is part of my journey and part of who I am. The one thing I do hold onto however, is the anger. I do everything possible in my power to make sure that I get home everyday to my son and husband. What makes me furious is you died of cancer which was caused by your job. You knew there were risks each day, and that there were things you could and should be doing to prevent this from happening, but you were too damn tough. And I know at the time you wanted to look tough in front of the men at work, but the toughest thing of all has been mom and I living, without you.

Knowing that you could have been here.

There is so much that you have missed, and there is so much I have missed of you.

When I look at my son on his 16th birthday, there is no way I could be leaving him now.

And I can't begin to imagine how that must have felt for you. I just wish you were here dad, I need you.

Love,

Rosie