

DEAR ME,

IF YOU'RE READING THIS, WELL THEN BY SOME MIRACLE, THESE WORDS HAVE REACHED YOU AT A TIME WHEN YOU NEED TO HEAR THEM, A TIME WHEN THERE'S STILL A CHANCE. AS I LOOK BACK AT MY LIFE NOW AT THE AGE OF 60, THERE AREN'T MANY THINGS I'D CHANGE. I'VE LIVED A HAPPY LIFE, FOUND HOBBIES, GONE ON VACATIONS, AND AFFORDED LUXURIES I COULD HAVE ONLY DREAMED OF WHEN I WAS A CHILD. BUT AS MUCH AS THESE THINGS MAKE ME HAPPY, THEY ARE JUST FILLERS COMPARED TO MY TRUE HAPPINESS, WHICH I HAVE FOUND IN BEING A HUSBAND AND A FATHER. MY WIFE AND CHILDREN ARE THE REASON I HAVE GOT UP EACH DAY AND HAVE PUSHED MYSELF SO I CAN PROVIDE FOR THEM AND GIVE THEM A BETTER LIFE THAN THE WORLD THAT I GREW UP AND LIVED IN. I WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR THEM, AND NOW I'M AT A TIME WHERE THE THINGS I'VE DONE EARLIER IN MY LIFE ARE TAKING THIS HAPPINESS AWAY FROM ME.

AFTER DECADES ON THE TOOLS MY HEALTH IS NOT WHAT IT ONCE WAS. AT FIRST IT WAS BARELY NOTICEABLE, I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST PART OF WORKING IN WELDING FINDING IT A LITTLE MORE DIFFICULT TO BREATHE. EVERYONE IN MY SHOP SHARED THE SAME EXPERIENCES AND NEVER COMPLAINED, SO NEITHER DID I. BUT AS I GOT OLDER IT WAS STARTING TO GET THE BETTER OF ME. MY CHILDREN WANTED TO PLAY, AND I FOUND IT HARDER AND HARDER TO KEEP UP WITH THEM. I EVEN STRUGGLED GOING FOR WALKS WITH MY WIFE! I THOUGHT THAT WOULD BE THE WORST OF IT, BUT IT WASN'T. I STARTED TO GET TREMORS IN MY HANDS, I WAS SLOWER WITH EVERYTHING, AND I BECAME IRRITABLE OVER THE SMALLEST THINGS AND WITH THAT THERE WERE THE MOOD SWINGS THAT TOOK ME TO PLACES SO LOW THAT I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I WAS CAPABLE OF FEELING. I HATED WHO I WAS BECOMING, RUINING THE THINGS IN MY LIFE THAT I TRULY LIVED FOR.

I GUESS I WAS A LITTLE NAÏVE WHEN IT CAME TO UNDERSTANDING JUST HOW RISKY MY WORK WAS. WHEN I STARTED OUT, HEALTH AND SAFETY WASN'T SOMETHING THAT WAS TAKEN ALL THAT SERIOUSLY. JUST SOMETHING THAT PAPER PUSHERS MADE UP TO MAKE IT LOOK LIKE THEY WERE DOING SOMETHING IMPORTANT. I WAS YOUNG AND TOUGH, I THOUGHT HOW COULD ANYTHING, ESPECIALLY SOMETHING I COULDN'T EVEN SEE, AFFECT ME? BUT I COULDN'T BE MORE WRONG. AS TIME PASSED, PEOPLE BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND WHY THEY WERE BECOMING SICK LATER ON IN THEIR LIVES AND THAT WAS DUE TO THE WORK WE WERE DOING IN THE SHOP.

BY THE TIME WE PROPERLY KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, IT WAS TOO LATE. THE DAMAGE HAD ALREADY BEEN DONE AND ANYTHING WE WERE DOING TO PREVENT IT WAS JUST PROLONGING THE INEVITABLE FROM HAPPENING. I'VE LOST GREAT FRIENDS WHO I'VE WORKED WITH OVER THE YEARS, AND MANY ARE NOW IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT I HAVE FOUND MYSELF IN.

AS I'VE GROWN OLDER I'VE REALISED THE MOST VALUABLE THING IN LIFE, IS LIFE ITSELF! NOT THE NICE CARS, THE HOUSE, THE "THINGS". IT'S SIMPLY JUST LIVING AND BEING WITH PEOPLE THAT REALLY MATTER. I'M ANGRY AT MYSELF THAT NOW I DON'T HAVE ANY SAY IN THIS, THAT MY HEALTH IS MY REALITY AND THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF THINGS THAT I WILL NOW MISS BECAUSE OF IT. I'VE WORKED MY WHOLE LIFE TO LIVE, BUT NOW IT FEELS LIKE I'VE JUST LIVED TO WORK, AND I DON'T GET TO ENJOY EVERYTHING THAT'S ON THE OTHERS END OF WORKING. THE UNCONDITIONAL DEVOTED TIME WITH MY FAMILY.

I LOOK BACK TO WHEN I WAS 18, TO YOU, WITH EVERYTHING I KNOW NOW. I WISH I COULD JUST STOP YOU, MAKE SURE YOU'RE DOING EVERYTHING BY THE BOOKS, MAKE SURE YOU'RE WEARING YOUR RESPIRATORY PROTECTION. BECAUSE WHEN YOU GET TO MY AGE YOU REALISE WHAT IT'S ALL FOR, SO YOU CAN ENJOY THE MOMENTS THAT REALLY COUNT.