

Sam Mitchell - Dementia Narrative Final

Growing up, my father was a really fun-loving guy. He would take me to amusement parks, play catch with me, and come to all my school presentations, even if none of my classmate's parents did. I guess that's just because he wanted to protect me, and be there for all my accomplishments. Just experience as much of my life as he could. When my mom died, I was only two years old, and with no other kids, it was just me and my dad. Losing my mom really took a toll on my dad. Despite me only being two, I've heard stories of my dad shutting himself in, paying attention only to me and work. Never going out, never talking to friends or family and refusing to let them visit. As the years passed, he loosened his grip on me, and slowly started to interact with others again. By the time I was 5 years old, he was back to his joyful self.

I'm 16 years old now. My dad started changing a bit around the time I was 10. He got a promotion at work, so we had to stop taking weekend trips to amusement parks and different places. He's gotten a bit more forgetful since then. Of course, getting a bit more forgetful is just a normal part of aging. For example, I found him sitting on the stairs next to a laundry basket the other day, and when I asked him if he was actually going to do the laundry, he replied, "Of course!" I roll my eyes, grinning at the silly guy my father is.

I got a knock at the door today. When I opened it, it revealed a man with a black suit and red tie on standing outside with a briefcase. He asked me if my father was home, and when I responded that he was out at the market, he simply handed me the briefcase and told me to give it to my father. I nodded slowly, mumbled a goodbye and closed the door. I glanced at the briefcase, which was unmarked. I set it down on my kitchen table, and snapped it open. What I found inside was a bundle of papers, all marked 'UNPAID' and 'OVERDUE'. With a quick glance at the tops of the papers, I realized that these were the bills for our house. Water, electricity, and more. *How could dad forget to pay the bills?* I thought to myself. Dad needs to get home soon so that we can discuss this.

After figuring out that my dad 'forgot' how to do the bills, I decided to take over and just use dad's account, figuring that was better than risking him forgetting to turn them in again. I hear the kitchen phone ringing while finishing up the electricity bill, I scoot my chair out and pad into the kitchen to pick up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hello, is this John?"

"Yes?"

"Your father has been in a car accident. He's in the hospital." At that moment, all my minor irritation at him from having to do the bills along with my homework, and having to do the laundry for him, all disappeared.

"What?!"

"Would you like us to send someone to pick you up?"

"Uhh... y-yes."

I couldn't think straight. I barely got out the words before I burst into tears and slammed the phone down, not caring that I hung up on a police officer. I sat down on the kitchen floor, crying my eyes out, thinking my dad was gonna die. There was a knock at the door about 10

minutes later, by which time the tears had been replaced with pure shock. I slowly got up and dragged my feet to the door, wiping my eyes one last time before opening it.

"John?"

Two police officers stood at my doorway, looking at me.

"Hi..."

I started out of the house, and one of the police officers patted my shoulder comfortably, at which I sniffled.

"Your father is stable. He's gonna be okay."

"R-really?"

"Yes."

The officer opened the back door of the car for me, and I got in, glancing around at the glass wall in between me and the two officers. They started the car and began driving. Before I knew it, the car stopped and the door was opened by one of the officers, named J. Wilson according to his nametag.

"Would you like one of us to walk you up to the room?"

"No... I'll be okay. Thanks though..."

I looked at Mr. Wilson with my still tear stained face.

"Of course. The room is 324. Take the elevator to the third floor. You'll be able to find it from there."

"Thank you."

I turned my back on the officer, slowly walking into the hospital and towards the elevator. I pressed the 'UP' button, and the doors immediately opened. I entered, searching for the third floor and pressing the appropriate button when I found it. Soft elevator music played, and I closed my eyes until the doors opened once more and I could leave. I glanced down the hallway both ways, seeing door after door. I searched for a sign that could direct me towards the room that held my injured father. I finally found the sign and went left. When I found the room, I took a deep breath, knocked on the door, and waited for it to be opened for me.

The door opened to a sympathetic looking doctor.

"Hi. Are you John?"

"That's me."

"Alright. Come on in."

I padded into the room, and the doctor closed the door behind me.

"Your father is completely stable," the doctor spoke as soon as the door was closed.

"He's just unconscious at the moment."

"O-okay..."

I looked over at the bed that my gaze had been avoiding. My father had an IV in his wrist, and a few scratches along his face. His head was tilted to its side into the pillow, obviously out cold.

"What happened?"

I looked over at the doctor.

"It was just a fender-bender. Nothing serious. But... Come over here for a moment."

He gestured away from my father with his hand, and I followed, confused.

"John... Have you noticed your father forgetting how to do basic things or when to do things lately?"

"Yeah, why?" I was beginning to get worried.

"Well... your father has dementia. Do you know what that is?"

"N-no... Is he gonna die?!" Shock filled my body again.

"No no no no no... dementia is the general term for the decline of mental ability. Your father didn't get in the accident today because of a mistake. He doesn't know how to drive anymore."

I didn't know what to say. How could dad not know how to *drive* anymore? How is that even possible?

"Do you need to sit down?"

When I didn't respond, he set a hand on my shoulder and led me over to the chair, which I sat in. The doctor backed off, allowing me to adjust to the situation.

"Is he gonna forget everything?"

I looked at the doctor, who was peering out the window on the other side of the room. When I spoke, he turned to me.

"Eventually, yes. You'll have to take care of him."

I didn't speak at all after that. After a few hours, one of the nurses offered me a room close to my father's that I could stay the night at. I accepted, and after taking one last look at my father, left his room for some well needed rest.

The next day, I asked the doctor more about my dad's 'condition'. He gave me a packet all about dementia and how to take care of people with it. I read through the packet in my room, and realized all the little things that I had been shrugging off about my dad were all in this packet. And not once had I tried to seek medical help.

My dad was let out of the hospital three days after the accident, and his license was revoked. Thankfully, I had my license, but that also meant I was gonna have to be the one to drive my dad places and get groceries. After we were dropped back off at my house, my dad sat down on the couch, staring blankly at the television. I sighed.

"Do you need me to turn on the TV?"

My father looked at me.

"Who are you? Get out of my house!"

I felt my eyes widen.

"What?! I'm your son!"

I stared at my father.

"I don't have any children! Get out!" Despite his voice, he made no attempts to get up, and he was still smiling.

"Are you okay?"

I didn't move.

"John? Oh yes of course. Please turn on the television."

When I didn't move, he spoke again.

"John?"

"Uhh... okay..."

I reached over and switched on the TV, still looking at my father. His eyes fixated on the TV, and he started ignoring me. I sighed and padded up to my room slowly, flopped down on my bed, hands over my face. *What am I gonna do? I can't stand this! He didn't even remember me!* I threw the cover over myself and closed my eyes, wishing it would all just go away.

I woke up this morning to my dad standing in my doorway. Apparently he was coming to wake me up. Seeing that he still cared, but that he was vulnerable even in his own house kinda softened me up. I realized that it's not his fault. That he can't control what's happening to him. That he doesn't even realize he has dementia. I crawled out of bed and gave my dad a bear hug, and he hugged back after about two seconds. My father took care of me for 16 years.

Now it's my turn.