My dad would always tell me I have the genes of two Type-A people who beat themselves up if they fail to meet personal or external expectations. He told me I had to learn how to not be so hard on myself. In my defense, high school seems to promote that kind of thinking. You have to worry about your future – where are you going to school? Are you doing the necessary things to get into a top school? What are your test scores? At least for the people who care, high school is a wake up call to get your ass in gear for your future. However, the values of the education system put unnecessary stress on the children that progress through it. My dad was right; I am self-motivated and highly ambitious, and I expect probably too much from myself. Still, my hard work paid off and I made it to the top musical theatre school in the country – CCM. Then, on July 21, my dad passed away unexpectedly.

My dad, Kent, was fifty-two years old. He exercised almost every day, and went on a thirty-mile bike ride every Sunday with my mom, Pam, and their friends. He died on a seemingly normal Sunday, after taking a nap from the last ride of his life. My sister and I were upstairs playing videogames, actually spending time together, and my mom found him outside after he helped bring in groceries. He collapsed from a heart attack and was face down, bleeding and unresponsive. Though the paramedics and us tried to save his life, by the time they got him to the ER, he was gone.

Going to college without my dad was something I never imagined I would do. Adjusting to a new life and essentially leaving a family who needed me was incredibly difficult. When thinking of that Sunday, my mind tends to wander to all of the things I wish I did. The first week in Cincinnati, the faculty told us to take it a day at a time. For me, what that meant was letting go. I can cherish all the memories I had with my dad, but I have to let go of what I wish happened, because that is not reality. Taking life a day at a time means being present in the current moment, and celebrating things like family, friends and hard work. Furthermore, I believe my hard work does not mean having to get it right, or doing things perfectly or better than anyone else. Realizing I am at school to learn makes not being so hard on myself much easier. If I tried to get it right every time or be perfect, I think I would not develop as an individual and would not enjoy my time here. By allowing room for mistakes and shortcomings, I can challenge myself with realistic goals and grow beyond any rigid expectation of me in my, or anybody else’s, mind.