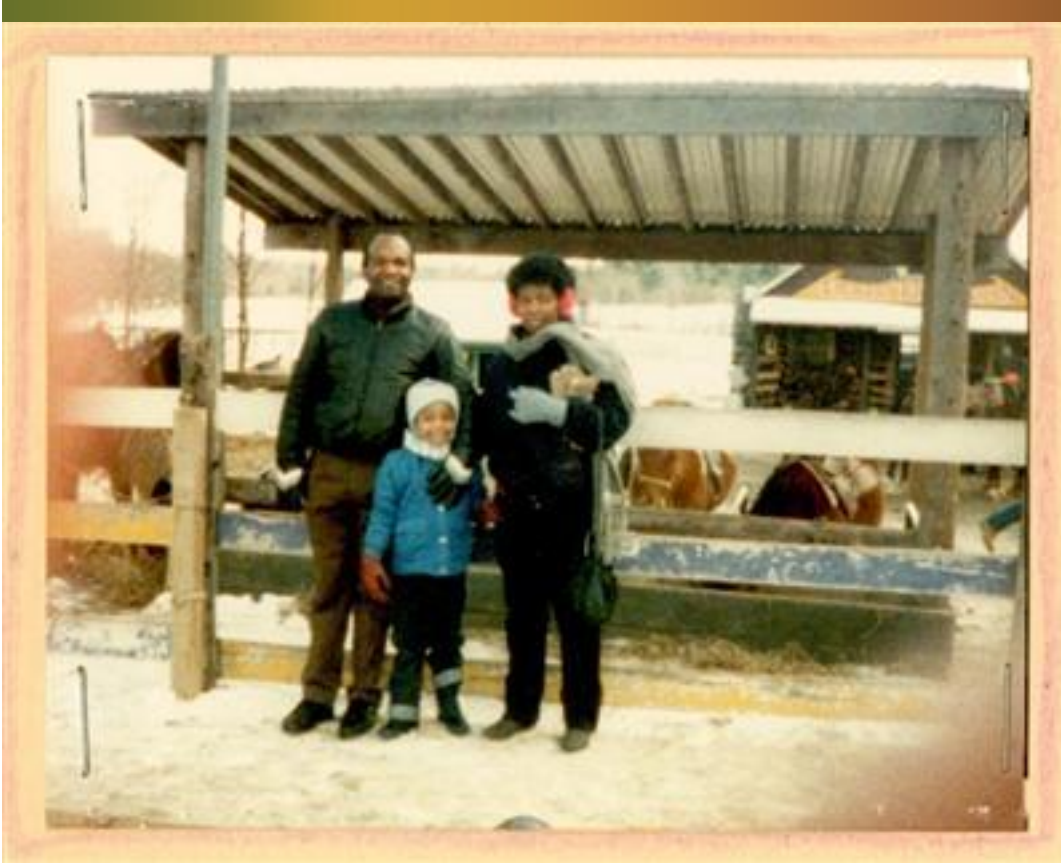


My Father, the Tragic Hero

How I beat my addiction to make my dad pay for his.

- By: [Felicia Pride](#) | Posted: June 11, 2008 at 12:00 AM



Me and my parents, circa 1984

I've boycotted Father's Day for longer than I can remember.

In content rebellion, I'd refuse to telephone my father and would avoid his call when he pined for my gratitude. I'd reject any urges to select and purchase hideous neckties or other unnecessary gifts. I'd dismiss images of sitting around a bountiful dinner table honoring the man who got my mother pregnant. And in spite that only I reveled in, I'd sometimes call my mother, the superwoman who took over when my dad indefinitely dropped out, and wish her a happy Father's Day. Not acknowledging the paternal day of celebration was my way of punishing my father for choosing his life over caring for my own. For several years, my resistance made me feel powerful while simultaneously draining me.

As a child, I was a daddy's girl who would lie in my father's arms and, even at that young age, understand what it meant to be loved. In my eyes, he was as close to Jesus as humanly possible. He was incapable of wrongdoing, even on those occasions when he let me down and left me searching for him in the audience of the violin recitals he missed. He was the big brother I never had, capable of making me giggle uncontrollably and happy to spend Saturday mornings with me watching wrestling and cartoons. It wasn't just me he impressed. "Your father is so cool," one of my classmates said after my fun-loving dad volunteered for our third-grade class field trip to a local quarry.

Truth is, my father is a professional bullshitter. He could sell heaters in hell. Between his college degree in psychology and his experience as a highly successful salesman who rose to the top of the ranks of a major oil corporation, my father knew how to say what you wanted to hear. It was this talent that allowed him to buy his family a big old house in a coveted neighborhood in northern New Jersey and for him to drive a Corvette that commanded the attention of my preschool friends who would rush to the window to watch the race car pull away after he dropped me off. Give my father five minutes, and he can have even the most reasonable people opening their pockets and unloading their money to purchase something they don't want or need. It's a dangerous talent.

For several years during my adolescence, I consumed his empty promises like candy. Toward the end of my elementary school days, his presence in my life and in our big house turned from a bright picture to static, until it completely faded away. I continued to try to tune back to the station of the happy family, but the façade was forever dismantled. His drug addiction finally took the starring role in his life. Loved ones were pushed off stage and left to watch him lose everything: His high-paying job. His house. His wife. His children. His self-esteem. His confidence.

That was '91.

By the time I reached high school, the taste for my father's fantastical words had turned bitter, an emotion potent enough to clothe and mask pain. Along with being a good student, I excelled at being resentful; it was my part-time job. I became addicted to my own obsession: how his drug addiction forced me to be the perpetual victim. This dysfunction lasted through my early twenties and ushered itself into my relationships with men, but more drastically, into the relationship with myself. Even as my father began to get his life together, I concentrated on keeping him out of mine.

I wish I could say that one day I woke up with such tremendous clarity that I called my father and we started the conversation that would begin to mend our relationship. It didn't quite happen like that. And honestly, I don't really know what triggered a turning point where I was tired of playing a downtrodden role that never really suited me. It was just time to move forward. I started to recover the optimism and faith that I possessed as a child and slowly, surely, I began to bury the mounds of resentment, bitterness and cynicism. For the first time in my nearly 30 years, I started to think about how his addiction affected *him*. I removed myself from the center of everything and practiced sympathy. I tried to calculate the strength it must have taken him to rebuild from scratch. I became impressed again.

My father is still one of the smartest men I know. At 62, he's still sharp as a knife and his tongue is still made of gold. He could take over the world, but he's settled for regaining what he's lost, including the position of friend and confidant that he once held in my life.

We've talked more in the past year than we have in 10 years. Not in an attempt to make up for the past, but in efforts—on both of our parts—to craft a new future. I still find myself enraptured by his words—the ones that convince me that I will be successful, that I'm already rich in person, and that despite any obstacles, I can and will prosper. We laugh. We joke. We move on. He's my tragic hero whose story isn't finished yet. This year, Father's Day dinner will be at my house.