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The Unforgettable

It was a hot summer day on July 9, 1997. My mom was just coming back from a funeral of a dear friend whose daughter had passed away. My sister Shamika and I, who were only 15 at the time, were sitting at the table in the kitchen of our 3-bedroom apartment eating cereal. She looked over at our mom and asked her, how was the funeral?

“My mom replied and said it was sad; I feel so bad for officer Michael.” “I don’t know what I would do if I were ever to lose one of my children.”

“Then, my sister said, mom, I don’t know what I would do if something were to happen to you.” I then said, let us talk about something else.

“My mom went on to say, are you packed for your weekend trip with your cousin?”

“My sister said almost, and I just need to add a few more things.”

As the day went on, I and my mom helped her get the rest of her things together so she can go to North Carolina with my cousin. When Friday finally approached, my sister was all ready to go. My cousin and her father came to our grandmother’s house to pick her up. She was so happy! It took them about nine hours to reach North Carolina, but they made it. While down there, they had so much fun. My sister and cousin got to see family members they have not seen in years. They even made plans to bring the family members back with them so that everyone can meet them. You see, my aunt, who is my mom’s youngest sister, had five children, and they all lived with their fathers. My oldest cousin of that union, her name was Betty, and she wanted to reunite her brothers and sisters. She did everything she could to try and track them down, and finally, she found them. So, she decides with the help of her dad to drive down North Carolina to see them.

Sadly, all things changed in just a few days on Sunday, July 13, 1997. My sister and cousins were headed back to Pennsylvania when the accident happen. My grandmother received a call around 5:55 am on a hot Sunday morning of July 13, 1997. At that time, she informed us that there was a car accident involving my sister and family members. The Delaware State Police told my grandmother that the driver of the car fell asleep at the wheel, hit a tree, and the vehicle flipped several times. The Officer also stated that four of the seven passengers died at the scene. The other three severely hurt with injuries that could last their entire life. My mother worked overnight as a Deputy Sheriff, did not know anything about it until my grandmother contacted her. The morning of the car accident filled us with so much pain, agony, and anger.

“My mom cried loudly on the phone to my grandmother, asking God, why did you take my daughter?”

The night before the car accident, I had spent the night over the neighbor Erica’s house. The next morning, which was the morning everything happened, my brother and two little aunts came over to get me to go home. There was a knock at the door, and we did not know who it was. Erica went and opened the door to notice that my brother and aunts were standing there. She then called my name loudly and told me to come to the door. As I approach the door, I started thinking to myself, what could they possibly want. My brother said to me, “grandma said you must come home!” I then replied, why? He then stated to me our sister Shamika had passed away along with our other family members. I said to him, why are you lying and I slammed the door. He then bangs on the door again. I open the door immediately, and I said stop playing, what do you'll want. My aunt said they were not playing. As I opened the screen door a little more, I noticed so many people in front of my grandmother’s house. Everyone from neighbors to family to the Action News team was there. I immediately ran up Erica’s steps to her room and grabbed my things. I was in so much shock that I could not believe what they just told me.

When I arrived across the street from where my friend lived to go to my grandmother’s house, you could see my oldest sister standing outside, crying while pacing back and forth. I immediately ran up to her and hugged her, and then walked in my grandma’s house to try and find my mother. Finally, I noticed that my mother was upstairs in my grandma’s room, crying her eyes out. Once I approached the inside of the room, I saw her shirt was all wet up from her tears, and her eyes were bloodshot red. My stepdad Steve was trying to hold my mom together, but it was not working. I ran over to her with my heavy feet hitting the floor and gave her the biggest hug I could. She asked me was I okay, I replied, not really but I will get there. I then said, mom are you okay? She replied, no, and I will never be okay.

As the day went on, I sat on the couch, thinking about everything that happened that day. The way my mother will never get to see one of her daughters and how my siblings and I have lost a vital part of our lives. We lost my sister and three cousins to a fatal car accident. It is because of that accident that my mom has become a heavy drinker and chose to let her self-go. I realized from that day forth; my mother will never be the same. This incident was the point of no return and forever pain. It appears all I knew how to do was cry and pray, asking God, “Why?” What was my family supposed to do, knowing that my sister was gone? It is like a piece of me has left. My heart will forever and will forever be broken behind the loss of someone so close to me. This level of emptiness, people will never understand what I feel, nor can they tell me how to feel when it comes to losing my sister. I never thought this would happen to us.

As the day of the funeral smacked us in the face, we could have never prepared for this mentally or physically. It was a day I was not looking forward to having. I felt there was a void in my heart that I could not shake. As we walked out of my grandmother’s door, there was the limousine waiting to take us to the funeral. When we pulled up to Francis Funeral Home, there was an abundance of family, friends, classmates, and our community. The South Philadelphia Soul Survivor Drill Team in which my sister was a proud member led the procession. The Philadelphia Police Department traces the sidewalk in preparation for our family arrival in support of my mother, who was a raking officer. In exiting the family limo, as I approached the doors to the funeral home, I could only recall thinking, “This suck!” I was about to see my sister for the very last time. I will never forget it!

As life goes on, I try to think about the moments I shared with my sister, like reading her poetry, her love for Allan Iverson, and her laughter, something my children will never get to hear. However, in all my pain, I promise to share all the stories with them, knowing that she is in a better place. Losing a loved one, especially a sibling, was a dark moment that I endure, but I have learned that there is sunlight after every darkness. We will meet one day and look back at the unforgettable.