

MY FATHER STROLLED INTO THE LIVING where my younger brother Matt, my mom, and I were adorning the Christmas tree with ornaments.

“We’re going to Hawaii!” he announced to our family gaily.

My family and I were elated at this new piece of information. We all began shouting at once to try and get the details of the trip.

“Pipe down everyone, and I’ll let you know everything.”

“Sweet! This is so sweet!” Even my brother, who usually displays little emotion because he’s a seventeen year old high school senior who’s much too cool to be caught smiling could not silence his excitement.

“Oh Phil, really?” our mother asked him with questioning eyes as if she really couldn’t believe it.

The countdown to our getaway passed much too slow. When the day finally arrived for our flight, we were beyond ready. We finally stepped gingerly off the eight hour plane ride and were instantly awestruck. The airport had no glass in the windows, just open holes in the wall for people to view the scenery. The sky was crystal clear blue, with fluffy clouds painted into the sky. The palm trees waving lazily in the light breeze were such a lush and vibrant green color. All the dull usual colors I normally saw everyday seemed to have been processed through Photoshop Digital Processing.

“So this is how bright everything is supposed to look,” I thought to myself.

When we arrived at our condo, we were again out of breath. The condo sat directly on the beach. All we had to do was step out the front door to feel the grainy tan sand roughing our feet. Even though it was dark, we could see the ocean glistening in the moonlight. The sound of the rushing waves was like an orchestra playing soothing music, so we left the sliding glass doors opens as we glided off to our much needed slumber.

I awoke early the morning, ready to seize the beach and unwind. I shuffled out of the bedroom and into the kitchen, crossing my fingers that my mom had awaked earlier than I and went to the grocery store to buy some makings for breakfast. Before I could even reach up to open the sturdy cupboard door, my sleepy eyes landed upon it. It was the hideous container in which the toxic contents could turn my father into a complete stranger. The forest green long necked bottle sat upright on the glistening countertop. My stomach immediately started churning with apprehension. I averted my eyes from the bottle that I had long since come to know as the enemy. I located its consumer on the balcony with headphones on his ears, and empty shot glasses spread as casually as the newspaper would be on the small ivory plastic table. The time was the bleak hour of eight in the morning.

I considered mentioning to my father that it was possibly too early to be drinking, but that idea tired quickly when I reminded myself I was not certain of how much he had drank. I momentarily strained my view beyond him and out into the ocean. The water was unbelievably clear. The waves were small yet powerful, and I could smell the salt of the sea whirling into my nostrils. I returned my vision to the bottle of beast bantering me.

To anyone other than my immediate family, this was a simple bottle of Jameson's Irish Whiskey. To us, this was a bottle of poison, the harm equivalent to the venom of a scorpion. I tried to shake off my queasy feeling and prayed today would be a day without conflict.

My family and I decided to go into the tourist town of Lahaina for the day. The town was quaint and like almost everything else on the island, sat on the shore. The sound of seagulls squawking filled our ears, and the smell of food, salt, and flowers filled our nose. As we ducked in and out of shops, my father ducked in and out every possible bar he saw.

"I'm gonna grab a brewski real quick, I'll meet up with you guys later," he slurred as he disappeared into the pub.

We answered his statement with disapproving eyes, to which he'd reply, "We're on vacation; its okay."

My mom, Matt, and I passed a booth advertising parasailing. My mom's eyes lit up when I suggested we go together. Shockingly, she agreed. My mom isn't too adventurous so I wanted to hurry and sign us up before she changed her mind. Matt decided not to go with us and instead decided to take advantage of our dad's vacation into oblivion and snag his credit card to go shopping. After making sure we all had a cell phone to contact each other, Matt took off to do some damage in the shopping department and my mom and I took off in ours. We took the boat ride out to the middle of the ocean. The water splashed our face and we could taste the salt of the sea. We got harnessed in and before we knew it, we were soaring high in the air, our feet dangling 800 feet above the waves. We had an incredible time. Those twenty minutes we were in flight, giggling in awe as we flew among volcanoes, under rainbows, above water, and toward mountains, are twenty minutes that I felt as free as I ever have before or since.

We were back on land too soon, and we strolled along the street looking here and there. We were in line to purchase two waffle cones of pecan praline ice cream when my phone starting ringing. The voice on the other end was my dad.

"Let's get out of here. You and your mom meet me and Matt back at the car," he mumbled.

It was only three o'clock.

"We're getting some ice cream. We'll pay and be there in a sec," I informed him.

He hung up the phone on me, and I relayed the conversation to my mom. She sighed and shook her head in disappointment. We began to amble our way back to the car slowly. We were in no hurry to leave. The phone rang again.

“Where the hell are you guys? Didn’t you hear me the first goddamn time? It’s time to go. Now.” The booming voice was my father again. And again, he hung up on me.

I shortly thereafter received a text message from my brother.

“Sorry,” it read. “Dad’s really drunk.”

We quickened our pace, now concerned for my brother. He called again.

“Fuck it; I’ll take a fucking cab.” Before he could hang up on me for a third time, I tried to get a word in.

“We’ll be right there, geez!” I shouted.

My mom and I arrived at the car and swiftly got in the backseat and belted ourselves in.

My brother was driving because my father was obviously too inebriated to do the task himself. We were silent, none of us wanting to speak a word that may set off my father. We drove along until the cars suddenly began to stop. The brake lights around began flashing like Christmas lights. However, the mood was anything but merry. There was a traffic accident ahead and unlucky for us, there is only one way to get back to our condo. We would have to wait it out.

The radio was on quietly and we were all lost in our thoughts when it happened. He erupted like the volcanoes we saw in the brochures for Hawaii. My father turned around sideways to face my mother, Matt, and me. His eyes were somewhat like those of a basset hound, bloodshot and droopy, but lacking the love and loyalty that the dog would have shown and replacing it with a faraway crazed gaze. He began to spew his word vomit upon us, spraying us with the filth and making us feel dirty. He took a turn at each of us, starting with my mother.

“You make me sick,” he growled at her. “I can’t believe you. You are so fucking lazy and I’m tired of you. I can’t stand the sight of you.”

My mother began quietly crying. She shut her eyes, balled her hands into fists, and turned to face the window. He then moved on to my brother.

“You think the world revolves around you, you little shit. You’re nothing. You’ll always be nothing. I’m so ashamed of you.”

Matt’s face was ashen and he was trying desperately to hold back the tears in his too cool for school eyes, staring ahead to the road.

Finally it was my turn.

“And you, you think you’re so smart. You’re just a fucking idiot. Stupid fucking brat. All you do is sponge off of us. You’re so dumb, I can’t stand you either.” I was weary by this time. We hadn’t done anything to deserve this. Matt and my mom had answered his insults with silence. I, however, would not.

“I am smarter than you will ever be. Look at you, you’re pathetic. Talking to your wife like she’s some nothing on the street, treating your son like you hate him. You’re a selfish drunk, and that’s all you’ll ever be. Don’t you see, you’re the one with the serious problem?”

The words fought their way out of my mouth and I couldn’t stop them. I had to stand up for my mother and brother. I had to show him he needed help. Surely he would take the harsh reality of the words from his only daughter to heart.

Instead, he laughed in his drunken stupor and said a simple “fuck you.” Then he passed out.

I was enraged. I had to get out of the car. I felt like the air was being sucked violently out of my body and if I had to stay in that car a nanosecond longer, I would suffocate. The traffic was still at an absolute stop so I threw open the door and stormed to the side of the road, where there was a beach. There was a porta-potty to my left, an unlikely haven. I locked myself in and stood there, my head leaning against the door. In this moment of rage and sadness, I was numb to the germs, bacteria, and foul stench enveloping me.

It was there, in that porta-potty, that I had my epiphany. My dad was no longer my dad. He hadn’t been in a long time. He was a stranger now, changed and consumed by his obsession for liquor. His tendencies have helped to mold me into who I am today. I am guarded with my heart, because my father is the first man to have broken it. They say “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” but I know the truth. Words are the ones that can leave the most hidden, deepest and everlasting scars.

