

How has one of my most significant challenges brought meaning into my life?

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April 20, 2015, this was the day my outlook on life completely changed. This was the day I began to see how empathy connects us all as human beings. This is the day I saw the true intrinsic value of human life. This is the day I lost my grandpa who died by suicide.

I can not put into words the flooding emotions I felt when I heard the news. It was a normal day. I was walking to my vibrant yellow house in Georgia, ready to ask if I could have a playdate with my best friend. The smile on my face and the hope in my eyes quickly faded as the words, "Grandpa passed away," came out of my parents' mouths. It was as if all life surrounding me went still. I felt my heart break a little. My mind grew with questions. My twelve year old self continuously wondered, "Why was he so sad but seemed so happy."

The rate of suicide is highest in middle aged men, white men in particular. On average, there are about 129 lives lost by suicide everyday. 129 loved ones taken from this earth way to early due to the inner demons that we all have. Losing my grandpa was a significant challenge. Yet, this life changing experience allowed myself to see the true meaning of my life. Meaning is enduring and connects our pasts to the present as well as our futures. The obstacles I have overcome have increased meaning in life. This emotional experience gave me a deeper understanding of myself and others.

The word "meaning" to me changed after I lost my grandpa. I wanted to live a full life, for myself and him. There are many ways I work towards this. I live by my beliefs and values, find balance, follow my passions in life, and live in the moment. However, I believe that the most impactful way to live this life is to make a difference in this world we live in. Whether it is attending marches, sharing random acts of kindness, or speaking up for what you believe in...all give you the best feeling in the world. This is my purpose in life. When I found my purpose, I felt good about who I was becoming. An inner peace replaced the need to seek approval from others. My friends and family began to sense a new me: someone who is happy, motivated and self-assured – a person with a mission.

Before my grandpa passed away, I never challenged myself to see beyond the surface. I was not aware of the masks that so many individuals put on everyday. The task of putting on a mask has become second nature to so many. Losing my grandpa to suicide opened up a whole new world of understanding. As I said earlier, I believe that empathy is what connects us all as human beings. The depths of human connection hold more power than I could have ever known. Empathy is not merely a characteristic trait. It is an action to connect on a deeper level

emotionally with someone. This action has the ability to break through the stigmas, the stereotypes, and can save someone's life. When I empathize with someone, we are equals.

We all have our own inner demons. We have all felt alone at times. No one should ever feel alone. That is my mission. I need people to challenge themselves to see beyond the surface. Put yourself in other people's shoes. Now more than ever we need to open our eyes to the reality of our world. "תיקון עולם," To repair the world. In order to repair our world, we must break through the stigmas, stereotypes, and hate that feed into the demons of so many innocent lives. Stand for those who have fallen, and use our voices for those who have lost theirs.

Grandpa, you are missed. But I want to say thank you, for bringing meaning into my life. Thank you for opening my eyes. Thank you for showing me how to live a full life, for me and you.

I will continue to live by this quote... "The purpose of life is a life of purpose." - Robert Byrne.

It isn't too late to start.