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**THE
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Life Lessons

by Shane Windmeyer . Guest Contributor

A father and his gay son

Sundays to many of us represent a day for worship, a day for family and a day for love. Since May 18, 2003, every Sunday has meant something different for me and my family. The six-year anniversary this May marks the day when I heard my father was killed.

My dad, Fred Windmeyer, was walking the family dog in our north Topeka, Kan., neighborhood that Sunday afternoon. He was just around the corner from our home by an elementary school when a drunk driver hit him. The drunk driver was 21 years old and four times the legal limit of alcohol. Witnesses estimate that the driver was going 70 miles per hour on a residential road when he topped the hill, crossed over the median and struck my father with a Chevrolet pickup truck. The young man did not stop the vehicle and instead ran off to hide at his home in the woods.

There are so many things wrong with what happened that Sunday. No family should ever have to face the loss of a loved one due to a drunk driver. My dad always told me that life was unfair and he was right. There is nothing fair about what happens to victims of drunk driving and their families.

My dad was a hard worker. He was a farmer and never went to college. I never would have imagined this, but my relationship with my dad grew stronger as a result of my coming out and being open and honest with him. He often joked that he wanted to adopt my partner Tom so he could be legally part of our family. Of course, I convinced him that was probably not the best option and it would be weird for my partner to be my legal brother. It was his sentiment that truly counted.

Remembering my dad becomes more difficult as the years pass by. I miss our conversations and our times together. I have always wondered how he felt about having a gay son. I know he loved me and was proud, but I wish I had asked that question and could hear his response today.

Luckily, my sister who is five years younger than me, had recalled one story that she told me shortly after his passing. This is the story I share most often about my father to remember him. I use the story in my speaking programs with straight college audiences across the country. It brings some sort of purpose to

my dad's senseless death and also shares some valuable lessons.

My sister recounts: One day my father came home from work and looked perplexed. My sister asked him if something was wrong, did he have a bad day at work. He responded that a coworker had asked him the question: "What would you do if you had a gay son?"

My dad had a disgruntled look and appeared like he was upset. My sister asked, "What was wrong with that?" My dad said matter of factly: "Well, I told him that I have a gay son and I love him just as much as I do my daughter."

My sister said that my dad went on and told the coworker how proud he was of his kids, showed him pictures of us and then he and the coworker had left it at that.

My dad then looked back at my sister. The real reason as to why he was having so much angst came out. He said, "Was that enough? Did I say enough?"

I still cry when I tell this story now. My father was not only a great parent but he loved his son. He had seen my college speaking programs about "Coming out as an Ally" on numerous occasions and heard me talk about the importance of straight allies. I never thought to tell him that simply saying that you have a gay son and that you love him is indeed enough.

In this day and age, we need more straight allies to come out with their personal stories of those they love and care about. As LGBT people, we need to encourage and tell our straight allies how much they mean to us. I know it seems so simple — but yet we forget to actually do it.

In memory of my father, please consider telling personally or writing a note to your straight friends. Tell them thank you for being an ally, for loving you, and standing up for who you are. Tell them that being a straight ally does not have to mean more than being willing to share your love and saying, "I have a friend who is gay. I have a sister who is lesbian. I have an uncle who is transgender. I have two moms."

I wish my dad were standing next to me today so I could give him a big hug and tell him, "Yes, Dad... that was more than enough."

I miss my father. He taught me so much about life. Nobody ever thinks that what happened to my family can happen to them. Victim families of drunk drivers are forever impacted by the tragedy. The pain of loss is

see *Life Lessons* on 7



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