

Try to imagine when you first learned about the Holocaust. Here is this massive scar on the history of mankind, and you're calmly sitting in a classroom discussing its significance as if it were some work of fiction. You weren't there in Auschwitz 70 years ago, you hardly see any vestige of its existence left in the modern world, but because some teacher or textbook tells you so you do your best to appreciate the true scope of such genocide of your own people. It is only through the few remaining survivors of this tragedy that we can begin to comprehend the magnitude of what took place.

This is the way that I have come to feel about my sister Mollie. She and I never shared a breath together in this world, but I have seen and heard the implications of her story from my earliest memory. My sole interactions with her have taken place indirectly through my parents, and I'm not even sure how substantial those have been. How can I, a healthy, privileged young man, try to empathize with a child so unfortunate that she never knew the world for more than the suffering it had to offer? I see the pain on my parents' faces when we light her candle in her memory, but observation is still miles away from empathy.

So where does that leave my relationship with such an unfortunate young girl? In all honesty, I would equate it to reading a long novel and having the protagonist, in whom you've invested so much time and effort, slip away right in those last few pages. Now this may certainly seem like far too crude an analogy; how dare someone associate such a tragically real event with a work of fantasy. But I only use this to describe my relationship with *her*, which no amount of reflection will make into anything more than an experience that falls outside the scope of my own reality.

It is my relationship with the people still on this Earth that has been irreparably shaped by the coming and going of Mollie. My parents had pretty blithe and happy childhoods back in the day, somewhat close to what I've been lucky enough to have. They studied hard and eventually earned two PHD's and a marriage out of their first few years together, but they were still just kids. When they took their first crack at constructing the iconic American family they assumed that the road ahead would be filled with hard work, but ultimately happiness would continue to follow them. Then within only a few years of their new life together, they received a brutal shove into adulthood. Dads tend to say that the day they became a man was when they married their wife or held their newborn baby; I vividly remember the day when my dad looked me in the eye and said that all of that is child's play compared to being told that your first child only has precious months to live.

Though it may seem that tragedies are accompanied only by misery, what is ultimately gleaned can often make what happened bearable at the very least. I clearly never knew my parents before Mollie had passed away, but it's obvious that her death has formed a fundamental aspect of their personality. Instead of interpreting this as some curse from above, they chose to have it instill an even deeper sense of compassion for their family that is still here. They've also used her story to raise thousands of dollars for research that could ensure that no other

family has to hear such condemning words from their doctor. Most importantly, my parents gained the invaluable ability to place life's issues in perspective, a skill I could not admire more.

I have been fortunate enough to be the recipient of these inspiring qualities for my entire life, and I truly believe that it has fundamentally shaped the way that I am today. If something like that can be taken from such misfortune, I know my parents and I can feel as if some modicum of justice exists in this world. It is undoubtedly how we handle tragedy that defines who we are, and my parents have defined themselves as those who won't give up on life even when it throws death in their faces. I can only hope that, like Tay-Sachs, this quality is genetic.