

A Walk Up 1968, Life Story, Family, Piecing the Man Together

By

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Submitted to the Board of Anthropology
School of Natural & Social Sciences
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2022

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Second Reader: Lorraine Plourde

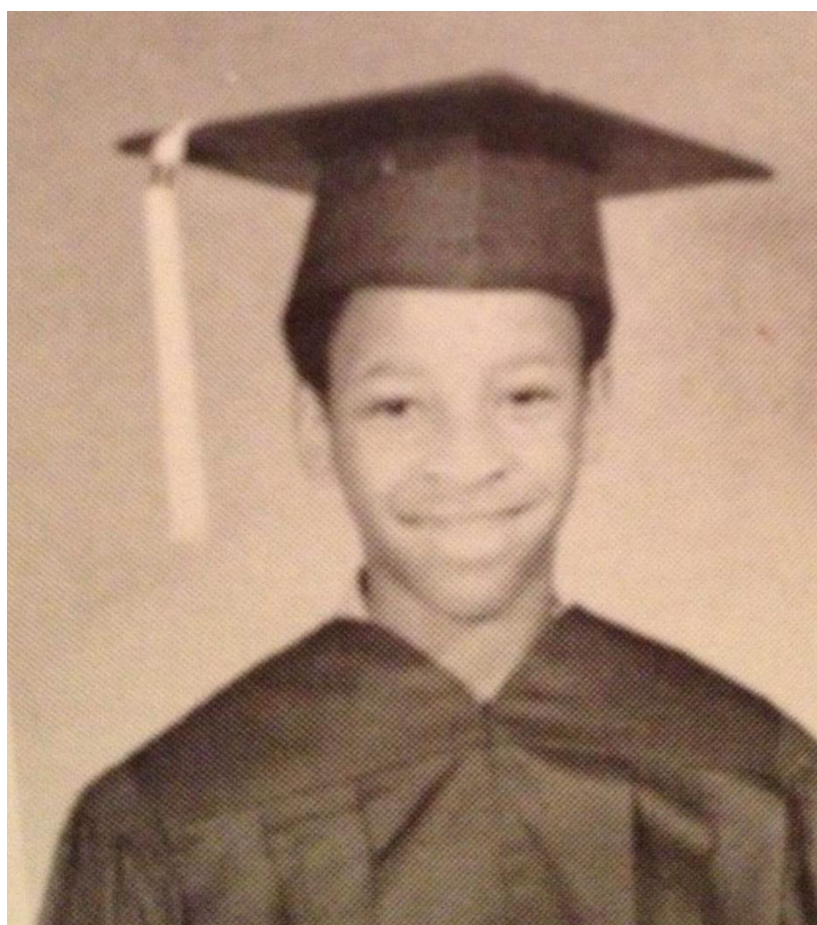
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Abstract

Going into this project I read a number of works that I felt leaned into the concepts of life history, family and health all while still keeping the importance of grief work as an undertone of this project. Before I share the why of this project, I wanted to give a bit of background on my experience of each piece and how they relate to my work, myself, and my father. There is so much meat in each of these writings and there were many ways that they could be applied. Using them like sonnets helps move the reader through the work, still I wrote with reflection on these pieces, and I saw the potential for each of them to be used inside of this senior project.

Audre Lorde

It felt necessary to include Lorde's writings from the cancer journals as I feel her work captures a lot of the physical experience of pain and transitioning into a space of pain. The cancer journals are her living breathing work of an internal and external experience that I feel relates to my father's internal dialog of resolve to live despite having to sift through the haystack of emotions and deep grief to push forward. Lorde like my father looked to her community for support in her later years of life, communicating more openly with others about the decisions she had come to about her health. This work like Lorde's' is a reflective piece about life and grief and the cycle of moving forward, allowing my father to remember and process what has been under the surface all while allowing myself as an observer and a participant to meet the person I have known all over again. I would like to propose a theme of reintroduction, as a daughter learning the man Paul Michael Wayans, while the father relives his experience and unintentionally exploring the differences of the young man he was and the man he currently is. The space of reintroduction is not something to be controlled or put into a container of a narrative it is an experience that the subject in this case both Lorde and Paul must explore, and the illness becomes an igniter for the journey.

Karla FC Holloway

Holloways writing felt like an expression of the black gaze on the experience of death, it came through the lens of a black woman and expressed the experience of the black body surrounding death, family and the health care system; most importantly to me the perception of black death. If we are to understand as readers that a lot of the perceptions of the black body and the black grieving experience have come through the lens of whiteness, then works like the writing of Holloway's dismantles the narrative that has been composed outside of the black experience. The foundations of the black funeral home and practices from the 19th century are still evident today in many black owned funeral homes and relationships cultivated in the black church. Holloway covers the practices of traditional black families and the process of death in quite the same way that my father walks me through the process of death. Her writing informs the necessity of mourning practices and the comfort that comes from community. The death of the black body has traditionally been violent in the United States, my father will see a great many violent deaths in his lifetime, friends, siblings, and peers sharing his health condition. Holloways is intentional in her sharing of the disparities in the medical system that leaves black people with kidney failure and heart failure like my father without the same level of care that they would provide the white body, extending the violence of death into the spaces where there should be help. Holloways writing on the violence of black death reflects the insight of death and violence to educate our children and community on the ways for which they can meet their end in this country. In this paper my father will too have an education on the violent end in which the black body can meet with death. Holloway is careful to be tender in her writing and give life to the innocence of the black child and the sensitivity of losing a loved one. Death is an unimaginable event and all the ways that the black experience has shaped mourning are gifted in this

writing, this work really grounds my perceptions of grief and death and my own cultural experience of loss.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

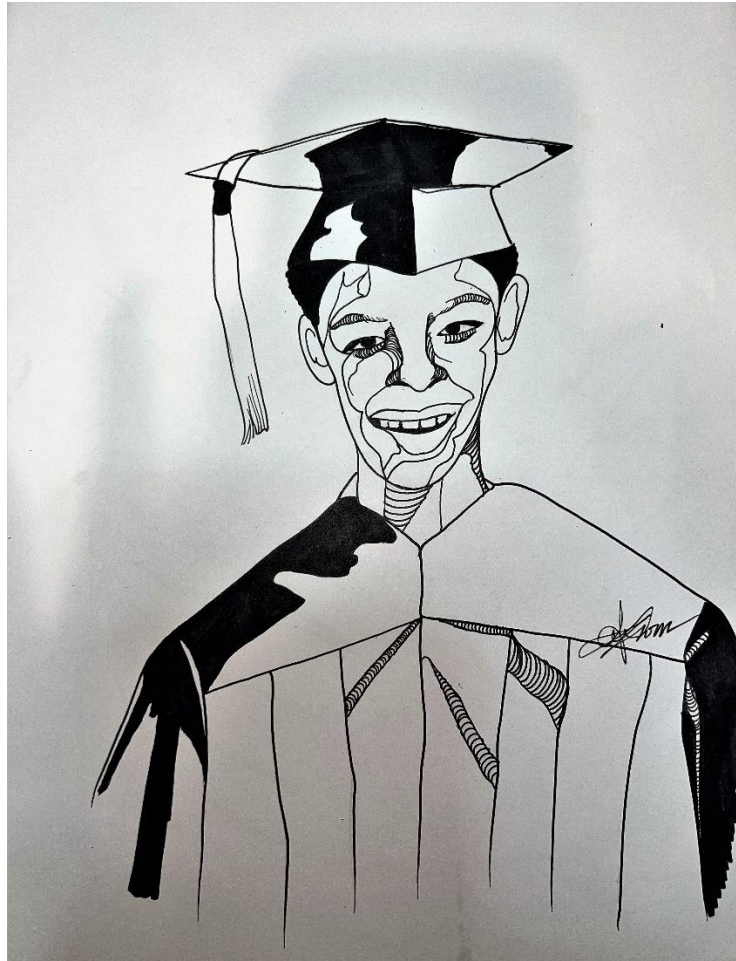
The writing from a daughter's afterword I find useful in process. Like Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, this work began in searching for purpose in writing as I started when asked to write a life story in my fieldwork and qualitative methods class. I chose to write about my father and his experience with death and grief. The project still felt open after I finished my assignment and wanted to pursue this writing further, I originally thought the work would be an insight to death and grief, but it became an expression of my father's life and his remembrance of events. Though not always succinct like Kirshenblatt - Gimblett's father Mayer, the telling of the work would begin with questions that eventually would become my father leading me through events both felt and processed. Much of this work has been recorded on my laptop and then transcribed. Kirshenblatt – Gimblett's work points me towards methodology, ways to explore anthropology and life history with the art of storytelling and visual arts. Her work makes it possible to feel present as both an artist and a writer expressing the experience of my subject. Kirshenblatt – Gimblett's work like my own is a daughter writing about her father bringing their experiences to life. My father is telling his story and the story of others while I too reflect on him, in this way creating a three tier of reflection. Kirshenblatt – Gimblett's speaks on a room that she was very familiar with from her father's stories it was her favorite space to hear about and to reflect on with her father so when he painted there was a power in Mayer's version of the drawing being different from her imagining. I will spend some time in this work thinking about how my own imagining of my father and his experiences are different from his retelling. The usage of photos and items included in this work are important to my father and they act as an igniter to the flame of memory. In this way the writing is not linear it moves in the context of how things come up for my father as memory is fragmented, the use of images beginning with a pair of glasses that eventually grounds this writing in how I engage with my father.

I wanted to return the sacredness of the image back to my father in his depiction of imagery.

Renato Rosaldo

Grief and The Headhunters Rage is a work I have revisited many times throughout my college experience and it to me is a healthy frame to assess the emotional experience of grief. Renato Rosaldo's and his late wife had an intimate relationship with the practices of the Ilongot tribe which gave him wisdom which he would later put into practice. There is a line in his writing that was expressed by an older member of the tribe that Rosaldo was missing the point of the Ilongot man's conversion of faith. There are certain things we must experience in life to fully understand and it is not until Rosaldo goes through the mourning of his wife that he could learn the lessons of the Ilongot Headhunters. Grieving is more than the death of a loved one or the death of yourself, it extends beyond the moment of impact. The emotion of rage is not always familiar in the language of grief, but the unexpected and unplanned event can stir an unsettling place in a man or woman's soul. Such a fire no tear can put out and no words can sooth, my father will experience these emotions throughout his life, but it is when he must grieve himself, the loss of his health where we see the floor fall from under him. I appreciate Rosaldo's transparency as he writes through religion and the transition of identity, questioning the familiarity that he had with bereavement and rediscovering what the gravity of loss. I believe that this work leads us to examine how we have put grief into a container, how do we unbind ourselves from the traps of culture and ritual labeling and give ourselves permission to experience moving continually through the grief process. There is a time for loss to be final and there is a time to find peace in our experience of loss.

The WHY



I was born on November 11th, 1994, the day before my father's birthday, and everything I am mostly attributed to the relationship I have with my father, Paul Michael Wayans born November 12th, 1968.

I grew up in the Bronx, N.Y in a family of five, my mother and my two siblings, a not so much older sister and my barley younger brother. Then there was my father. As I said before Paul Wayans my tall, light yellow, furrow-browed father, a man who speaks with such clarity and distinction but recent years as he's aged said very little at all. My father although always present felt very absent as well, I have many memories of my father being asleep during my birthday parties because he was tired from work and dialysis. My father was diagnosed with hypertension that caused kidney failure ate the age of 29, he attended dialysis three times a week at 6:30 am every single week. This was the same man who sometimes came home from work during the

summer months with a brown paper bag full of red lipstick-colored caramels that were wrapped in a clear plastic with a silver foil that said “classic caramel” in the center in big black script letters. My father in those moments would kiss my siblings and I on the forehead before he walked into the house to lay down. If my father was home, I could find him at the computer playing Star Craft online on multiplayer with his younger brother Ryan into the wee hours of the night. I often stayed up past my bedtime to stay in my father’s presence, a lot of the time we weren’t speaking, I just sat on the floor silently cheering him on as he played his game. Then the time came for my father to move out when I was about nine years old, a day I would never forget I was so heartbroken, in tears that I was losing my father that I could not make it up the street. Despite both my parents reassuring me that I would still see my father on an almost daily basis the crushing absence of my father from the home and my presence had bore me a pain my nine-year-old soul had never know. What was the loss of my father to be? I stopped at the payphone on the corner and called my home phone, when my father answered I asked my dad if I could miss school to spend the day with him before he left. Upon hearing a yes through the phone line from my father who had never really been moved by tears I turned around and ran home to be greeted with a hug from *my daddy*.

I do not know if that moment with my father was my first experience of loss, despite it not being a death it informed my little mind that people can go away, they will not always be in your immediate space even if you love them so much the concept of living in their skin frequently crosses your mind. As a child both my parents ensured that their children attended church every Sunday. I may not have known what it truly meant to live or die but even at an early age I could tell you about heaven and hell. I could easily recite to any person I met John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whom soever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life”*. I knew that I needed Jesus and so did everyone else and if you died without Jesus you were going to hell. To a child that is simple, there is a good place and a bad place, now a child can’t explain to you the middle or how one gets there but if they say it enough times, they will believe it.

I have one memory of my dad’s brother Carlos the night he and my father’s other four siblings pulled up to our house late at night in a little red car after going out for drinks. My uncle ran into the house as the rest of the family waved from the car, my uncle bald headed and brown skinned, wide eyed with gold fronts and a leather jacket picked me up and kissed me on my cheek. I do not remember the words he said, I remember his face and his toothpick and what it felt like to be in his arms. I don’t know the amount of time that passed but I do remember sitting in a building that slightly resembled a church, faint green walls, and carpet, I remember single seated chairs and the shadows of black and a casket. I remember laying in my mother’s lap, I do not remember emotions or understanding that my dad had lost someone he loved, this was also my father’s third sibling to die (I’ll get to that). The one thing I do know is that nothing changed for me despite my father changing in ways I did not understand. My uncle Carlos’s funeral was the first of many that I would attend with my father. Funerals were kind of a thing we did; I hate to treat it like they were some kind of activity. My father would pick me and my brother up from school and we’d go to a funeral, I would walk into rooms full of men and stand close to a wall, while my father would shake hands with people and strike up conversation. My father who did not talk much with us children was the most social person in a room at times, he had an invisible magnetism. In those dark cloudy spaces, I would see my father smile, his fang shaped teeth emerging from behind his large pink lips reaching upwards towards his sharp down pointed nose

that he inherited from my grandmother. At times my dad would tell me whose funeral we were attending and others we just left to karate practice and my father would become Mr. Wayans second degree belt karate master and teacher, and there he was still just the man. I did not always know that the funerals I was attending were of men that he had met during his mornings at dialysis, people who he was on this health journey with whom somehow foreshadowed what his end could look like. My father spent most of his time in five places, with his children, at dialysis, at the karate school, by his mothers or at church, each affecting how he showed up in the world and what parts of him he felt that he could express. It was until recent years that my father was just my daddy, I realize now that he is a man with a story. His connection to loss has greatly influenced my perception of the world, the loss of himself, his friends, his family, his career. My thoughts on losing him have shaped my life and the decisions I make down to what state I can live in. From the moment he told me he was moving out of my childhood home, till this very day the thought of losing my father to the side effects of kidney failure has paralyzed me with fear. One day it will be November 12th and it will no longer be his birthday; on that day I cannot run down the street and be comforted by the loving embrace of my complex father. So, this senior project is a prelude, a gift to me in case of an emergency I'll have something to hold on to.

Logistics of The Body



Ricky Orlando Wayans

In this way, we built a scaffold that became the conditioning context for remembering. The paintings became our compass, putting things in relation to one another in space better than spoken descriptions could.

- Barbra Kirshenblatt -Gimblett

I called my father to ask him if he remembered asking me to come help prepare my grandmothers body for the funeral, I expressed that I did not remember who called me if it was him or his younger sister Vanecia (nick named Nene).

PW:

No, situations like that don't give way for time for emotion, like when you get wrapped up in the logistics of stuff its processing it has nothing to do with how you feel emotionally, you don't have the liberty to have emotional lows when you're expediting the logistics of a funeral. You must have clarity of mind, you have to the fortitude it takes emotionally, um it's what people are looking to you for, they are looking for that person to remain strong enough to expedite the logistics. That's my strength, that's part of what I've come to be in this family. I can divulge myself away from my emotional stuff and get stuff done.

AV:

Do you think that this skill came from dialysis or from karate?

PW:

It is an accumulation of different things. Predominantly from karate and the reason I say that is because in karate you get hurt and, in that instance, when you're in pain you still have to make a decision. Do I – do I just suck it up and um continue on, or do I cave into this pain whereas though more pain is more likely to occur because I stop doing what I'm supposed to do. But then there is dialysis right, dialysis is an in-your-face experience. You have no choice; I don't have a choice to lay in the bed on Monday morning and go ehh you know what not today I'll do it on Friday. I don't have that choice there are consequences and repercussions, so you learn to embrace the challenge right in front you and keep going and you deal with the other stuff later. So that's who I – I have become.

My father who was wearing the same baby blue our lady of grace 8th grade graduation hoodie from two days prior sat by the living room window. he looked tired, the lines in his face looking much longer than usual, his salt and pepper gray five o clock shadow pushing up out of his pores bound to prickle the skin of the next person he hugged. His shiny but somehow dry bald head refracted Sunday's sun light off his scalp back out the window as his head leaned right towards the direction of the living room wall. He was about to go into the attic to run wires through the ceiling to put in new light bulbs despite expressing that he was tired and felt that more recently he has just been struggling along.

PW:

I slept in the room with your uncle, and I was always at your grandmother's house. Your great grandmother I should say. Again, you are pulling chunks of emotional stability out of your life. These people make up your emotional stability, and that gets taken away and you, you learn how to move forward without them and that takes a long time.

Ricky would commit suicide while on angel dust when my father was in his early teens. Ricky was everything my father wanted to be and taught him exactly what not to become. Ricky was nineteen at the time of his death, my father was twelve.

PW:

In the world my brother Ricky was a giant, he was fearless... there was nothing that he set his mind to that you were going to stop him from doing. I kind of have that, he shaped my level of intolerance um because my brother was not a tolerant guy (laughter). He kinda told you something one time, which was how your grandfather was... and he could be violent... in relationship to the rest of my sibling he and I were very, very tight, close. I slept in the room with him for the longest. I mean I slept in the room with you uncle Van and Uncle Carlos, but Carlos had gone off to prison and van had gone off to the military.

There was a nostalgia in my father's voice while talking about his brother. As if he could see Ricky's face and was reliving his presence; what it was like to be Ricky's little brother all over again. My father expressed his anger about losing Ricky and his grandmother again but this time including his good friend Kurt's dad in the mix. My father who grew up in church had men around him he considered spiritual fathers; Kurt's dad was one of those men. When he died, my father with a puzzled face raised his forehead wrinkles expressed the confusion. How could a godly man like that die? Somehow as soon as the words left his mouth his wrinkles dropped back down on his forehead and acceptance was in his tone once more.

PW:

"I became kind of bitter about death, and that's where you guys see your dad. Like my dad, I only saw my dad cry one time and that was when my brother Ricky died." (I do not know if it was because I had mentioned it earlier in a question or he just didn't want to talk about it again. When Ricky died my grandfather took my father to identify Ricky's body, my father was the only other boy living under my grandparents' roof at the time besides Ricky.) "He shed a few tears and that was that, and I asked him dad why are you not hysterical, this is your son. And my dad said what is that going to do? And so, your father kind of grew up on that day because crying resolves nothing, it didn't resolve nothing for me it. Does not make me feel better, nothing, I don't like the way sorrow makes me feel. So, it's an emotion that I tend to do without."

Funerals for our young are daily, lonely occurrences. In some black urban ghetto or another somewhere in America, at least once a day a small black congregation will gather together to try to repair the hole in a brother or mothers' soul with the balm of singing, prayer, the laying on of dark hands on darkened spirits

- Holloway, Wideman

To lose a loved one is a natural part of life but the violence and weight on a person that stems from the place of grief can create a strength, a resilience to the emotional strains of death. For my father emotions have to come later.

Daddy on Dialysis

Once the Raiders kill their victim they toss their head rather than keep it as a trophy and tossing the head away it claim to castaway their life burdens putting the rage in their grief.

- Renato Rosaldo



My father is sitting on the couch in the living room in his usual spot, you can hear the rustling of the wax paper as he peels pieces of salami out of the wrapping one by one throwing whole pieces into his mouth. Loudly he smacks and waits as I set up my stuff, almost impatiently for me to begin.

AV:

Do you remember your first time at dialysis?

PW:

Yes.

AV:

What year was that?

PW:

1998, June.

AV:

So, what was that like?

PW:

I was (loud chewing), I had just been told a few hours earlier that my kidneys don't work, and in my head I had the mindset that there was a pill you could take to fix this, and they were denying me the pill. Telling me there was no pill and I was convinced, and these were my words "give me the damn pill, so I can get out of here and get on with my life". And they were like Mr. Wayans you're not understanding, you have a permanent condition, that will never change. So then I was mad, I was angry, I was upset, I was on the tier top violent (loud smacking, once twice, deep breath) doctor after doctor came in that room to try to quell my fear and my anger. Then um I met Doctor Yu, who is my nephrologist and he calmed me down then he was like (there was a long pause) this is what you got to do. There was an African doctor also who was a nephrologist who was on dialysis also and it made it easier hearing from him that this is what you gotta do, that life could go on it was just going to be different.

So there after, I went to – they do what is an emergency procedure, they shave your pubic area and then they stick needles into your major vein by your groin, what is it, [the femoral artery] whatever it is I had my first dialysis by my groin. (Loud smacking continues) So that experience was unnerving unsettling but absolutely necessary.

AV:

How long was it before you had your artery fusion?

PW:

The fistula? The fistula came about within three months, but even though they put it in you, you can't use it for six to twelve months.

AV:

So how were you doing dialysis?

PW:

So what they do, they put what they call perme cap, and they put it in your jugular, and it comes out of your chest. (Lifting his shirt to try and show me, my dad pulls up his our lady of grace blue hoodie very aggressively only using his left hand because his right hand has salami grease on it, wringing the sweater up from side to side grunting with salami in his mouth, I ask if those were the three scars he had on his chest when I was a child). YES! (Continues chewing) so then you do dialysis like that for six to nine months, then when this is mature enough, your fistula, then you do dialysis through your fistula.

AV:

What does it feel like to have something in your neck when you moved your head and stuff? I don't remember this.

PW:

Well, no you wouldn't, you were too young, but it's like having hard phlegm. You know it's there; it won't go anywhere (he begins to laugh) you do your best to protect this area on you because if not you'll get an infection, and because the tubes go into your artery directly into your heart the consequences if they can't fix the infection you die. I had an infection, and what they do is they bring you in the hospital and they give you lots of antibiotics until you're better?

AV:

How did that work having little kids who want to touch you?

PW:

You were allowed to touch, you were allowed to play with me, it's just I had to keep yall off of my chest. You guys were very good as kids. You weren't bad children you were really good children, that's why I tell you I have some of the memories I have of you guys are really really good ones because all I did was get to play with my babies, so it wasn't a bad thing. It was just another thing.

AV:

Did you get scared? Sometimes when people get sick sometimes, they get scared.

PW:

I won't call – they say there's seven different emotions that you go through. I can say that I did experience these really bad, but I process things because as a martial artist I process things in a way that I try to look at things realistically. So my initial from what I've been told about my dialysis I was angry, and then became confused, and then I felt almost hopeless, and then I was like well if this is what Gods got this is what Gods got. I went through a little bit of a depression and then I would say I had the resolve to say life goes on and I aint dead yet so let's keep it moving. That's where I've been ever since.

What the man in fact sought in the new religion was not the denial of our inevitable deaths but a means of coping with his grief. With the advent of martial law, headhunting was out of the question as a means of venting his wrath and thereby lessening his grief.

- Renato Rosaldo

Sucking the last pieces of salami out of his aged fangy teeth, my father turns his head up to my stepmother to ask for his phosphorus binders, a medication he takes every time he eats to reduce the absorption of dietary phosphate and help prevent calcium deposits from being built up inside of the arteries and soft tissue. At the time I couldn't really understand the harm that calcium

deposits could have on the body. It would be less than two months from this conversation that calcium deposits would become relevant again.

AV: So, in terms of funeral stuff, I know because I've been with you to some of these funerals. Have you attended any recently, do you still go?

PW:

No, the reason I do not go to the funerals of those who I have come to be friendly with is because of the HIPPA laws, the HIPPA laws prevent you from learning when a person dies. Any kind of information pertaining to a person a person is private and if you don't make a friendship with the family of the deceased, you'll not know. The only way you will know that person is deceased is that they will no longer be at the center. You can inquire but the center can't say yes or no to your question, they can just acknowledge that the person isn't there.

AV:

Is there a specific funeral that stuck out from your time when you did go?

PW:

No, but I am always surprised how quickly people are not there.

The Glasses



Carlos Paul Wayans (Pop Pops), Daddy, Ryan Octavius Wayans

The paintings are not illustrations and the stories are not captions. They are not versions of one another. Rather, different parts of the story are told in different ways in different media to form a whole that is greater than could be achieved in words or images alone

- Barbara Kirshenblatt – Gimblett

Carlos-Paul and Joanne Wayans, they were not the first Wayans, but they were two of the most memorable. People frequently address me as Joanne's grand, they speak highly of her cooking her style, and the way her home was open to everyone. Carlos-Paul was the Vietnam veteran, violent in his behavior and his defense of his children, equally violent in his discipline of his children. The soft spoken and commanding man Paul, a brown skinned man from Harlem who cared little for fashion, he and Joanne had a young and tumultuous love. This couple was the epitome of domestication and class despite living in the United States classification of poverty.

The couple raised their family in EdenWald projects in the Bronx N.Y from the fifties to the 2000's, as their children would go on to have children. Apartment 1D in the Bronx projects of 4010, the smell of cigarettes and collard greens, filled up every room in the house. Matching the standard NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority) cream-colored walls and mop painted roof that looked like little icicles had dried on the ceiling. The living room, being lined with black and red checkered draping that stuck together with magnets in the middle instead of traditional living room doors, led to a living room furnished with a red carpet. The carpet was covered in plastic lining so people with shoes never touched the carpet. Then there were the green and black couches that moved from each side of the room depending on Joanne's mood. The big green and black cozy boy that belonged only to Carlos-Paul sat in the far-right corner of the living room. The apartment in 4010 no longer houses this couple but if you walked in today the home looks the same but it is missing the power of their presence.

On facetime I place a pair of glasses before my father and ask him if he remembers the glasses, he says they look like his mother's glasses. I say no and tell him that they actually belong to his father. Paul's face lights up and releases a booming laugh all the lines on his face lifting to express curiosity and joy as he begins to reflect. Smiling wide my father touches the pointy part of his bald head resting his hand there before saying, "those glasses belong to a man who would have been 87 years old".

PW:

Those glasses belonged to a man who when he died at 71 in 2005 those glasses became nonfunctional, they became purposeless because there is nobody's eyes who they're suitable for. It's been 2005 – 2021 sixteen years (Inflection in his voice getting deeper). He died at 71, he would've been 87 years old.

A.V:

When? When was his birthday (I think it is kind of sad that I did not know his birthday, unlike all of my other grandparents I never had to call to wish him a happy birthday)?

PW:

March 28th, so those are cool, but they will never be useful for another set of eyes because they were specific to his.

PW:

Yeah, this is all part of aging, and especially if you have any health conditions oh forget it!

(Burping loudly and inconsiderately which has always been his thing).

A.V:

He didn't wear glasses when you were a kid?

PW:

No, Glasses are for old people. People who are old got health issues, not for healthy people. But the way this country seems to work it's in the best interest of the Mmmmmmedical (slowly saying the word as if he's putting together his thoughts, but in truth this is how my father gears up towards making points. He begins to speak in a performative way. A way that most ted talk speakers have not learned yet.) no that's not right (he says to himself) it's in the best interest of – AH I CAN'T EVEN SAY IT – (he makes out through a yawn) it's in the best interest of those who make health appendages and stuff that people wear glasses. Not that we encourage people to eat things and do things that are going to improve their vision, it's good to wear glasses and contacts (his last statement riddled in sarcasm). It's money, one of the horrible realities as you get older you start realizing if you're healthy you're in a small minority, if you don't need to take a pill or glasses or some kind of prosthetic, you're in a small minority. A-and the way it seems to be going we don't like those people, they don't make us no money, we want everybody to be sick and broken so this way we can take their money. And that's my observation about aging, it sucks. You become an addict of a sort, you're dependent on the healthcare system for everything, they wanna tell you to eat, how to eat it, when to it, and all these other things because they are good for you.

AV:

So, let's go back to your dad. (I realize now that I should have never asked this question. Not only was my father connecting his experience of aging to his father he was telling me what I learned and to me now although he was lost in a tangent it was not a bad one. Being so focused on the questions I wanted to ask about his parents I directed him away from himself and this writing after all is about him.)

PW:

(Ignoring my stepmother as he has learned to do without skipping a beat he continues talking)

They reminded me of my mother's glasses (you can hear me saying on the recording, I have those. Followed by the sounds of me getting off my bed uncomfortable creaking sounds to be linked to the rummaging through a glasses box where I keep my summer shades), and by the way if he couldn't find his own glasses he would wear her glasses, daddy was an all-purpose glasses wearer man.

AV:

I have her last pair of glasses. (Lifting them up to my camera so my father could see his mother's brown and dark speckled oval glasses frames)

PW:

AHHHH there's mommies' glasses!!! Look at mommy and daddy they're hanging out! (Bursting into laughter). See daddy wasn't really into fashion (cracking up) as an older man (repeating himself to get his point across) as an older man. Grandma fashion all the way to the day of death, grandpa it was just the purpose. So, look at the stark contrast in fashion difference, one look liked they could be (mumbling over trying to find his next word) what do you call these things when you shine the sun through the lens? (I responded calmly – Magnifying glass). Yeah, a

magnifying glass, my daddy just wanted to be able to see what he needed to see, he did not care how it looked. That was daddy but as a younger man yes, he was into fashion, as he got older he could care less.



Drawing this picture, I did not think I would make any attachments to it, I often feel separated from my work and the drawings I create. As I repositioned the glasses over and over again to draw them, I could hear my father in my head saying "look at mommy and daddy hanging out together" that was such a simple sentence, but it really rocked me as someone who does not believe in the energy of the dead lingering on the earth when they die.

A Selection on Ties

AV:

Do you feel like you dress like him in any ways? (Referring to my grandfather).

PW:

As I'm getting older um what I find there is relatability, I don't really dress up and you know daddy likes to look good (His tone of voice deep and chocolatey, indicating for a second, he was really feeling himself). But my daughter recently, you know we don't want to say which name (indicating that he was about to throw shade at me lol) but one of my daughters recently said that in my youth I was very narcissistic, and I don't believe I was a narcissistic person, I just believe that to the body you are given you must dress it well. So consequently, that's all that I do, when I see things that I appreciate as far as fashion goes, because I don't like to spend a lot of money on stuff, if I can find it in a cheaper version of the same thing I'll buy it. but one thing I don't compromise on is my shoe game, my shoe game gotta stay tight baby (sounding like a 1970s pimp/ player) I can't spend two and three hundred dollars on a pair of shoes like I used to but if I see a nice pair of shoes, I have to buy them. cause I like looking down at my feet and going HMM (his face expressing the joys of feeling himself in a good shoe) I recently went to a funeral, and I was given a compliment by someone I never would have expected to pay attention to the way that I look. And they were like "from head to toe look at you look at you" I was like in my – you know – at that moment I had to go "Damnnnn Right" (laughing and feeling himself). But as I've gotten older just like my dad, I don't have any purpose for it. I'm not hanging out I'm not going to lots of events, so why play dress up?

AV:

Whose funeral were you at?

PW

I – I don't wanna say, let's just say it was a family funeral

AV

Was it one of our cousins? (Yeah, he replied) oh oh okay cause I was curious as to why you dressed up. Cause I've seen you not dress up for funerals.

PW:

(Defensive about my last comment, pulling his neck back appalled at my words)

Oh, you ain't never seen your me not dress up for anybody's funeral.

AV:

I've seen you not suit and tie, dressed up for a funeral

PW:

But you ain't never seen me not dressed up. Typically, I don't wear ties anymore, I have literally a tote that's about two feet wide by nearly three feet long full of ties. (When I was a child, my dad had a big brown armoire that sat in his bedroom. It was arched at the top and about 5'5 feet high. When the doors closed on it, they made a clicking sound as the clasp came together and the wood touched upon itself. The wood was smooth and rich like mahogany, but the inside was not polished and smelled like older wood. My dad kept all of his work clothes in there. In the middle on a metal rod that slid forward and backwards were his ties. This rod once pulled forward revealed my father's extensive and impressive tie collection. In the morning before work and before dialysis, I would watch my father select his attire for the day, when it came time to picking a tie, he would take his time thumbing through the many choices before settling on one. Then he would place it on his shirt around his neck before tying his tie. It was an art, it took time, and it made him happy).

AV:

So why don't you wear them anymore?

PW:

Because I don't find the need for them, I'm – I'm happier in a turtleneck, if you pay attention, you'll see that most of the time I dress up I have on a turtleneck unless it's like a formal affair like a graduation, a wedding something like that then I'll wear a um – tie. But for the most part I wear a turtleneck, my chain, I'm fine.



The emerald-green tie was worn on Paul's first date with my mother Jacqueline, the tie is 34 years

Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created.

(In 2006 when I was about eleven my dad his kidney transplant, I was in the seventh grade, and we were at karate practice when his cell phone rang. My father who would sometimes keep his flip phone inside of the top part of his karate uniform where the two parts folded over one another because his phone would land on the knot of his black belt and would not fall out. That day my father answered his phone to receive a call from his nephrologist telling him that there was a kidney available for him and he needed to come into the hospital for the transplant that night. my father let the class and parents know that he would be ending class early because of his procedure. At the words kidney transplant I jumped up and down over and over with pure joy that the one thing I had prayed for consistently was being answered. Miracles do happen. My stepmother – although my parents were not married for another 3 years – drove us to the hospital that night and dropped my father off at the doorway to the entrance of Montefiore hospital on Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. It is one of the few times I remember seeing them kiss on the lips. My father got out the car and the next time I saw him he was being rolled through the hospital hallway post op and into an elevator that would take him up to his room. Once we were allowed to see him, I looked around the room at all the wires and tubes connected to him, band aids and tape, I do not remember our conversation much, but I can recall the joke he made about being on Percocet and the sky or clouds. He needed to rest and so we left, the funny thing about memory is that I do not know if I was with my mother or siblings, or any other person was in the room with me besides my father and the hospital equipment. It feels like a lot of time passes between then and my next memory. I was at church one day and was told that my dad was in the lobby. I left the amber colored pews that sat in the full bodied and grand sanctuary to the coolness of the white marble floored lobby. There stood my father in a white turtleneck with his gold chain hanging right under the neckline accenting his early 2000s Morris chestnut outfit. He had on black slacks a belt with a silver buckle and really nice shoes. I remember hugging my father wrapping my skinny arms around him, when I realized his belly that had always been there since dialysis was gone. I made a comment about him being so skinny and he looked down towards me mentioning that since the surgery he lost a lot of water weight. Within a year or two his stomach returned as he got used to new medications, but for a while he was a version of himself, I had never known. Mobile, happy, slim, attractive, he knew it and he could be himself...I think a version that was not sick.)

AV:

That's interesting to me – the remark about your outfit at the funeral.

PW:

Yeah! It was striking, your outfit from head to toe and I was like dammmn right, because yeah people overlook what they put on their feet, your feet take you everywhere. Before you walk in a room somebody done seen your feet. (The sounds of an ambulance come blaring through my window) So I'm in the market right now for a nice pair of shoes.

When The Going Gets Grim

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light.

- Audrey Lorde

AV:

Yeah, I think – I don't know sometimes you get out like more – like now of days you say more because you say more now (“you know why”) your older and more sentimental.

PW:

I saw Joval Wilson yesterday and Richard, cause Chris (my thirteen-year-old younger brother) we picked him up from his place in queens. Something that slipped out my mouth – and I was like wow, that's true. He's like how are things going brother Paul? And I'm like it's a day-by-day struggle. And even today when I was going through my thoughts, I was like man, day by day struggle and you just now said I'm starting to talk more. Why do you think a person talks more if they are going through a day-by-day struggle? (Prompting me to answer a question he knows I won't have the metaphorical answer to, and he has already decided that he has the correct answer “processing” I say unsure). More grim (grim? I say unclear as I expected to be) *Grim* (he said in a dark hooded voice).

AV:

You think you're grim?

PW:

I'm saying it is something that is grim that drives people to communicate more. What grim thing can make a person want to talk more? (Another question).

AV:

Death (I say slow and idiotically).

PW:

The prospect of me dying is a real one, that – I can't ignore anymore, I really can't ignore. I struggle, I struggle, I struggle a lot. And the only person who gets to see that, and the only person who gets to see that, well Jay and Chris get to see that (Two of my three younger brothers who live with my dad) they are becoming more and more aware, but Jean (My stepmother, who has probably been sitting on the couch next to my dad this whole time. She is never too far away from him physically). Jean has a habit now, if I'm sleeping, she comes and pokes me to see if I move. That's a scary thought, when she told me she did that I was like but why would you do

that?! And she said cause I just don't know, with all the stuff you're going through, (Now referring to himself) I can't breathe, my heart is out of order in terms of my blood pressure, and so forth I'm always swollen with swollen parts of my body you know. So, all I have left is to communicate thoughts of – I hope to be important, communicate the gospel, communicate love and experience. those are my things, because life is fleeting (Staring to snap his fingers repetitively four times as he talks) nobody (snaps) plans (snaps) on you not being able to catch your breath. You see those steps behind me? (Eluding to the four steps in my parent's ranch house that leads to the three bedrooms and bathroom in their home) just four little steps, I should never get to the top of those steps and have to pause to breathe. Jay and Paul Michael (Paul another brother, my father's Jr.) can tell you if we go for a walk, I have to pause several times, I can't walk uphill I can't walk up the steps, and this yeah, your dad Mr. Martial arts expert here, yeah, not anymore. I am on the prospect of teaching again at Montefiore back Wednesday – Monday sorry Wednesday Thursday, I think Saturday I'm not sure, and I'm not sure if I can do it. because I don't do demonstrations anymore, I can't I threw a side kick and fell down (He was laughing lowly but it my heart broke, my father was known for being the karate man, his side kick was beautiful he was a favored teacher in many schools and an excellent fighter, what did it mean that his health had taken that from him?). Ah one of my signature kicks, I threw it and fell on the floor – that's an indication I should not do that anymore. Challenges man challenges, so what else. (Letting off some uncomfortable coughs) What did you say?

I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.

- Audre Lorde

AV:

I said I don't know what to ask you right now.

PW:

(Laughing) Ask me anything you want, this isn't necessarily about me, this is about me and my father, I'm just giving you relatability from my perspective to him as aging occurs.

AV:

Was he sick?

PW:

According to his autopsy no he died of natural causes. That don't make no sense to me, "natural causes" some say he had high blood pressure and he went to sleep, and he had a stroke while he was sleeping. That could be a natural cause, he could have asphyxiated on his vomit. But since we are poor people, we can't get absolute answers.

I stopped recording here to read him my intro to this project, I cried through reading most of it and when I came to the end, he not only thought it was good but asked if I would write his obituary when the time came as most of it would already be here recorded.

Daddy on His Own Death

My Grandmother, Joanne E Wayans passed away October 31st, 2014, she was my father's mother. This was the second of my father's parents to pass on and as the responsible big brother, my father would again begin the funeral planning process of his parent. On November 3rd of this past year, we sat down to talk about the process of planning a funeral and its cost. During that conversation my father shared with me much of the same points Holloways talks about in her writing on the rise of black funeral homes in the south. My father touched on the many fees associated with the death of a loved one insurance money and where it goes and the remembrance of a loved one similarly to Holloway. Although my father who can be very short in his responses at times, he was direct in his answers. One thing that I picked up on was that for him the planning of his parent's funeral was a uniquely solo experience.

AV:

Granby's was more cost efficient? How much did it cost how much did the funeral cost?

PW:

In total about twelve thousand dollars

AV:

Did grandma have insurance? How much was the insurance pay out?

PW:

Ten thousand

AV:

Did you cover the two thousand? Did everyone pitch in or was it just you? Just you? (A fact I did not know). When it comes to planning a funeral could you walk me through that process because I do not know?

PW:

You're not expect to know at your age, the first thing is the person dies, once the person dies the hospital facility will contact, well I'm speaking from in the hospital, but the process is similar if the person dies in a home. The medical director, if they die at home the medical examiner will come and take the body to a morgue at a hospital, and from there the hospital will release the body after an autopsy has been performed. Once the autopsy has been performed the person is then given permission to take possession of the body – so once you then take possession of the body you have to contact a funeral home. The body stays in the morgue until its secured by the funeral home, now with all of this there are associated charges, transporting, prepping, there's a whole structure of charges that have to be, they are what make the cost of the funeral, like I said prepping dressing embalming, the actual service, transportation, all of those charges are put on a list by the funeral home for you. now it goes better when you have actual insurance, once you secure a death certificate, once the hospital has declared the person dead, the hospital gets in contact with the state of new York or whatever state to get you a temporary death certificate, and the reason that is important is because the insurance company will not remit any money to

anybody unless they have a copy of the death certificate declaring this person dead by the hospital.

PW:

Then there are little accessory fees, like the mail outs the card plaques that detail a person's rising and declining date, mail outs to say thank you for coming. (I held up my grandmother's card plaque) Yes.

AV:

Are the obituaries apart of those fees or do you make them yourself?

PW:

I did mine, for both of my parents I did the obituaries, I think I still have daddies in my stuff. I did mine but you can have yours paid, you just have to have the synopsis of their life drawn up and you just have to send it to a printer and the printer can do it. Or like I said you can draw it up on a computer and they can print it out.

PW:

The clothing that you choose, you choose the clothing for your deceased person or you can dress the body if you have the fortitude to do so. But most people don't have the fortitude to see what has happened to the body.

AV:

Why'd you choose this picture?

PW:

It was one of the more recent pictures of her at the time, and it detailed her fashion sense, and she was happy. I think when you post a picture of somebody it should be within reason of a recent time. I don't think I need a picture of me with hair, anybody who knew me within these last twenty years would be like that not Paul, idk who that is, and it should denote your character. That was my mom's character, my mom was a fashionable person who was generally happy so that's how I made that selection.

AV:

Did you write the obituary by yourself?

PW:

Pretty much yes.



Obituary

On March 4, 1936 in Columbus Georgia, Joann E. Wilson was delivered into this life, to parents Ida Mae Burkes and Frank Lee Wilson. Joann would grow and acquired the admiration and fondness of most who would come to know her. As for the rest, she would be content to say something like "ok they were not worth the effort anyway."

Mom spent her summers in Georgia with her family, learning a great many things one of them being how to cook. Mom would tell stories of the land she grew up on and all the various things that came along with that: such as the fruit trees and snake encounters. Mom would follow in the footsteps of Grandma Ida as a proper lady and a fashionista.

While attending school here in NY she would meet her one and only true love. A smashing handsome charismatic man - Carlos Paul Wayans. Carlos knew that Joann would be his lady love. Carlos made this fine lady Joann his wife January 7, 1955, in Arlington Va. Out of this fantastic union were born eight children, Antonio, Carlos, LeVan, Paula, Ricky, Paul, Vanecia and Ryan. Mom was not perfect but we will go with awesome. Mom loved to host. Growing up we were privileged to be exposed to both sides of our family, both mom and dad's family often were in our home enjoying the love of our family. Those were great times and memories. Mom made her home a special place for all she loved. We can't tell how many times we slept on the couch or floor, as she made sure if you came over you could rest and be feed. Mom believed strongly in the bonds of love and friendship. If mom had a banner she lived by, it would be love one another. Family is everything.

On October 31, 2014, surrounded by her family mom left this life to go and join so many others who have gone to heaven. We are happy to report that mom chose to accept Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior acquiring eternal salvation. Mom is preceded in death by both her parents Ida Mae Gibson and Frank Lee Wilson; husband Carlos; sons Antonio, Carlos, and Ricky; grandson Carlos; brother Wayne Wilson; mother in law Lillian Dowdy; in-laws Ethel, Benny, Charlotte, James and Eugene.

Mom leaves behind: sisters Judy, DeCarla and Sheryl; brothers: Clint and Brad; children: Levan, Paula, Paul, Vanecia, and Ryan; grandchildren: William, Raymond, Jason, Oneida, Devone, Ashley, Brandon, Amber, Paul, Michael, Jewan, Shanaiya, Jayden, Jeremiah, Christopher, Jariah, Josiah, Jaeza, and Ryan Jr.; great grandchildren Kandis, Estell, Carlos Jr, Masa, Raymond Jr., Aaliyah, Nikko, Genneva and Kelab; In-laws Howell and Elvira, Pauline and David, Edith, Antonette, Jean, Jacqueline, Michelle, and Johnny, Brenda Wilson, Willie King, Thomas Newell; nieces on moms side of family: Kimberly, Tremeka, Angie, Kali, Kizzy, Renita, Anita, Shontae, Shantina, Mattezia, and Maleequa; nephews on Moms side of family: Dramarcus, Rodrick, McKenzie, Vion, DeAndre, John, Brandon, and Martrez; cousins Emma, Wayne, Grady, Joe and Ruth; nieces on Dads side of family: Debra, Donna, Deldra, Kim, Charlene, Elvira, Renee, Brenda, Nadia and Devonne; nephews on Dads side of family: Charles, Benny, Keenan, Damon, Jimmy, Stevie, Shawn, Billy and Marlon.

A black community would anticipate the financial burden that would greet its members given the frequency of unforeseen illness death and associated cost of burial page

- Karla FC Holloway

May 11th, 2021 I attended my late uncle's funeral, in a Brooklyn church assembly that was in deep need of renovation. The hard church wooden pews felt like the restriction of the early church, made so that in no way could one find himself comfortable. Still on my left my tall now slightly wider father was leaned forward intently scrolling up and down the same notes screen in his phone. I peered over his shoulder to read the words of his obituary dating his life, accomplishments, and the people he was leaving behind. I could feel my eyes well up with tears, whispering to my sister who was equally uncomfortable in the pew next to me on my right, I said "Daddy is writing his obituary" my sister rolled her eyes as if to reiterate silently her belief in my father's dramatics and mine for indulging him. Silently I asked my father knowingly as if I had not read the screen already if I could see his writing. He passed me his phone and what is written below is exactly what he wrote.

Here I lie

Paul Michael Wayans sr 6th child of Carlos Paul and Joann Evelyn Wayans

Accomplishments

College graduate Hostos community college
Business owner Wayans taekwon-do
Bottom line health claims management services
Physical education teacher
Taekwon do instructor
Personal trainer
Husband & father
Homeowner
Competency demonstrated in-
Auto mechanics
Carpentry
Electricity
Painting
sheet rock installation
insulation installation l
Plumbing
Roofing
Land scaping
Photography
Artistry
Battery builder
Gardening
Wine and soap making
Hair and skin care making q

Now my time is up.

I'm thankful for all of the experiences that I've had good and bad.

I am thankful that this physical journey ends and that my eternal rest will be with God because of Jesus Christ.

I know my life is hidden Jesus Christ and not because I have done anything that would pardon me from the judgment of God. I am very thankful for the friends and the family that I have had over the course of my life some notable mentions master Leonidas Lopez my taekwondo instructor my dojo brothers Leandro Dominguez Juan Suarez Gabriel Pena Paul Garcia Geronomo Santana Mateo Julio Jose Vallejo Angel Lahara Washington Leon and Sonny Robinson. friends that made life a lot better burnell Nichols David Cordova Kirt Gittens Ashton Bristol Deland Johns Chuck Francis John Morales and Ronnie mothership Joyce.

some notable lady friends Carol Dyce Courtney Arrango Sharon Ferrigon Darcell Berridge and Kellie Harden and Claire Satur each person mentioned all played a very valuable part of my life and for this I am eternally grateful.

there are other men who influenced me and helped to shape who I am or who I was kirt gittens sr Othneil BinLey Harris Joseph Casimir Colin Young Peter Britton and Al Stuart and Ashton Senior of course respectively the mothers Lisa Casimir Ingrid Harris sister Jim Bristol Sisters in the Lord who very kind to me Junie Fuller Pat Stuart my journey man in the faith Dwayne fuller.

I will miss you all but truly I hope my life blessed you as you have blessed me leaving I hope I have demonstrated Love and imparted something of value to each one of you. the message I would like to render now is that if you have never given consideration to your eternal resting place, please do so, for life is brief at best, here today gone tomorrow - in a blink of an eye all that you hold dear - gone. there's a song that says have a little talk with Jesus tell him all about your troubles he will hear you and he will answer. Peace is something we all seek let that peace start with your eternal insurance.

I leave behind my beloved wife Jean who loved me and who I loved. The 5 most cherished people God has granted me Ashley Amber paulMichael Jewan Christopher. The siblings who afforded me the opportunity to be their big brother Vanecia and Ryan; the other siblings who allowed me to be the big brother when I wasn't the older brother Van and Paula.

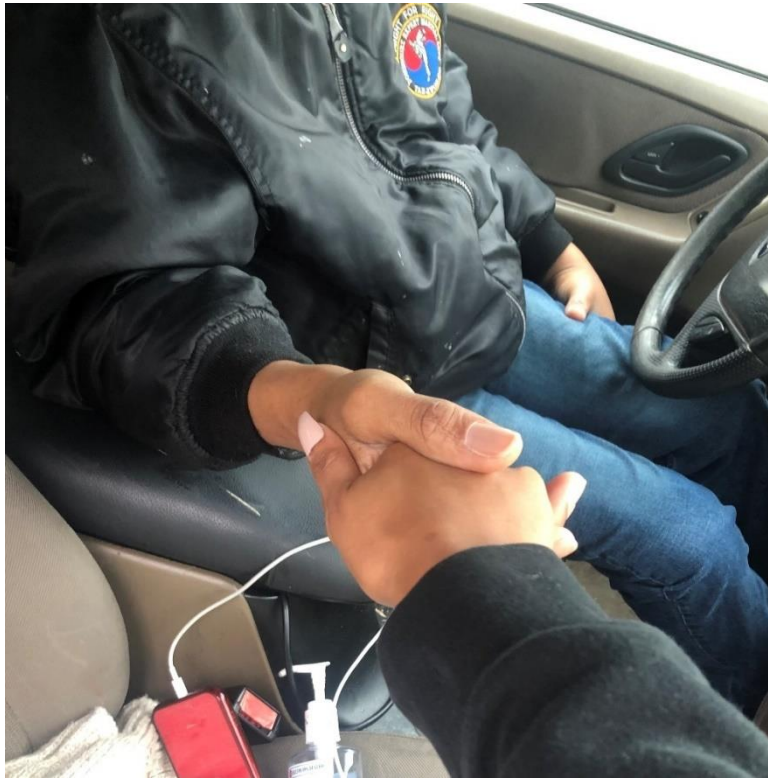
if I have not said that I love you hopefully I demonstrated that I did. For some this will be the last time we see each other and for others we will Meet again in the presence of Jesus. In your physical life, I hope you make time to square away your eternal insurance in Jesus Christ.

enjoy the repast
eat some food
have a drink
be merry
take care

Sent from my iPhone

It is strange to think that any one person is proficient in obituary writing as I do not think the average person has taken the time to write out their life and who they leave behind.

Faith Don't Fail Me Now



I could not conceive Mama actually dying. She had talked of it many times

- Karla FC Holloway

It's 7 AM and I have been awake for an hour, despite doing my breathing exercises and my finger holds as a way to navigate through my anxiety I cannot return to bed out of fear and worry. The fear of my own thoughts has swept me.

The Wednesday before Christmas of 2021, my father was diagnosed with congestive heart failure, my family was told that his heart was operating at 15% function and there would be a likely if not immediate need for him to have open heart surgery to correct the issue. My stepmother called me to share this news and asked me to tell my other siblings. Keeping my emotions intact I walked into my sister's room and repeated what my stepmother Jean (MJ is what we call her) had just told me. My sister nodded and I closed her bedroom door turned and walked down the carpet stairs of my home to my brother's room directly below me. I knocked on the door to find my father's name's sake lying in bed on the phone with friends, I began to repeat myself, the same words I had just said to my sister. My brother too nodded and I closed his bedroom door. I could feel the sting of tears begin to surface under my eyes and I opened and closed my fist as I began back towards the stairs, walking fast enough but not a run. I felt a full on break down coming, instead of crying first I began to sing a worship song "praise is what I

do". I reached the top of the stairs and directly to my right was my bedroom door, I walked through and shut the door quickly turning the lock. I sang "praise is what I do when I want to be close to you, I learned to worship you". Hoping to praise God in advance of a very bleak looking situation, I wanted to practice the faith I had always had that God is right with me in every situation. Still here I was afraid. I called my mother, she answered, and I explained repeating once again what my stepmother had told me, this time it was not controlled or in pace, it was broken, my voice was cracked from trying to breathe. I wanted to praise, I wanted to pray but I was afraid. This same week just two years prior my childhood best friend's mom had died from a medical malpractice, and it all felt too familiar. I wanted to hope but I was afraid. My dad currently had covid and I could not see him, I could not touch him, I could not be comforted by his hug which was really me laying on him while he patted my arms or upper back saying "It's alright, I know daddy's baby". My mother prayed with me and said she would call my father and stepmother as it had been a while since they had spoken, and she had been meaning too. I got off the phone with my mother, who although her prayer was beautiful and trustworthy in the power of the lord, I did not feel comforted. I picked up my phone and called my two college best friend's, Myesha and Carly, as I started to talk, I decided to add in my best friend of twenty years Samantha, because I knew I would not have the ability to repeat myself as I had just done three times before. When they had all answered the call I sat still in the darkness of my room, not fully detached from the tears of the night before where I had cried in pride of how far I had come in my education. Now I cried in fear that my father may die for real, not metaphorically in some distant future but in this reality where each day his pressure had been in the 200's and he should have already been dead. My three friends held space for me, they welcomed my brokenness in a way that I do not think I can repay. We sat on the phone for about twenty-five minutes before my father called me on facetime. I let them know he was calling, and I would return to our phone call, I answered, and my father was in his usual spot on the living room couch with the same blue Our Lady of Grace hoodie that he always has on. With the hood on and one corner of the hood tucked behind his ear like a strand of hair. My father asked me, "What was wrong?" with humor in his voice. He said that I looked like I was crying which I admitted without shame. My younger brother Jewan popped over my father's shoulder with his iPhone showing a facetime screen. Apparently, my brother Paul who was in the bedroom downstairs from mine was trying to get in contact with my father and without success called Jay (What we call Jewan) to get a hold of my dad. My dad said to Jay "What's up" Jay showed him the phone and, on the screen, where the two siblings I live with peering back at my father, he smiled and said, "Guys I'm going to call you back, I'll talk with Amb and then I'll hit you back". I laughed and started smiling childishly and said, "I'm the favorite". My father rolled his eyes and said "No, it is because" – I cut him off "I know, I know, I am your most emotional child and the most attached, so you want to make sure I'm okay". My father smiled and nodded when a group family face time popped up on the screen, apparently my siblings were not too keen on my father taking one on one time with me and they had waited long enough. My father and I both answered the call. We stayed on that call for about forty minutes, my dad explained what needed to be done and how he was feeling, my brother Paul sporadically shouted out how my father was going to live another ten to fifteen years every now and again. Most of the call however was childish bickering between siblings and my father falling in and out of sleep, at the point it was clear that my father needed to take a nap, I got off the phone with my siblings and returned to my friends, we talked for a bit longer and then I tried to go about my day. I do not remember if I did anything productive that day.

On Christmas morning as usual I called my father and talked with him, despite having covid my father said he was going to drive down to the Bronx to bring my siblings and I our gifts. My fathers' gifts are usually never any good, they are some girly items I never really utilize or some house socks, still he gives them anyway. My father said he was going to be by within the hour we live about twenty minutes from each other on the Sprain Brook Parkway, it is not a long drive. About two and a half hours go by and sheer panic floods over me, where was he? Had he fallen asleep while driving? Was there an accident? My father had admitted to my stepmother that he was falling asleep at stop lights lately, so my fear was not misplaced. I called my father and stepmother receiving no answer from either of them. A few moments later my father called saying he was outside, I headed out to get the gifts and to properly scold him. I asked what had taken so long and he said he got a call from his best friend Chuck, and he was talking for a while and so it took him long to leave the house. In the windows reflection I saw my brother exit the house and come to say hi to my father and grab the gift bag. My father was on facetime with my aunt Nene, she marveled at our ages and how adult we are trying to show us her new house and children, honestly, I could care less. This was the first Christmas at home with just my siblings due to covid, both my parents and their spouses had covid. Beyond that my father would be going into the hospital the coming Monday for an extended stay and for the first time in my life I could not hug my father. My father would not be allowed visitors at the hospital, I did not know the next time I would be able to touch him. When my brother walked away, I said to my father "Well since I can't give you a hug, can I hold your hand?" to which he replied "Of course". We held hands for a moment before he expressed that he was tired and cold and wanted to go home so he could go back to sleep. I rubbed the top of his hand with my thumb then told him I loved him. I put on hand sanitizer and closed his old truck door. I asked my father to text me when he got home, he nodded turned his Christian music on and waited till I entered the house. My dad doesn't know this but since I've lived in this house after I close the door, I peak through the glass to watch him drive away. I locked my door and waited till he pulled off, then went upstairs to see what terrible gift I got this year; pink fuzzy insulated socks and two pink scarves – my favorite color is brown.

On Monday December 27th, 2020, my father went into Montefiore South on Jerome Ave, the hospital he was previously employed by as their karate teacher. By Tuesday morning he texts me that he had been admitted and he would keep us up to date. My father did not keep us up to date, MJ did. I reached out to my uncle during that week leading up to new years and asked how he was doing? Ryan was my dad's youngest brother who he had raised like his son. Although I am born the day before my father, I would say Ryan is closer to my father than anyone. It was a brief text conversation where we exchanged sentiments on our wellbeing in regard to my father's health and his upcoming procedure. Ryan assured me that this was the best course of action to return my father to good health, reminding me that my grandmother his mother had open heart surgery after years of smoking and it improved the quality of her life. Ryan sent a mass text a few hours later to four out of the five of my father's children basically saying the same thing again and letting us know if we needed anything that he would be here for us.

On December 31st my father was discharged due to having covid. The surgeons felt they could not do his procedures because of his infectious rate and his blood pressure being exceedingly high. The hospital sent him home with the information that they would schedule him for a catheterization test soon and check for blood clots in his arteries before they would do the procedure. Unfortunately, they were going to do it at a different facility.

On Friday January 7th at 1:06 PM my father texted four out of his five children that he loved us in a group text. He had his catheterization procedure. I did not hear from my dad directly until the following Sunday, which informed me on face time ever so casually, from the couch that he was going to be having his heart surgery on the Wednesday of that coming week. My dad was very casual about it, and we did not talk for long. In fact it felt like it was becoming increasingly harder to get a hold of my father as Facebook family was stepping in to call all the time. Over the holidays I had received two phone calls from family, and they were extremely draining to navigate. People calling to “check on you” but really just talk about themselves and their feelings. The phone calls made me dread my father’s death, I could hear the phone calls from people calling to see how I’m doing, how my siblings (Who never answer their phone are doing), to express their sympathies and how much that my father meant to them. However imaginary my thoughts were in regard to his death, I do not long for this process. During this period, there has been a childhood friend who has actively taken issue with me and was adamant to others about her distain towards me and my personality, yet she has gone out of her way to inquire about my father. I am unsettled by human behavior.

I am a bridesmaid in a wedding on January 27th and have been trying to distract myself with my duties, so much so I forgot to call my father the day before his surgery. I woke up anxiously on January 12th, realizing I had not texted or called my father prior to his surgery. I called him on facetime at 9:08 AM, no answer. I was afraid I had missed my opportunity to say I love you. I worried, laying in my bed without opportunity to rest, my head pounding from lack of sleep and stress as I had been up till 4am the night before. I text my father.

“Hi daddy” I said accompanied by two white heart emojis.

“Hi darling how are you I hope all is well and I will talk to you when I finish surgery”

PANIC – Nope! Not a chance I was going to wait until after his surgery, what if something went wrong?

“Hi daddy I’m okay, I was wondering what time surgery was”. “I am sorry I did not call you yesterday”.

My father sent a voice note saying, “I should be going into surgery in the next twenty minutes, thirty minutes”.

“Did you make my voice note?”. “I thought you had dialysis first”. “Well, I am praying for a smooth surgery”. “I love you very much”. Followed by three pink heart emojis.

On Christmas eve, I called my father on face time doing my best to hold back tears. Sitting in his favorite place on the living room couch, my father asked me “What was up?”. I didn’t want to sound worried, but I shared how on an afternoon a few weeks ago my sister and I went through her voicemail and found a message from my grandmother Ruby who had passed. It was crazy to hear her voice again after two years. Before finding her message, my sister had to search through many voice mails from my father, they all said “Hey sweetheart its dad, hope all is well just calling to see how you’re doing. Give me a call back.”. I was jealous, I always answered my parents calls and I had no voice notes of affection. I asked my father to record a note for me, something I could play in ten years to hear his voice and his wishes for me. My father listened to

me while I teared up on the phone and agreed to give me my voice note. – my father did not record the voice note.

“I can never question your love for your dad, yes I’m still sitting here at the dialysis unit waiting on MJ to pick me up and then off to the facility. I am not allowed to have visitors I’ll be at the Eastchester Road facility Albert Einstein”

I began to text my core friend group letting them know the update on my father, so I had moral and spiritual support. I emailed my boss that I would be out of work and sent lesson plans for my students. I felt that I needed to be home.

I text my father for a while with no reply I figured he had fallen asleep. An hour went by, and my stepmother called me to tell me she had picked up my father and dropped him off. She was sitting at the kitchen table and let me know that his surgery would be at 1:30 PM. My stepmother who was moving the phone all sorts of ways began to tell me that she felt my father would be just fine. She shared that after years without insurance and my father’s health declining, she decided she was going to go back to work so that my father would have health insurance. My father protested the idea of my stepmother returning to a job that she hated just so that he could *maybe* be eligible for a kidney transplant. My father decided to call one last insurance agency, United Health, and was approved that day. On the same day the transplant uni called my father about if he had received health insurance, my father let the transplant uni know that he had gotten the insurance and it would be active in August. However, because kidney failure was considered a preexisting condition, the insurance would not cover the cost of a transplant for six months and would approve the surgery in February of 2022. During the wait my father’s health had declined, his hands and feet having massive swelling on a daily basis, his pressure was so high he was in serious danger and his fistula where his dialysis was performed was no longer functioning properly. Between October and December my father had countless tests done to try and determine how to manage his health and everything was unclear until the news about his heart failure. My stepmother went on to share that right before the surgery the swelling on my father’s hand and feet went down. All of a sudden, his pressure (Which has not been normal in years) was 128/76! A normal person’s pressure! There was no explanation and the doctors had not changed anything in his regimen. Although my parents were not aware since Thanksgiving, I had been in consistent prayer about my father’s hands and feet that they would be healed. I was often discouraged by the sight of his hands and feet after praying for days and then I’d see his hand swollen, and the sway of doubt would come over me. God had answered my prayer for a kidney transplant before would he not alleviate my father’s pain now? I was asking something small of God in sincerity. Was my faith not enough? Upon hearing the news of my father’s hands, I smiled and shared with my stepmom about my prayer but quietly thanked God inside because doubt had gotten the better of me. My stepmom explained that she knew that my father was going to be fine because next month my dad was going to get a kidney transplant in her mind, because why would God clear up all these issues not to give my dad the kidney?

During my phone call with my stepmom my father sent me a voice note.

“Good morning, Amber, here’s your note” the sound of the heart machine beeping in the background. “I just want to say I appreciate all the effort and how wonderful you and your sister and your brother are. But this note is specifically for you, so daddy just wants to say how much I

love you and I am privileged to have a wonderful daughter like you. Alright later”. The sound of my father’s New York Bronx accent rolling off his tongue.

“Fergit ever’ thing but yo soul, son. take your mind off ever’thing but eternal life fergit what the newspapers say forget yuh’s black.”

- Karla FC Holloway

I texted my father back that I loved him so much with three pink heart emojis. A few moments later my brother Paul came and sat on the couch with me and said he was going to call dad. He faceted my father who was lying in a hospital bed with the mildew green gown on. We all chatted for a moment, I noted that the voice note was great but not really what I asked him for. We joked for a few more moments about his health and his lack of eyebrows, I recorded the interaction just in case I needed it. On the call I shared how my friends were all praying for him.

AV:

We got the whole gang praying for you.

PW:

Me and Jean (MJ) prayed before we came upstairs – well before I came upstairs and that’s the end of the situation. It’s a win win situation. Either I come back to you guys, or I go see Jesus –.

Cutting my father off.

AV:

Alright, alright, pipe down.

PW:

(Laughing) I know sweetheart you don’t want to hear that.

Paul JR:

I told you, you have another ten to fifteen years.

I mentioned the call with MJ and how she explained the order of things and the way they have been moving. And that it’s possible that he could be getting his transplant.

Paul JR:

So, who knows you might be fully functional and back up and active in a year. (The enthusiasm of my brothers voice almost too high to be believable).

PW:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well see, prayerfully.

The conversation became playful, and my father tried to find a photo to send my brother and me. He asked the attending who came into his room to have him sign the surgical forms to turn off the lights. I knew that a nap was coming.

The rest of that day was not particularly special, I received calls and texts regarding my father and the inquiry of how the surgery went for which I had no answers. I had not heard from my father or MJ in hours and assumed that all was well being that there was no phone call about the worst having passed. At 7:36 PM my stepmother texted a large group chat of twelve individuals. "Hello everyone, spoke to the hospital, Paul procedure went well. He is resting probably drowsy from his meds, but we can call him later. Keep praying for continued recovery.". A flood of text rolled in from the group one after the other expressing their relief and liking and emphasizing each other's text. I hearted the message and emphasized my uncle's text about his anxiety decreasing significantly. I never responded in the text chain.

Friday January 14th at 12:23 PM, MJ text the same text chain. "Good afternoon, everyone, Paul's heart is back to normalcy which is 50%. The site where they went in is still seeping. So, the doctors are waiting for that to stop but he said he felt better so keep praying. Again, everyone hearted the text and talked amongst each other. I said nothing. I was at work and honestly, I rather just talk to my father, I had called the day before but got no answer, I assumed he was tired, so I texted "Hey daddy, was just checking on you, glad everything went well.". No answer.

After a friend's art showing I found myself at a downstairs café in Harlem on 145th st and St. Nicholas Ave, in the middle of a not so funny army vets set when my phone began to ring. I opened my purse and saw two letters, MJ. I handed my friend my purse and walked right through the man's set and grabbed the cold silver handle of the door. My stepmother never calls me regularly, it's always on facetime. If it's a regular call it must be serious. That is how she delivered the news to me about my father's conditions, so I felt like there was a need for concern. My stepmother explained how although my father's heart function is up his leg won't stop bleeding at the incision sight. The doctors have been applying pressure, but they can't get it to stop. She expressed concern that no one acknowledged that in the text thread and she was asking me to be vigilant and pray. As I stood outside of the basement café in twenty-degree weather with my hand freezing while clutching my phone I found myself staring at the floor. I would look at the gate then back at the stone steps on a loop. I could not do anything; I could pray and although it is not without effort, what could I do? I got off the phone with my stepmother her somber tone made it hard to return to a room full of uncomfortable laughter, bad jokes and a white man telling pro trans jokes wrapped in dry sexual predatory humor. I made my way home like the average New Yorker on public transportation accompanied by an uber only to realize I had forgotten my keys and needed to be let in the house. My brother let me stand in the cold for a while before allowing me in. About an hour into being home, I called my dad. It was 10:44 PM, we talked for three minutes. I asked him how he was doing, and he shared that he was tired, and his back was hurting. That he'd been laying on his back for three days and desperately wanted to roll over, concerned I asked why he hadn't, and he explained that because the incision site won't stop bleeding, he can't move or else he risks rupturing the site. He was frustrated because he

hasn't gone to the bathroom in days, and he has no desire to use a bedpan. He did not have to say it, but my father's face and eyes said that he was not ready to be at the place of pooping himself in bed. I don't think his pride could handle it. Rolling his neck side to side and attempting to adjust his shoulders I could see how uncomfortable my father was. I asked if a nurse could come and help him and he said yes, that if he called for one, they would come. He said he would do it soon. My brother catching wind of my father's voice yelled over and peered over my shoulder into the camera. "Hey man I called you!" I scolded my brother telling him that my father has been tired, and he hasn't answered my calls either. I asked my father if he was allowed visitors and he said yes, one a day, I asked if anyone had come to see him the last two days, he said no. I said, "Not even mom (MJ)", He said no. That broke my heart.

I woke up this morning uncomfortable, I'm feeling and worried. I mapped out the bus route to the hospital, despite it being nineteen degrees outside, windy and a New York winter, I could not sit comfortably knowing my dad is in pain and alone. I tried to sleep I tried to shake it off. Instead, I grabbed my laptop.

We Walk This Road Together

Mayer does not intend the paintings to stand alone. They are, each and every one, an occasion for a conversation between the artist and the viewer. Mayer comes to know himself-and we come to know him-through the stories he tells.

- Barbara Kirshenblatt - Gimblett

In March of 2022 I relocated to my father's house in Yonkers, for many reasons I fought the process but this Tuesday evening I found myself walking the half mile to my father's home from the bus stop. This is a walk I had done many times before, and it was one that was currently drawing on emotions of déjà vu and failure. How had I at twenty-seven ended up back in my parents' house, a job two hours away by train and bus, with no license which meant I had to walk this winding hilly road each day after work. Two lefts and a right followed by a very long road and a hill. Normally I am swept away by the simplicity of the homeowner life in my neighborhood. The few structures that don't feel like they fit, the supporter post's stuck into the brown, green washed grass "We support our Yonkers fire and police department" sign on flimsy card stock paper. Not today, today I had rediscovered my shazam music playlist and was dancing my way home, the same three songs playing on a loop, *Drive* by Clean Bandit, *Luna* by Bella Dose and *Thought I was Gonna Stop* by Papoose ft Lil Wayne. The breeze from this 68-degree day that was thick with humidity from the morning rain. The sky was warm and the feeling of summer approaching washed over me as I slid my leather jacket from my shoulders. I felt my self-strutting up the long road to my house. On a normal day this road is work, I have to be quite motivated to get home. It is strange, although I am not far from home the road is so long you can't even see my house at the top of the street. I only know it's there when a car passes around me and from the distance, I can see the red break lights come on as it finally comes to a slow stop at the stop sign that sits on the left of my house.

Papooses' song comes on and I can feel my most confident self-emerging as the beat rises in my headphones...I stop. There is a figure a few feet ahead of me on my left, I could feel a bit of fear rise from my stomach like little bubbles when you pop a cork. I turn my music down. It's rare to see people just sitting still on a car in this neighborhood. I squint as it has been getting dark on my walk, I looked the figure up and down. The shoes, the shoes were familiar, they looked like my dad's off brand low cut timberlands, which he stepped on from the back, so the front always bent a bit forward. "Daddy?" I said still unsure of if the figure I was seeing was my father. The thin figure turned their face towards me "Hey sweetheart" my father replied sounding tired. I walked over and inquired about what he was doing out leaning on a car. I think it is important to note that I could hear and see how discouraged my father was, both physically and mentally. His breathing was labored, his head was hung low, and his legs and feet were splayed in front of him like pegs just to keep him propped up but not really providing support.

AV:

What are you doing?

PW:

I went for a walk about forty-five minutes ago.

AV:

How long have you been here?

PW:

About twenty minutes

AV:

What happened, you feel okay? Is it heart stuff, breathing or energy?

PW:

I just ran out of energy. I went for a walk down the road, came up Ascot, went down Croydon, came up Allendale and I got stuck. I was walking and thought to myself this is the hardest walk I've ever been on in my life.

AV:

Well let me help you, you can put your arm around my shoulder, and I'll walk you back.

PW:

No sweetheart, go ahead home, you have something to do. Go make dinner.

AV:

Dad I'm not gonna leave you out here.

PW:

I almost called your mother (MJ) to tell her to come get me, literally just like I'm right down the street come get me.

AV:

Just put your arm around me.

PW:

I'm not doing that, that's weak. I'll walk with you though.

(We stood in silence for about ten minutes. Until he was ready, neither of us really looking at each other. He picked up his head quickly to initiate movement in his body).

PW:

Alright let's do it. (Mustering enough force to push himself off the car). Fuck (He says, as he exhales becoming level. My father very rarely curses and even less in front of his children. He immediately swayed. I put both arms out to catch him just in case he began to fall). I'm not gonna fall.

AV:

I'm not saying you are but just in case. I'm not going to let you hit the ground.

(We walk in silence, both of us just breathing. I don't know if I thought that once he started, he'd be able to make it up the road to the house, but it wasn't that at all. After about fifteen steps we stop. I was standing vertically to my father standing facing our house with both his hands in his jean pockets, looking dead ahead as if I wasn't there. He begins to speak).

PW:

You know what I just thought? There aren't any cars between here and there.

(Turning my head, I look to see that there are no cars parked for the next fifty plus feet).

AV:

Well, when you need to stop, I'll just squat down, and you can lean on me. (I could tell that my dad didn't like that idea. He didn't want to have to lean on me for support). Or we can walk on the left side where the gate is and can stop there.

PW:

Nah. Let's go, thirty steps.

(We set off walking, my arm hovering behind his back but never touching him as to let him know it was there. Counting every step in my head we had passed thirty-five. We took three more steps, I could feel myself anticipating forty steps, but he stopped. Thirty-eight. He inhales deeply).

AV:

Look at that more than thirty.

PW:

Mmhm, forty steps.

AV:

Thirty-eight (Why did I have to say that, why couldn't I have let it be forty. Turning my head to look back and make sure no cars were coming since we were now in the middle of the road. He was tired and there were no cars for him to rest on. Just silence and breathing. At this point I too felt tired. Maybe it was that I've had to do this walk twice a day every day since I moved in, and my boots were heavy. Or that it was humid, and I had on a turtleneck and my work hoodie while carrying my three-pound leather jacket. All while trying to steadily slow myself down to match

my father's pace. This walk was taking much longer than it normally would. My father sways a little. I move from his right side and stand behind him, back-to-back so if he wants to lean on me, he can.)

PW:

You're blocking the breeze.

(I crouch down so he can feel the air flow behind him. A few minutes pass before he is ready to go again. We are on the incline that reaches up towards our house. I can see the stop sign. As we begin walking, I just know that he can make it home I can see the back fence and the big tree outside the fence. We stop again. My father offers for me to go inside since we are so close. I am not going to leave him. It is the final stretch, and we finally step on to the grass outside the backyard's fence, a few feet from the stop sign. I was under the assumption that we'd go inside together. Instead, he walks over to his broken-down green Ford truck and rest his forearms on the hood).

PW:

Go inside sweetheart, I'm going to enjoy the air.

(I kissed my father on the top of his shiny bald head and turned to go in the house. I worried about leaving him outside, but I knew that he needed a moment, the same way I did.)

Summary

A life story takes time, more time than the year and a half that I have worked on this. Part of that is because as people we are constantly living growing and changing, and how we remember is directly related to who we become each day. I believe I had to let go of what I thought this writing was going to be and instead assemble what the material was giving me. The act of documenting memory is not as polished. I usually like writing; this work has challenged me to exhibit patience in writing and in seeing the full picture. So many times, I have felt that the closer you are to something the harder it is to see the fullness of the item, person, or problem. This may be the first time I have attempted to see my father as a whole being. Each time I step back to examine what is before my eyes I find something else that I want to inquire about. When I first began this paper for professor Plourde in 2020, I felt that I heard the holy spirit say leave no stone unturned about the things I ask my father. This work has been an opportunity to ask my father things I would not have dared to ask before and to connect with him as a person instead of a parent. Following my presentation at our schools Natural and Social Science Symposium, I was asked if it was hard for me to write certain things about my father and if I felt like there was anything I should not be sharing. This is a unique case in that my subject is my father and so I had permission to share because he would not have said anything he did not want documented. Still my answer is yes, there have been times during this work that I have felt angst about sharing. I've found myself while drawing or writing for this project praying that I would honor my father and my family, it is unnerving to feel that your work may strip someone of their dignity. All I can say was that I have been transparent with my father the same way that he has been with me. There has been more gained in the telling of his story than leaving things alone in silence. I have spoken of this work as a gift to myself and to my family, in David Graeber's writing Give it Away, Graeber questions if there is anything that can be a pure gift. I have almost always agreed with Graeber that a gift becomes charged during its exchange and it beckons the recipient to action. I want to sit with this line that Graeber says right before his hypothesis on the exchange, when objects of great value change hands, what really matters is the relations between the people. The gift I have been given are my father's words, his thoughts, his experiences, and his perspective on himself. I hold so much space and value for what he has shared and as his child I can receive this. What I have learned is that life stories and the act of documenting an experience, a group or people is less about the act of exchange or giving back to others what you have gathered and more about how that story. That lived experience, touches your life and shifts your perspective, warming your spirit. Our stories are not commodities, they are what move us to understand ourselves more and impact the human experience. The exchange here is between a father and a daughter by leaning upon materials from a partner and mother like Lorde, a father and daughter like Mayer and Barbra Kirshenblatt- Gimblett's relationship, a husband and wife's like Rosaldo and mother influenced by the loss of her son like Holloway. Each of these writers gifted me their stories and impacted the way I have seen, listened, and written throughout the development of this work. I hope that my writing is received in such a way as those who laid the path before me.

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