

One Was Missing

My younger brother, Daniel, and I were at a band competition in Rock Hill, North Carolina. We had all performed our best, and we had won the Grand Championship. This meant that we were the best at the competition. When the announcer said the Band of Gold had won, we all ran onto the field. It had been a long time since Gaffney's band had won anything this big. The rewards of hard work as a team were sweet. The band members headed back over to the busses and we were all yelling and jumping around celebrating. At the same time, Daniel and I both stopped. "I wonder..." he said. We suddenly became somber and thoughtful. We both felt that someone was now missing.

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My family and friends were gathered in the gymnasium of my home ward building in Gaffney, South Carolina. There were refreshments, dancing and presents, and a sense of joy. My older sister, Melody had just married Cameron Rognan and this was their reception. My family stood in a line to receive the well wishes of the guests. My other sisters and I were garbed in beautiful blue dresses, Melody's wedding color. Everyone was so happy for Melody; she had found herself a fine man for a husband. There was the melancholy, too, of losing her. She would be moving to California following her honeymoon. I especially felt the pangs. Melody and I had grown very close before she went to college, and now she was moving out for good. In the rush of emotions of the evening, only one person was missing.

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I was fifteen and it was an almost regular Sunday at church. I had gone to Young Women's and Sunday school like always. Only one thing was different. After the opening song

**Comment [BI1]:** This is sort of a dry, impersonal, non-engaging way to start your essay. Think of a way to really get your readers interested right away by starting with the most interesting part of the story.

**Comment [BI2]:** This is not very descriptive. Try to avoid clichés or over-used phrases to describe things.

**Comment [BI3]:** Implied.

**Comment [BI4]:** Who/what is Gaffney? Define.

**Comment [BI5]:** I'm not getting anything here. I know you're using this as your common theme, but it just seems very abrupt and random. Try leading into this more with some personal speculation or insight. This will also convey more emotion to your readers.

**Comment [BI6]:** You should mention this earlier to establish context right away.

**Comment [BI7]:** Don't spend so much time discussing the more mundane facts of these experiences. Everyone knows what happens at a reception, but what makes your story unique is your personal thoughts and experiences at this particular reception.

**Comment [BI8]:** Nothing can be "almost" regular. Either it is regular, or it isn't. It would be better to say something like it started out normal, but one thing was different.

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and prayer in Sacrament Meeting, Bishop Martin called me up to the front of the congregation. I had been working hard since I was twelve—doing value experiences and seven projects—and now at last I was receiving my Young Women’s in Excellence Award. I could see my family and friends looking at me, smiling. After church, they all came up and congratulated me. However, one familiar face was missing.

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Friday night meant football with the marching band once again. However, this Friday meant something else as well. I was a senior and this was senior night for the band members. This night would honor us and all the hard work we put into the band performances and playing each Friday. We all left our instruments with our friends at halftime and were escorted by one or both parents across the football field as our names were called. My mother, Rebecca, escorted me that night. Tears filled my eyes, but did not spill over. My mother looked over at me and knew what I was feeling: loneliness for the one who was missing.

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For the last four years, I had looked forward to this day. I looked forward with both excitement and nervousness. On this day, I would leave behind what I had known, what was familiar. I was graduating from Gaffney High School. I had worked through four years of English and math classes, research papers and calculus, and now had made it at last. The graduating class of 2007 sat in alphabetical order, so I was seated beside my friend, Bridget. During the graduation a few of the people around me and I started singing the Alma Mater with the chorus, and Bridget got teary eyed. “Of course, I had to sit by ya’ll. You’re making me cry.” I was crying too. I was leaving my friends behind. I was leaving the familiar behind. But there

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was another reason too. Over in the stadium seats, over where my family and friends were sitting, one was missing.

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My younger sister, Sarah, and I cry at **weddings**. It does not matter how well we know the bride and groom. They could be complete strangers and it would have the same effect on us. Unlike most people, it is not the actual ceremony that makes us emotional. They cry because they are losing the bride or the groom from their homes. That does not bother Sarah and me. The reception does it to us. We are happy for the bride and groom. We see how happy they make each other. We both hold it together until the daddy daughter song plays. The father gives advice and encouragement to his little girl while Sarah and I watch and cry silently. It reminds us of the person in our lives who is forever missing.

**Comment [BI9]:** Whose wedding is this? You never say.

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From the time I was twelve until a little after I turned fifteen, my father, Mark, fought with leukemia. At first, he joked about it when his hair started to fall out, trying to make us laugh. Sometimes, I think he had a better attitude than I **did**. He was less frightened. He had a positive outlook until he started getting **towards** the end of his fight. Then, he got scared and said life was like a nightmare. That is when the younger kids in the family started to get nervous around him. Right near the end, he started to get better. He had more energy and he got out of his wheelchair. We went camping with him during that last summer. We got to build a few more happy memories.

**Comment [BI10]:** In American English, you spell it "toward" without the "s" at the end. It's actually in British English that you spell it "towards."

In September, Melody was getting married in Utah. Mom and Dad flew out to see the wedding. Dad never made it to Utah. His immune system was down, and he caught pneumonia

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on the plane. He was hospitalized in Las Vegas, one of their layovers. Mom stayed with him up until the wedding, left to see Melody, and came back. Dad went into a coma. The older siblings went to see him in the hospital. Nathan, who was watching us younger children, wanted us to go too. Mom vetoed that idea. She wanted us to remember Dad how he was before. I am grateful for that wisdom in her. Dad died about a week later. It was the night of Daniel's and my band competition. We could feel he was gone, and the older siblings confirmed our suspicions when we arrived home. This is why Sarah and I cry at weddings. We know he will be missing at ours. Dad will not be there to be happy for us and give us advice and tell us we always be his little girls and he is there for us. This is the man that was, and will continue to be, missing.

**Jessica DeLand's Response:**

**What Works:**

I love the sentiment of this piece. I can tell that your father was really important to you and that you miss him very much. I also love how you constructed this, with the reader always wanting to know who it is who is missing. It kept me reading so I could find the answer to that question.

**What Doesn't Work:**

It may be because this is such a difficult, personal topic for you, but I felt a lack of emotion in your writing. You spend most of this piece relating the dry facts and mundane happenings of these events without ever really focusing on or addressing the real issue at hand: the absence of your father at these events. I would suggest you rewrite this piece trying to write from a much more personal voice. How did you feel inside when these things happened? Write it down, no matter how messy or confusing it might be. You can always go back and revise later, but right now, you need to get that emotion down on paper. This will also help with another problem I noticed. Your writing is very choppy because you are using a lot of simple sentences. If you push emotion into your piece, it will help give your writing fluidity because it will become a bit more "stream of consciousness" and much less a list of "here's what happened." Doing this will also help you avoid clichés and overused phrases because you will be writing in a very personal voice.

I know that this emotion is there because I can feel it hiding beneath the surface of your piece. You just have to unbury it from all of the things that are not really important to what you are really trying to say. I applaud your efforts to share such a difficult, personal topic in writing, and I wish you the best of luck as you revise.