

Why me?
By Daniel Dover

I still remember everything like it was yesterday. It was mid-way through 2018. My mom got a new boyfriend. I really liked the guy. He always wanted to show me how to do work around the house or how to work on a car. I liked spending time with him. His name was Billy. My mom loved Billy. Billy and I had the same taste in music. He loved newer rock bands and so did I. A really popular band was coming to Saint Louis by the name of Five Finger Death Punch. I wanted to go really bad. I asked Billy if he'd ever heard of them and he told me, "I love Five Finger Death Punch man. I was thinking about buying tickets for their show, would you want to come with me?" I couldn't believe that I was getting an opportunity to go and see one of my favorite bands. I was ecstatic about going. I was in such awe about the concert that I forgot I had a vacation to go on with my father. I was really upset about not being able to see one of my favorite bands in person. Billy wasn't upset with me; he knew I forgot about the vacation. I didn't know this at the time but that is one of my biggest regrets so far in life, not going to that concert.

My birthday is in early October, so I would have been turning seventeen in late 2018. I didn't have a car to get myself back and forth to school and work so I tried saving my own money from my job to get a car. I would always look on Facebook Marketplace for vehicles that I knew I couldn't buy because they were well out of my price range. Well, anything was out of my price range because I was broke. I finally told my mom, "I can't afford a car myself mom, I just don't have the money for it." My mom

said, “Daniel, I will try my best to help you out with a car, but you know I can’t buy you a super expensive car.” I understood where she was coming from because we were a pretty poor family. It was just me, my mom, and my little brother, well until Billy came into our lives. I eventually found a car that really sparked my interest. It was a cheap, somewhat reliable first car for a seventeen-year-old.

I asked my mom if we could go look at it, which thankfully she agreed. My mom, Billy, and I all drove about twenty minutes to go look at this car. It was a 5-speed, 1998, Ford Mustang for \$3,000. It had over two-hundred thousand miles on the odometer which I didn’t exactly like, but as long as the car ran and drove, then I didn’t care how many miles were on it. The car was a very faded red, as if it had sat out in the sun for the past twenty years, which it probably did. The body was in pretty good condition considering it had been driven over two-hundred thousand miles. There was no rust on it at all which would have been a deal breaker for me. I wanted to take it for a test drive around the block which the owner let me do so. Billy rode with me while I was test driving it. He wanted to make sure that nothing major was wrong with the car if I were to consider getting this car. The car ran well and drove smoothly for being twenty years old. We eventually left and I was pretty upset because I didn’t think I would be able to get the car.

A couple of weeks later it was finally my seventeenth birthday. My family took me out to dinner for my birthday at a nice Italian restaurant. I got my favorite pasta and got cannolis for dessert. The servers even wrote “Happy Birthday Daniel” on the plate in

chocolate sauce which is a very fond memory for me whenever I have cannolis. After dinner my mom wanted to go to my older sister's house so she could give me my birthday present and wish me a happy birthday. When we pulled into my sister's driveway, I saw it. The mustang we looked at a few weeks earlier. I was absolutely shell shocked. I wanted to cry tears of joy. My first car. Billy handed me the keys and said, "Happy birthday buddy, this is my gift to you." I gave Billy the biggest hug and immediately got in the car to take it for a spin.

That same night my mom and I were out and about, driving around just having fun. She said she needed to stop at her friend's house to pick something up, which didn't raise any suspicions. It was very normal for us to stop at her friend's house to pick something up. So, to her friend's house we went. We arrived and I figured I was just going to stay in the car. I pulled out my phone and my mom opened my door and said, "Come on, let's go." "Uhhhh, ok," I reluctantly agreed. I had no idea what my mother was dragging me inside for, but I didn't want to argue. We walked inside and there he was. A puppy with a bow around his neck. How could this birthday get any better! I named him Neo, which means "gift" in Setswana. I thought that was a pretty fitting name for him.

Billy and my mom decided to take a couple's trip shortly after my birthday to Branson Missouri. I was so happy for my mom. She found a man that she really loved. I got pictures of the fun activities they did in Branson and was kind of jealous I'm not going to lie. They did bring me back some souvenirs, so I was happy with that. When they got

back they told me they got engaged in Branson and I was so happy for them. We could all live together as a happy family.

Billy eventually got tired of the small two-bedroom apartment we were living in and decided to buy a nice four-bedroom house for us to fix up and live in instead. We did all of the work ourselves to fix it up. I was so excited to finally have our own house and really feel like a complete family. We got the house to a point to where we were almost ready to move in, we were so close. I was getting more and more excited day by day. Billy worked his ass off working on that house and my mom was getting all of the apartment packed up to get us ready for the move. The house was beautiful, well after we had fixed it up of course.

Billy was starting to get sick, really sick so we had to put the house aside while he got tests done and a bunch of bloodwork done. We waited and waited as Billy kept getting sicker. We eventually got the news. Cancer. Stage four lung cancer. We were absolutely devastated. This took a toll on our family.

We had to sell the house to move elsewhere since the house wasn't quite fixed up yet. Billy was doing all of the work to the new house and since he was sick, he couldn't do that work anymore. We decided to move into a bigger apartment so we could be comfortable and have a little bit of more room. Billy was getting worse though. He was all drugged up from all of the medications he was on from the hospital and he

was a completely different person. He would always say stuff that he doesn't remember, or he wouldn't be very coherent and just wouldn't make sense.

Billy made it very clear when he first got his diagnosis that he would not get chemotherapy. He made that clear because his mom also had stage four cancer and all the chemo did was prolong her suffering. Billy was eventually put on hospice and was pretty much bedridden. Billy kept getting worse every single day. He was a walking skeleton. I hated that I didn't have any control over the situation at all. I felt powerless and I was really losing hope for Billy. March 14th, 2019, Billy passed away peacefully.

Billie's passing put my mom in a rut. I've never seen my mom hit rock bottom before, but she did. I tried to be there as much as I could for my mom and I tried to comfort her, but it truly wasn't enough. She was a train wreck. Our family was in shambles after Billy passed. My mom started to not go to work, the bills weren't getting paid, and my car insurance wasn't getting paid either. We were getting closer and closer to getting evicted. Months after Billy passed away, my mom woke me up and told me we were getting kicked out. I panicked. I was freaking out. I cried because I didn't know what to do, I didn't know where to go. I had nowhere to go. I texted my aunt and asked her if I could stay with her for a while and thankfully, she accepted me with open arms. I called as many of my friends as I could to help me pack my stuff and get it out of that apartment as quickly as possible. I will forever be grateful for those people that helped me when I was at a low point in my life.

I eventually got settled in my aunt's house and thanked her for letting me stay with her for a while. My mom, on the other hand, had nowhere to go. She was living out of her car for a couple of months, and I felt horrible for her. There was nothing I could do to help her. I hated that we had to go through all of that in such a short amount of time. My little brother had to go and move in with his dad, my mom was living out of her car with my dog, and I was staying with my aunt. Our family was torn apart. It absolutely broke my heart. Why did this have to happen to my family? *Why me?*

It took some getting used to living with my aunt. I was still trying to adjust to living in a different home with a different family, even though I stayed the night there all the time with my cousin. It was still a very different feeling to me. I started my senior year of high school living with my aunt. I eventually found a new job through a friend of mine working as an Oil Change Specialist at Valvoline Instant Oil Change. I loved that job; the people there really helped me escape from the reality I was living with.

I was doing well in school, and I had a job that I really enjoyed. I was starting to feel happy again. My aunt was really supportive and loved having me around. I was going through a tough time and had no reason to lie to my aunt, but I still chose to, and she caught onto me very quickly. I would always lie to her for no reason, even about the smallest things. I lied to her about a box of brand-new cereal once, a box of cereal for crying out loud. What was I thinking? My aunt started to resent me. She hated that I was living there because I always lied to her for no reason. I guess I just felt like my aunt

wouldn't like what I was doing outside of school and work, and I just felt the need to lie to her.

One day my aunt gave me an ultimatum. She had a look on her face that I've never seen from her before. It was a very serious look but there was something more to the look she was giving me. It was a very hateful, regretful look. I don't know how to describe it, but she was furious when she swung my door open. My aunt told me, "Daniel, I am getting sick and tired of the constant lies you utter. I will give you two choices. You cut the shit and straighten up or you are out of here. You choose." I didn't know what to do or say. I was just stuck there. I opened my mouth, but no words came out. Tears started flowing down my cheeks, but words didn't come out. I ran over to my aunt and bawled on her shoulder and apologized profusely. I felt like the worst human ever for lying to this wonderful lady who let me live with her when I was in need of a place to stay. I hated myself.

I waited for a day when no one was home besides my uncle. I called my dad up and told him I wanted to live with him as soon as possible. I took my aunt's words a little too literally. I definitely got out of there. My dad rushed and picked me up a few hours later. I packed all of my stuff as fast as I could and loaded it all into his truck bed. I told my uncle I was out of there and he hugged me and told me good luck on my journey to a new life.

I started a new life completely. I lived in a big city my whole life and moved to a town of less than two thousand people. It was a culture shock to say the least. I felt out

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of place. I didn't tell anyone I was moving away. I didn't even tell my mom. I hated moving

away from my family for a while, a long while. I resented living with my father for so long. I cried and cried all the time. I wanted my mom so bad. I missed her and my brother. I missed Billy. I missed my family.

My father used to be a big alcoholic, and I hated living with him. He would always get shit face drunk and verbally abuse everyone. It probably didn't help that he was on testosterone either. Pure testosterone and alcohol don't mix well together, I guess. I was afraid of my father. I was afraid that he was going to lash out one day and really hurt someone. He drank so much that his liver was starting to fail. He weighed over three hundred pounds. That's when he realized he needed to change. After all of those years of drinking every night, that's what made him realize that he needed to change. Not the fact that he was terrorizing his family or belittling them, but the fact that his liver was failing him. He came around to his senses and stopped drinking.

He went cold turkey and quit drinking completely. He started going to the gym twice a day, eating healthy foods. He was even starting to become level headed finally. My father finally became the person I've always wanted him to be, my hero.

I eventually came around to enjoying living with my father after he sobered up. I was starting to feel happy again, I was feeling at peace. I don't know where I would be today if I didn't make the move. I love my family and I am so happy to have them around me. That's how I ended up in Canton Missouri.