

# Finding Light in Dark Spaces

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One of my fondest childhood memories was when my late stepfather, Mike “Perky” Perkins, decorated our house for Christmas. I never met any adult who loved Christmas more than he did. He would go all out adding more lights and decorations each year. He was proud of the fact that we had the best-decorated house in our neighborhood. Christmas of 2015 was the year Perky finally reached his goal of decorating the entire house. We had lights everywhere. The entire house, front and back, was outlined with lights. Lights were around every door, window and he even put lights around our mailbox and side rose bush. Our house glowed and shined in the darkness. It was truly amazing. Unfortunately, that would be the last time I would see those lights go up. That was the Christmas Perky suddenly passed away. I never realized how much of an impact his sudden death had on my life until years later.

Friday, December 11, 2015, started like any other day. I woke up and got ready for school. I was extra excited that morning because I was getting out of school early for a dentist appointment. Then my mom was going to take me and my siblings to Walmart after our appointment to buy stuff to make cookies for our family Christmas party the next day. My stepfather Perky had the day off, but he had already left the house to go hunting with his nephew Jeffery up in Chester-town. Little did I know, I would never again see him alive.

That afternoon, while at Walmart, my mom received a phone call from Jeffery. My mom had him on speakerphone, so I was able to hear the conversation. Jeffery said there was an accident. He went on to describe how he found Perky lying face down on the ground not breathing, and how he called 911. Perky was on his way to Albany Medical Center via helicopter and to get there as soon as possible. After my mom got off the phone, we left the grocery cart full of cookie stuff in the middle of the aisle and rushed out of the store to get into the car to go home. My siblings and I were scared and didn't know what was happening. Fast forward to the next day. I remember seeing Perky in the hospital bed with wires all around him, hooked up to a ma-

chine. The machine was keeping him alive. He was asleep and looked peaceful. He was never going to wake up. My heart ached and it was broken. I had so many thoughts run through my head. I couldn't understand; he was so young and full of life. He died that afternoon due to a massive brain aneurysm.

Losing Perky was hard for me. He had been in my life since I was two years old and was a second dad to me. I was in a bad spot for a while after losing him. I did not know what to do or how I would overcome something so heartbreaking. All I could think about was the time we had spent together, and all the good memories I had with him.

Time heals and it has been eight years since his passing. My family and I visit Perky often. We decorate his stone every year for Christmas with solar lights and we make sure it is the best lit up stone in the entire cemetery. My mom is now remarried and I have a new stepfather who is just as amazing as Perky was. I also have another little sister. I couldn't be happier for our new family. While I miss and love Perky so much, I realize that life is way too short. We are on borrowed time and tomorrow is never promised. I have learned to not to sweat the small things and to stay humble and kind. I've learned to cherish what you have and not take anything for granted. I've learned to enjoy life as much as possible and live it to the fullest.

