

Every time I go to a wedding or a dance, I have to ask multiple people for help tying my tie. Regular ties are hard enough. Bow ties are impossible.

My dad could tie a bow tie and make it look easy.

Unfortunately, my dad died before he was able to pass on that skill.

If I had a ticket in my hand, it would take me back to a time before my father was ill. He and I would go hiking in Iceland. My dad loved to hike. When I was young, he and my uncle would take extreme hikes, forging trails where none had even existed. They hiked Glacier National Park, the Grand Tetons, the Atlas Mountains in Africa and were planning a trip to hike in Iceland. I always wanted to go on those hikes with them, but he got cancer and the hikes ended before I was old enough to join. He never made it to Iceland.

Some of my best times with my dad were on Boy Scout camping trips. My father wasn't always the best outdoorsman among the dads, but he was one of the most competitive. He would pack as minimally as possible and always try to make our fire the old-fashioned way, without technology. We'd generally fail and have to resort to lighter fluid. But it never stopped him from trying it again the next time.

There are so many things I've missed out on with my dad. He wasn't there to teach me to shave. He wasn't there for my first school dance or my first high school football game. And he wasn't there the first time I asked a girl for a date. I'm sure he would have had plenty of advice.

I really missed him when I was learning to drive. My mother definitely wasn't the better driver. My dad loved his Tahoe as much as he loved his family. When we went out, my father was always the driver. He always knew the fastest route and could get anywhere, even without GPS on his phone. He kept an enormous atlas in the backseat. He also kept a mini Astros bat between the two front seats, a free giveaway from a game at least 15 years earlier. He said it was in case he needed to defend himself or his family against road rage. Thankfully, he never had to use it.

He gave me the same bat to keep in my car now that I am the "man" of the house. I haven't had to use it either. Luckily, the only road rage I've encountered came from my mom as she was trying to teach me to drive. She was terrified every time I got behind the wheel. We often rode in silence, broken only by her smacking on the window every time she thought I didn't brake fast enough. I had never missed my dad more.

My dad was brilliant at math and he always helped me with my homework. I really could have used him last year in pre-calculus.

He'd give me advice on how to treat women. He tried to talk to me about the birds and the bees when they showed that video in 5th grade. But 5th graders think they already know everything, so I didn't listen. With hindsight, I wish I'd listened. My father wasn't always the biggest talker, but if you got him on a topic he liked, he would talk for hours. I wish I'd written down everything he said.

My father won't be there for my high school graduation. He won't be able to take me on college visits and help me make one of my most important life decisions. He'll never meet my future wife or his grandkids.

I'd love to go on that hike with him, alone in the wilderness, where we'd have nothing to do but walk and talk. I'd talk to him about going to college. I know he'd have a lot of good advice. I'd talk to him about my future, my career as an engineer, and the family I hope to have some day. My ticket would be priceless.