

On May 17, 2018 I lost my Princess, Carman. We had nearly 20 years together and I was and remain thankful for every moment. Our time together was far too short.

I grew up in Algonac. After her Divorce, my Mother moved us to Chesterfield. After my own divorce, I moved back to Algonac, moving into what had been my Grand Parents home. I was blessed to have met Carman and we fell deeply in love. We got married, and soon after we were blessed with the arrival of our son, Ryan. Carman and I each had a daughter from previous relationships and as they were literally a day apart in age, they quickly grew close. Once Ryan came, the hilarity rose to even higher levels.

When we met, Carman and I were both working as Paramedics. She full time, me, contingently as I had moved on to another career, but still loved EMS. While pregnant with Ryan, she hurt her back lifting a patient. As she was pregnant, they could not safety assess or treat her injury. In my opinion, the workers compensation aspect made it even worse. Carman has always had a hard life.

Carman was never able to return to work as a Paramedic, and I believe it broke her heart. But she had her family and it drove her. As the years went by, the effects of the injury progressed. She had good days, which she wrung every last bit out of, and bad days that would rack her with pain and confine her to bed. Frequently for days. Through it all, she fought. As our children grew, so did her tenacity. Her determination to be a good Mom grew and kept pace with the effects of her injury. She was courageous. She was brave. She was loyal.

Our Daughters grew up and largely moved on with their lives. Ryan became everything to us, particularly to Carman. Carman once told me, Ryan said “You have one job, Mom! Get me where I need to go!” We both laughed. It was quite a special moment. The truth is, it wasn’t a “job”, it was her calling. It was her purpose. Doing everything she could to prepare Ryan for adulthood. To help him grow into the fine young man he is becoming. We always knew we had been blessed with Ryan.

Ryan, although starting a tad later than many kids, quickly took to football. We became football parents. Carman would text me continuously during games when I had to work. The cold weather was brutal on her, but she positively glowed with how her son was maturing. She made friends with a few “Football Moms”. It was sometimes hard for her to get out of the house, and these friends helped her in many ways.

Soon, Ryan came to love wrestling as well. A whole new world opened to us all. The workouts are far more intense (sorry but it is true) and the traveling is much more demanding. Carman made friends with many of whom I took to calling the “Wrestling Mom Mafia”. Carman’s phone, it seemed was constantly going off with “WMM” text traffic. When I was able to make the meets, I was struck at how all the WMM, Moms (and Dads) were so welcoming and loyal to all of the kids.

As time went on, I became acquainted with the Wrestling Coaches. They are completely driven to help their kids. Words simply fail me in describing my perception as to how motivated they are to help these kids grow into young adults. Frequently, a coach or occasionally, another team mate would give Ryan a ride home after practice or a meet. I thought that was nice. The full extent of their efforts were not obvious until after Ryan lost his Mother.

Carman became close to several WMM Moms. During the Mother’s Day flower sale, she was out there with them, in the weather. I have spoken to several of the WMM Moms who were there. They told me that Carman had them in stitches, despite the weather and her car getting stuck in the mud. I knew she would pay for this, being out in the rain and cold. I also knew, from hard earned experience, that trying to talk her out of it would be futile. She was having a good weekend, was with friends, and she wouldn’t miss it for the world.

Once the word of Carman passing away got out, Ryan’s Coaches and Team mates were on it. Coach Ranger showed up with a Team Mate “The Silent Ninja” aka: “The Silent Assassin”, to get him away for a bit. Team mates took him out. It helped. If you were one of these boys, know this **YOU HELPED RYAN A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT!**

Ryan told me he wanted to go back to school for a day, before the funeral. I spoke to Coach Ranger to outline contingencies, and let him go. I got a call from Ryan at about 10:30 that morning. I panicked when I saw his number on caller ID. He sounded happy. The Football Coaches had done something incredibly nice for him and he was calling to tell me about it.

Ryan's Teammates were there during the viewing, funeral and wake. They would politely line up to shake my hand before they left. I took to thanking them in groups. 5-10 at a time. Big hugs. One of them whispered to me, tears in his eyes "I went through something like this a few years ago. I can help Ryan get through this." I told him how incredibly proud his father was of him. How mature he had become, being able to leverage that experience to be able to help someone else. I told them all, and I meant it. "Well done". Where did these fine young men learn to be there for a friend? Family, true had a huge impact. But what made it real, was their Coaches. Please take a moment and consider that. We as a community are blessed. Yes, my heart is broken right now, but it is objectively true. The Coaches have taught our kids what leadership is. What stepping up and helping a friend is. What it looks like. What it feels like. Then these kids stood up, and did it themselves. Please take a moment and reflect on this.

Early on, Kayla, my daughter, showed me a website. Every day, a Wrestling Mom Mafia Mom, or a Football Mom would bring us dinner. I was stunned. I have no words. I lost quite a bit of weight, I still can't sleep very well, but it is kind of funny as we as a family get excited every day at about 5pm, looking forward to a visit and a Mom cooked meal. Dads, you can back me up (if it is safe to do so) Mom cooked meals just taste better. It might not be right, and yes, teens and Dads are capable of feeding ourselves, but Mom cooked meals taste better. It's just the way it is. We didn't make the rules.

I put out early on, that if people wanted to donate money in memory of Carman, to please do so to the Athletic Department of Algonac Schools, (Attention Mr. Landrum). I recently turned over quite a bit of money to Mr. Landrum. I hope that we will be able to leverage this money into something sustainable so that many kids in the future could be helped, much as how from time to time, we were helped. Carman would really love that. If you are moved to, please keep this in mind. Your assistance may be asked for in the future.

In closing, I just want to say Thank you. The thoughts, prayers, well wishes (and food!!) have been awesome and very humbling. I have heard Coaches call out "WHO ARE YOU?!" to the different teams. "MUSKRATS!!" they'd respond. "WHAT ARE YOU?!" they'd call next. "FAMILY!!". It isn't just a thing they say. They mean it. I have experienced it. In the worst two weeks of my life, I experienced it. Full in the face and it is amazing. Families stepping up to help mine. Teammates literally falling over themselves trying to get in to help my son. Coaches and staff stepping up in ways that in no way could be construed as executing a policy. They stepped up because they are good human beings. Doing the right thing. Making decisions, acting in ways that will echo in many lives for as long as they live.

I can only say, Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Jim Osterland