

In the early hours of July 19, 2023, our father was violently killed in a dog attack in a homeless encampment in Bend, Oregon. The savage nature of his death highlights the vulnerabilities that homeless people face, the inevitable fate of those that society has discarded as hopeless and incurable. What we fail to consider beyond our myopic lens is that these human beings are people, people with stories, families, and depth. Here is Joe Keeton's story.

Joseph Taylor Keeton was born on October 11, 1966 to Thomas Keeton (20) and Rita Keeton (21) in Wichita, Kansas. The virtues of the dead are always magnified, but when we say our dad was special, we mean our dad was special. He was unusually intelligent, insightful, and talented. He played musical instruments beautifully without any formal training. He was a deeply creative artist, a cinephile, and a spiritual man. He had skyscraper dreams of being a Hollywood director and went to grad school for film. But the one thing people remember most about him was how incredibly funny and animated he was. If you could liken him to any celebrity, it would be Jack Black. Our happiest memories as children were with our dad - how happy he was to see us, how affectionate and playful he was, how much we laughed and laughed when he would pin us down and fart on us. He was an amazing older brother to his much younger sisters, Heather and Autumn. He was athletically skilled and excelled in every sport he played. He was charismatic, loved animals (the irony is not lost on us), and he could be incredibly empathetic and compassionate. He was also a fox, very good-looking, and almost pursued a modeling career. This was Joe Keeton when he was healthy, happy, and free.

But like most brilliant people, our father had a dark side. From an early age he struggled with drug abuse. A broken ankle in high school killed his dreams of playing basketball and he fell into a depression that would follow him the remainder of his life. He was very close with both of his parents, so their early divorce was devastating for him. His parents moved around a lot and as a result, so did Joe. After a few rehabs, Joe began attending church, where he met our mother, Alex, and they had three girls (us) in the span of 4 years: Kansas, Jenna, and Dani. His love for children and God drove him to become a youth pastor. He was loved and adored by everyone who met him, but his perception of Jesus' teachings clashed with the Church. He did not want to teach children to fear God, but instead to love God. He became disillusioned and we left the Church for good.

*so struggled in later life*

At one point in the following years, our father hurt his back, which prompted the doctor to prescribe him 80mg of oxycontin per day. He naturally became addicted, and within a year or two, he had abandoned his family in search of the relief that only opiates could provide. Our father's untreated and poorly understood mental illnesses - likely manic depression in addition to other issues - morphed into psychosis when his drug use progressed to methamphetamine. In his illness, he could be selfish, narcissistic, and abusive, especially to those who he was closest to. He became a bottomless pit of pain for his father and mother, the latter of whom spent countless dollars on rehab centers that Joe weaved in and out of, and which we believe sent her to an early grave. After one such stint of sobriety, Joe met Laurie Gaddis, and the two had a daughter, Leeanna, but he would soon fall prey to his addiction and mental illness again, and he left his second family after only two years, where he remained homeless the rest of his too-short life.

However, despite his bleak circumstances, he made many loyal and devoted friends in the residents and workers of homeless shelters and churches throughout Oregon. He held profound conversations and changed the minds of many people about homelessness. He shared meals in church, had a dangerous enthusiasm for helping in the kitchen, and he played the piano beautifully prior to sermons. He spoke often of his daughters. He gave people the clothes off his back, and shared what little food he had with others who were also hungry. He spent the last several years of his life with his partner Jackie, who adored him. He was baffled and angry at how society could abandon sick people outside the reaches of a loving community, but was fiercely protective of those who were just as vulnerable as he was.

He lived and traveled so much and found so many different communities. He was a child, then a problematic teenager, then a devoted father and husband and churchgoer, then a grad student making films, and finally, a wanderer. He lived in Kansas, California, Alaska, Colorado, Washington, Utah, Idaho, New York, Oklahoma, Illinois, Virginia, Texas, Arizona, Montana, and finally, Oregon, where he also spent times in his youth. I'm sure there are others we either don't know about or are forgetting.

Our dad was like a stray cat - he had 9 lives. He survived some absolutely insane circumstances as a nomad that are really only appropriate to tell at an adult campfire. He was like the Steve Irwin of the Wanderers. And he didn't

deserve what happened to him. Nobody does. The fact that our father met his end by the vicious attack of three pit bulls is unforgivable. He was mauled for a prolonged period of time. He suffered greatly. He was failed by so many systems (please take a moment to educate yourselves on the truth about pit bull breeding and ownership, mental illness, and drug addiction), as most homeless people are. But we cannot fail him in death. For obvious reasons, our father had nothing to leave as far as funeral expenses go. We are asking for help in providing our dad with the service and burial that he deserves, as every single human deserves, whether they have a roof over their head or not. He has and will be so greatly missed. We hope that his story will inspire people to be kinder, more generous, and more compassionate to the houseless people they encounter on the street. A smile and a dollar may not mean much to you, but it means the world to somebody who has nothing.

We love you so damn much, Dad.