

First and middle names are the prominent distinction given to children by their parents. My father took the job of naming his children very seriously. As soon as my parents were expecting their first child, he purchased two baby name books which he studied for months.

I am named after my father and his boss and dear friend, Michael Rothberg. Not only do they share a birthday five years apart to the day, May 27th—but they also share a birthday in Heaven, September 11, 2001. I was born seven months later.

My mother did not spend any time with those baby name books. She knew exactly what my distinctive designation should be—Matthew Michael. From the moment I was born, my resemblance to my father has been striking not only in appearance, but also in personality and character. A piece of my father's legacy was coming to life.

As my father worked hard to build his career with a quiet confidence, he always valued his relationships. He would say, "Surround yourself with good people" which perfectly described the loyalty and respect he developed within his inner circle. I have seen the impact of that loyalty through his great friendships. For nearly twenty years, his colleagues have organized a memorial golf outing at my parents' alma mater that has become one of their college's largest endowed funds. I have learned how the loyalty you give is reciprocated in the loyalty you receive. I have always felt this innate desire to be loyal and help others, especially my mother and two older sisters. As a young boy, I noticed I could carry heavy items with ease, such as bringing in groceries or lifting suitcases. When my sisters went to college, I loved moving them in and out of their dorms. I know my father is depending on me to get the job done. I enjoy this responsibility. The comments on my report cards that say I am "the ultimate gentleman" prove my father is working his magic. My quiet confidence runs deep. My father's legacy was starting to grow.

In selecting my middle name, my mother was ensuring my roots were firmly planted in such loyalty in honoring the person that so impacted my father's life—professionally and personally. Michael was a gifted strategist who enjoyed debate and conversation. When Michael made decisions, they were good ones. He added value to many of my father's decisions, from career options to home purchases. More than colleagues, they were family. I have also experienced the impact of great mentorship. I have thrived under an incredible coach who guided me on and off the baseball field to not only reach my academic and athletic goals but also to

raise the bar. As a mentor myself, assisting twin boys both with autism, I am the one responsible for setting the example through kind and consistent interactions. My father's legacy has taken root.

My father and Michael shared other wonderful qualities that guide me, such as being hopeful. When they faced challenges, they both remained positive and moved forward. My mother has ingrained that same philosophy in our family. Recently, my mother required emergency surgery to remove a baseball-sized tumor surrounding her heart and lungs. Maintaining my positive outlook was critical as I helped her recuperate. Afterwards, we discussed that even though tragedy has affected our family before that does not insulate us from future events. I am a hopeful young man from a hopeful family that knows we can handle all of life's surprises. My father's legacy has grown into my adulthood.

Although I have never met my father nor his incredible life coach, they have bestowed upon me not only their names, but also their optimistic spirit—Work hard, help others and surround yourself with good people. My father is depending on me to continue his great legacy. I am ready for the challenge. I was born ready.

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In my 8th Grade English class, I produced a brochure about the various stages of the grieving process. I believe my unique family situation has provided me with a perspective not many teenagers have. While there are challenging times when dealing with the loss of a loved one, I do believe there is a transition that ultimately helps us get closer to our loved ones. This frame of mind also gives me strength; I know I can handle all of life's challenges.

My family and I hope our story brings other people a feeling of comfort, knowing we continue our positive outlook in the wake of unfortunate events. I have noticed this every year on the 9/11 anniversary. My mother always insisted we go to school on that day. She felt this was our patriotic responsibility to let people know these events have made us stronger. I understand exactly why my mother encouraged us to do so. I see the expressions on people's faces who know my story. They may have tears in their eyes, but I do see them smile after we speak.

So many families in our community were affected that day and many spend the day grieving. We have a different approach. Every year, we celebrate my

father's "Birthday in Heaven" and often do something fun after school that he would love to do (like go to a New York Mets baseball game or play a round of golf). Our family loves to keep my father's memory alive in this way.

Although I may not have yet been born, I have experienced the pain that 9/11 created. I have seen the anguish in people's faces who don't know our story as they learn of our situation. Time and time again, as we tell our story, people begin to cry. My father would not want our story to be a sad one. My family and I are on a mission to keep my father's memory alive, to let people know that he is with us, and to share our positive outlook.