…Well, as I glace back, I recall one that has been the most emotionally memorable and gets at the core of what I do.

Both my parents and six-year-old brother were all in and out of hospitals:

Mother – stage one, colon cancer.

Father – stage four, lung.

Brayden – a burst appendix.

Having had stay at home mom, I grew accustomed to her home cooking, but all home cooked meals soon stopped. During my father’s aggressive chemo and radiation treatment, he lost his ability to taste. At this point he was showing signs that this battle had weakened him – depleted him of life.

I remember I came home from school excited to share that we had started cooking in Culinary I – classic hash browns with bell pepper and onions. My mother wasn’t home yet and my father had woken up hungry, but he couldn’t cook for himself. I offered to cook a dish and I remember the hopelessness in his response.

“Don’t worry about flavor, I can’t taste anything,” he told me, sadness in his voice.
So, I carried out my task- we were having eggs and bread.

Couldn’t be too hard? I just learned how to do this earlier today – I got this.

I cracked four eggs into my pan and gave it a nice stir. I added some salt, some pepper, some cream cheese, and I remember it being so soft and fluffy that I was like, damn, I made a good plate of eggs.

I approached my father while he was lying in his bed, watching one of his volcano movies he always enjoyed. I set down the plate and left, but as I came into the hallway, I heard a soft weeping. I walked back around the corner as quietly as I could – my father was wiping away his tears, whispering to himself that this was the first thing he had tasted since treatment. I stepped back and couldn’t hold the feeling, this is what I’m going to do next, and so I took school more seriously in order to keep my culinary class.

My father didn’t get to see me graduate at the top of my culinary class.

He passed two weeks into my senior year.

I had just made Advanced Culinary II.

Since then, I’ve dedicated my time and skill to serve in the industry, to fulfill my journey as a cook, to give someone that fond memory like the one I carry with me now. I use it as my core motivation to push through each service, the ones that kick my ass, that defeat me and make me question if I’m going to get back up, and fight another day.