

My online presence and art progress have slowed significantly over the past few years and I want to talk about where I've been and what has been going on in my life. I wanted to go live on Twitch at some point and talk about this, but it's really difficult for me to not break down when I think about it and I don't want to do that in front of people. Some of you know bits and pieces of my experiences, but I want to put it all in one place in case you might just be someone who follows me for art and are wondering why I'm not posting as much. I don't want to ramble on too long and won't give every single detail for privacy reasons.

If you decide to read even a little bit or skim any of this, I want to thank you for taking time out of your day to listen to me.

[TRIGGER WARNINGS] Death of a parent, Illness (Cancer), Depression/Mental health, Brief mentions of thoughts of self harm/suicide

TL;DR: My dad quickly and somewhat unexpectedly passed away in the span of 3 months and it took a huge mental toll on me. I had to pick up the pieces and take over in my family for the next ~2 years. During that time, I could not create or take care of myself. My dad was one of my biggest supporters as an artist and believed in me every step of the way, and his loss hit me really hard. I'm finally trying to figure out a new normal and understand where I want to go next. I'm taking things one step at a time. Thank you for being patient with me.

2022

Let's start in 2022, right after I finished art school. I moved out of state to Wisconsin with my partner after we both graduated from college and he got a job out there, finally bridging our gap after dating long-distance for 2 years. My sister and her now-husband announced that they were engaged and planned to get married in February 2024. Things were generally pretty good, but I struggled being away from my family in California. I was always very close with them and felt alienated being so far across the country. I had thoughts of moving back to California eventually as I was starting to feel lost and depressed and was unable to find a job in Wisconsin, but the opportunity to move back came sooner than I expected.

2023

I visited home for a week in September 2023 and found out my dad wasn't feeling well. After he finally got an appointment for an MRI in October, my mom seemed to be a bit "off" like she was avoiding telling me something when I called them. A day or two later, on October 31st, 2023, my sister called me and broke the news that they found a cancerous tumor on my dad's kidney. I immediately booked a one-way ticket back home to help my family.

For some background context: My parents ran a business together for 35+ years - just the two of them there for 10+ hours a day, 6 days a week. As long as I've been alive, I remember my dad waking up at 4 AM, prepping things at work, staying late to finish things, and coming home

late at night. He was an incredibly active person who was on his feet all day. The business took up a lot of my dad's life and demanded a lot of attention and energy. If anyone else has ever had a parent or family member who's owned a business, you know exactly the kind of thing I'm talking about.

With my dad's declining health, he was unable to do a lot of the physical work and I had to step in and take over in a position I knew nothing about. When he was able to, he would come to work with me and help me out, showing me how to do things and answering my questions while he sat nearby, but some days I was there running the business entirely by myself because my mom was at her other job. It was a huge weight on my shoulders and terrified me until I started to get used to it, but I never truly felt like I could fill the shoes of someone who ran the business by himself for 35 years. It was extremely difficult for me, but there truly wasn't another option. I was going to take care of this and run the business because I had to take care of my family.

The next 4 months were filled with tons of ups and downs. I juggled running the business, taking my dad to the Emergency Room when he wasn't feeling well (which happened more frequently as time passed), grabbing his medications and food, and running errands. In the little amount of off-time I had, I *attempted* to keep up with art. The only piece of equipment I brought with me was my 8-year old iPad that I tried to occasionally draw on, but I was feeling drained and lacked motivation between the turmoil and could barely get anything out.

A surgery was finally scheduled for December 23rd. At this point, I had to start fully taking over the business by myself while my dad stayed at home because he couldn't risk getting sick and delaying the surgery. The surgery went well and we spent Christmas with my dad in the hospital. The doctors told us his tumor had grown to ~11cm and they would have to keep a close eye on things. They got everything they could, but the cancer seemed to be really aggressive and could spread quickly, so we needed to be careful. We remained hopeful and my dad returned home on the 26th as we waited to figure out what would come next.

2024

It was now the new year, January 2024, and my sister's wedding was coming up. My dad started to have some issues with mobility and had a lot of pain moving around, which we thought was a regular thing that can happen after having such a large-scale surgery. We got a physical therapist to help out, but it didn't seem like anything was helping. Even sitting up was painful for him and he couldn't walk much. There were even more trips back and forth from the emergency room around this time - some lasted overnight, some were just a few hours. His doctors also recommended that he start chemotherapy as soon as possible since the cancer seemed really fast-acting and aggressive. We started to discuss whether or not he would be able to fly out of the country for my sister's wedding in Mexico. Obviously, my sister was heartbroken and stressed, conflicted about my dad's health and the wedding she'd been planning for the past 2 years. Ultimately, it was up to him, and he decided he would come and start chemo as soon as he came back.

I planned my flight long before these events, so my flight for the wedding was out of Chicago since I was expecting to leave from Wisconsin. My mom took time off from her second job to run the business for a few days while I was gone and I finally returned to Wisconsin to my partner and I's apartment. This was the first real "break" I was able to get since October, and though I tried to relax I felt guilty and constantly worried about being away from my dad even for a few days. I called him every day to check in - the thought of his health and my inability to stay nearby kept me up at night.

We flew to Mexico for the wedding and I met back up with my parents, happy to see that my dad made it. Unfortunately, his health only continued to get worse and he couldn't make it to the rehearsal dinner or spend much time outside of his room. Additionally, my birthday was two days before the wedding and my sister wanted to make sure my birthday was celebrated while we were out there, but I struggled to enjoy it. I just felt overwhelmed and didn't feel like I could have fun. I tried to make sure I was always close by if my dad needed help, and I felt this deep guilt in my stomach if I ever found myself enjoying things or relaxing knowing that he was nearby in pain. It felt like some sort of form of "survivor's guilt" - I didn't feel like I deserved to have fun while my dad suffered. The wedding took place on February 4th, and my dad made it there and even walked my sister down the aisle despite how much pain he felt walking. It was incredibly difficult for everyone involved, but I know the tone of the wedding would have been entirely different if our dad didn't make it to see my sister get married. I began to mentally prepare myself to return to California and help my dad through chemo. I knew that the road ahead was going to be incredibly difficult.

Unfortunately, we never got that far. As soon as my family got back to California, my dad was in immense pain and went to stay in the hospital. The cancer from his kidney had spread and was pushing so badly that it had cracked his spine and was continuing to move at an uncontrollable rate. I rushed home and was able to make it in time to take over at the business for a few days so my mom could spend some time with him in the hospital. After hours when I didn't have to be at the business, I stayed overnight in the hospital with my dad, knowing deep down that I had to spend as much time with him as I could before he was gone. On February 14th, he passed away. I put a sign on the door at work saying we were closed for a family emergency, taking the rest of the day to try and process what had just happened. My partner booked a flight to California as soon as he knew what happened. I was forced to return to life as usual the next day on February 15th, back to work and struggling to keep a straight face as people came in and asked how my dad was holding up. Life goes on.

This had all happened in 3 and a half months.

2025

Family on my dad's side somehow came up with the idea that we "didn't take care of him" and blamed us for his death. They held a service for him back in Iran and made sure we knew that there was no mention of his wife or kids in their speeches. I was enraged as someone who uprooted everything to come home and do everything I could to take care of him while they

stood by and did nothing. We cut off the small amount of family we had left and looked forwards. We spent months picking up the pieces by ourselves. My mom was never good with phones or computers - My dad took care of all of my parent's finances and accounts and nobody else ever touched or knew what was going on behind the scenes, so the responsibility fell to me and my sister to figure out all the paperwork and accounts.

Customers continued to come to the business and ask about my dad daily. Friends we made through the business sent us cards, gifts, and came to check on us often which we really appreciated. There were people who obviously cared about my family and wanted to help us get through this. My dad was friendly to everyone and one thing was clear: people cared about him and this was a huge loss.

The more time I spent running the business while people asked about him, coming in and expecting to see him, the more I began to sink into myself. I felt wrong. I hated it. He spent his entire life at this business to take care of our family, and within the walls I felt trapped in his memory, like I was taking his place. It was a strange mix of grief and anger and sadness and it fucked with my head badly. I feel like a part of my consciousness turned off for the next year just to manage getting through everything without overthinking and getting emotional. I tried to be the rock in my family like my dad was, comforting everyone else and getting everything done without ever taking a second to take care of myself. At points, my depression got *bad* and I had thoughts of self harm/suicidal thoughts. These never went any further than just thoughts, and it came and went often, but I just continued to ignore and repress them, focusing on taking care of all the responsibilities that fell to me. I shoved my thoughts down, woke up, and went to work and survived every day, never fully processing things.

In February 2025, my mom and I finally moved out of our 5-person house to an apartment. The business continued to exhaust us physically and mentally and work only continued to get more demanding. The business had been supporting our entire family throughout our whole lives and we knew this would be a gigantic change, but it was not sustainable, so we permanently closed down after 35 years in August 2025.

Now

September 2025. I devoted two years of my life focused on my family making sure we had everything in check and... now what? With the business closed and everything finally seeming to be out of the way, I felt like I finally snapped back into reality and took a good long look at what the hell happened in the past few years. I'm back home living in California and my partner is still living across the country by himself, forcing us back into long distance. I was quickly dropped back into job hunting and got rejected for many entry-level and relevant positions after having two years of experience running a business on my resume (which is fucking insane, the job market is truly so terrible right now). I desperately wanted to get back into art, but I struggled to find the drive to be creative throughout all this, and oftentimes I still do. I've been through a lot of trauma and didn't give myself time to stop and process anything. I'm still in disbelief when I tell someone that my dad passed away because I can't believe that everything happened in just

over three months. I regained a lot of weight from stress-eating and went through a lot of mental twists and turns and am just now trying to figure out how to take care of myself again.

Now it's October, I've found a job to help pay the bills and I'm trying to make art regularly again and return to a normal routine. My mom and I are figuring out what going forward is going to look like for us. I'm slowly getting used to how things are now. Things are okay.

I'm still trying to figure out how to get back to a new normal. It's a very difficult process for me. The internet moves very quickly - as you go offline or take breaks, no matter what the reason, people forget about you and you become lost. I've lost so many friends over time and feel so scared trying to reconnect and reintegrate myself into the online world. I get really frustrated when I struggle to draw now - I feel like I've lost so much time and don't remember how to do what I loved. Sometimes I don't have the strength to push past my doubts and just create and it sucks. I'm trying, I can feel it coming back to me slowly, but it's still really hard at times.

If you can't tell, I was incredibly close with my dad. My parents were incredibly supportive of me wanting to be an artist and were/are my biggest motivators. He would pay for my memberships in online games when I was a kid, which were one of my biggest motivators and led to me working on ToonTown Rewritten for a bit. He let me buy merch online from YouTubers he never even knew the names of that I later became friends with and worked for. He helped pay my loans to go to art school without a second thought. My mom told me that my dad said he was never worried about me and knew that I was going to be successful. He found one of my old pieces of fanart I made of The Creatures 12 years ago and put it on the wall. He had a print out of one of my drawings when I got my first tablet on the wall at the business. He was my biggest supporter. When I struggle to create nowadays, I think of him and feel like I'm letting him down. It hits me so much harder than it used to. I want to keep going, not only for myself, but for him.

I'm trying really hard, but I truly appreciate everyone who has been so patient with me. I have a very difficult time towards the end of the year because I associate it with all the things that have happened: finding out my dad had cancer on Halloween, his surgery being near Christmas, trying to make him comfortable at my sister's wedding and on my birthday, and his passing being on Valentine's day. It's started to get easier, slowly but surely. Sometimes I still don't fully feel like myself, but I'm starting to believe that might be because "myself" is a completely different person now. I also think I really might need to go to therapy.

I'm sorry this is so all over the place, but I wanted to be open and talk about this because it still affects me so badly sometimes and I wanted to just... put it out there without thinking too hard about it. This is going to be the last time I talk about these events to this extent.

Thank you for being so kind and giving me time to figure this all out.

~ Choopie <3