

My mom tells me this story about the very instant she realized she was in love with my dad.

It wasn't a grand gesture made on his part - but a small, fleeting moment not intended for her at all. She and dad had been dating for a while and this particular date fell on a weekend that mom got with my older siblings, Nick and Jessie. It was a warm summer day in Conifer Colorado; I like to think the breeze was cool and the sun was high. I can imagine that the air was crisp; maybe it rained that morning, and the mountains still felt renewed. Maybe the clouds were still hanging a little low where the mountains reached up high.

Mom doesn't tell me what they were doing, or where they were going that day - because those details were unimportant compared to *the* moment.

They were walking down a dirt road, relaxed and laughing. Suddenly, with little warning, my dad took little Jessica Rose and put her on his shoulders. Mom remembers his big laugh and bigger grin, the thought of it always giving her a small smile of her own. As she looked on that day, a realization hit her like a flash.

This man genuinely enjoyed spending time with her children. More than that - he could and *would* love them, effortlessly.

And that was it. That was the moment my mother knew that she loved Tim Kienle. He won her heart and she wanted to live out the rest of her days with him. Their future laid out before her in those moments; he would love Nick and Jessie fiercely and he would proudly be their bonus dad. He would love his own children and carry them on his shoulders, laughing in the sun. He would walk with her on any rocky road life led them down, and he would do it smiling.

Mom also tells me about their first Christmas together when he drove her all over the Denver area on Christmas eve, last few dollars tucked in hand to find Jess a Little Mermaid doll. They spent hours looking and couldn't find the Disney Princess anywhere. Eventually, they stumbled upon a different mermaid with hair that was just as red; Jessie loved it all the same.

Mom tells me about the day I was born and how that was the first time she ever saw Dad cry. She tells me, with pride, about how well she chose a father for her children. And she's right; Tim Kienle, laughing trickster though he may be, takes his role as dad seriously.

We grew up poor, but my father did his best to ensure that we were healthy and happy despite. Every autumn, he took to the woods to hunt elk; every beast felled was made into food for our family for the winter. He worked hard to provide us a warm home and despite all the hardship that came with poverty, he made every opportunity to give us more.

He gave us the mountains. He took us hiking in the pines and searched for fae in crooked aspen groves. He dove with us into glacial pools in the heat of summer and gathered raspberries in the misty days of fall.

He gave us adventure. He took us on motorcycle rides and taught us how to camp. He took us fishing in hidden lakes and had us skiing before we could walk. Once a year he took us to Animus Basin to spend a picnic lunch with the ghosts of miners, before riding into Silverton in time to watch the train roll in.

He gave us a happy childhood.

He led us by example. One winter, he took my little brother and I along on an important quest. to cut down a Christmas tree for family friends who could not afford much. When it was done, he taught us to thank the tree for its sacrifice and to feel the world around us in a way that many people forget.

He sang a different tune every day and found cause to be thankful for the little things. He encouraged us to embrace what made us different and pushed us to pursue that which we love most. His belief in us is steadfast and unyielding; no matter how poorly we see ourselves, he beams at us with pride when he thinks of how far we've come.

My father is a lot of things; funny, intelligent, and a little rough around the edges. He's a talkative stoner-hippy-socialist who likes conspiracy theories. He can be vain at times and has a predisposition for reckless behavior. He has a tendency to wax philosophical, and he enjoys history as well as Shakespeare. Like many humans, despite being deeply spiritual, he can be hot-tempered and a little selfish.

The truth is though, I could go on for days about all the traits and quirks that make up my father and still not accurately convey who he is.

He is the high mountains in the summertime, and he is the cold winter air that sinks into your bones. He is the swirling mist in East Nellie that moves down through the pines with purpose. He is the golden glow of the aspen trees in the fall. He is the ravens he honors, and the songbirds he feeds. He is the music blaring out of our long-gone rusty Land Cruiser: Pink Floyd and The Rolling Stones and Nirvana. He is the smell after a long ride on his candy apple red Triumph: rain and motor oil and leather. He is the tight hug after a bad day and the tender reassurance that you are so very, truly, and deeply loved.

Tim Kienle is so many wonderful and weird things. And we are so lucky to call him dad.