Kendell Gunderson

My father was my best friend until his alcoholism became too much to handle. I was only a teenager when our relationship started to sour. My best friend was no longer visible underneath the haze of whisky. Every conversation was an argument, and at the age of 19, I told him I hated him and wished he was dead. The next day he was found deceased on the side of the road. I shut myself off from everyone after that, and during the Covid lockdown, I would be stuck with my thoughts through all of it. When I was a child, my dad asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, and I said an artist. Going into art school, although at the time our relationship was rocky, he was still the only one in the family to support me with my life choice.

I wanted to make something that was inspired by my father's death. He worked all of his life as a mechanic, five days a week, and stayed at the tv for the two days he had off. After taking a step back, and now see things with a clear mindset. I understand that his alcoholism was purely caused by depression, and having a volatile teenager did not help the situation. My father had dreams of going on vacation to Mexico, but never made it that far. I love my father now, but looking back, I understand his life was one day after another. Work eight hours, go home, watch tv, repeat. This was not living, but settling. I would hear stories from my mum about how he used to get into trouble with his friends or be the life of a gathering where ever he went, but later in life, that all seemed to change. His life stopped being about living and started to be about existing.

With my art, as I was working on it, it was more of a reminder to myself than anything. I originally wanted my art to show others that they will die someday, but more so, I believe I am trying to convince myself that I will die someday. I will die someday, how do I want to spend the rest of my time? I have always suffered from a violent anxiety disorder, and because of that, some days I am terrified I am watching life go by without me. I finished watching my father pass away without stepping up to live, and my greatest fear is that I will repeat the pattern.

I have lost both sets of grandparents, my father and a couple of friends, and I always have the most vivid dream the day before they die. My father was the strongest and most colourful I could remember. I remember screaming at him, a common dream I would always have. These dreams were always so frustrating to have because I always got the feeling of speaking to a brick wall as I yelled out my feelings. The dream I had the night before he passed away was the same plot as before, however, I remember him listening to me. In my dream, he sat down and listened to what I had to say. I stopped yelling, and for the first time I felt heard, and it was nice. For the first time in years, I had the feeling our relationship could have potentially been saved, and it was all because of a dream. I woke up the next day happy and energetic. I went to the gym, and at 2:37 I remember being slapped across the face. Nothing and no one was there to hit me, but it pushed me off the elliptical. For a brief moment, I had to stand there and process what I had felt. I felt the stinging sensation on my face, and I thought it could have been anything from a stroke to blood clots. When I got home that night, I was told at 2:37 my father was pronounced dead. He had a heart attack, and the next day I woke up with a tightness in my chest. The start of a string of heart complications I have been dealing with ever since.

I believe that we as social creatures make deeper connections than what we see on the surface. I have felt every family member's death, and I believe there is something else to the world around us. Tarot cards, for me, tend to be little pieces of advice given to me by the world around us. I am always sceptical of their use, however with everything strange that has happened in my life, I have a small passion for them.

To say my art was inspired by any past artist would be a bold-faced lie. Sure I have liked other artworks and I admire other artists, but it's not something I have studied or looked into. I am inspired by life and life events. All my work is inspired by what I see, and what has happened to me. I am an observer, always have been, and I observed the worlds around us, and that is where I take inspiration. I want to make my father proud, and I want to be the artist I told him I would be all those years ago.