

Remember Who You Are

The first time I heard the story of Deputy John Morris Heithcock of Fairview TN, aka my Granddaddy Morris, I looked into the anguished eyes of my father whom even as a grown man has a tear come to his eye when he tells the story. “It was a warm summer night, June 28th 1972, when we got the call that changed my life forever” said my father. His father, my grandfather, left their home that night to respond to a call for assistance from the Fairview Police department. When he walked out the door my father, along with his mother and 3 other siblings, had no idea it would be the last time they would see their daddy and husband alive. “He was killed from a gunshot wound to the chest, and just like that he was gone forever. I was seven years old and I was never going to see my daddy again and suddenly, as just a kid I had to step in his shoes and take care of my family because I was now the oldest boy in the house” my father told me and even as a child I could see the hurt in his heart that had never, and will never, go away. I know this essay is supposed to be about the impact of a law enforcement member on my life and seeing as I never got the chance to meet him face to face one may say my Granddaddy Morris hasn’t impacted my life, but that is so far from the truth and if you keep reading, I will tell you why.

Before my Granddaddy Morris was killed, my father lived a good life. I find joy in listening to him tell stories of his daddy who before becoming an officer was in the military and always worked hard to provide for his family and give them the things he never had growing up. But with his murder came destruction, he left behind a wife and four children and their worlds were turned upside down. His wife struggled incredibly losing herself as a mother and when I say my father, at seven years old, really had to step up I do not say that lightly. To this day my dad can remember his uncle approaching him at the funeral and whispering to him “I am so sorry you don’t get to be a kid any more” and shortly after that my father was working with his uncles,

carrying what weight he could handle at seven years old and learning how to be a man before ever getting to experience childhood. Today when I look back and reflect I cannot fathom how that must have been for my father, losing his daddy and his childhood all in the blink of an eye. But, my father embodies the spirit of his daddy; he is caring, loving, protective, strong, and the hardest working individual I have ever met in my life. My dad has worked multiple jobs at a time, seven days a week, for as long as I can remember to make sure his wife and children have never gone without. In seven short years my Granddaddy Morris not only taught his son his core values, but he instilled them so deeply within him that my father quickly turned into a man like Deputy Heithcock. Granddaddy Morris used to tell my father that above all else always, “remember who you are.” My father has always said those four words to us kids and they have become very important to me. My daddy knew the kind of man his father was, and he has worked every day since June 28th, 1972 to become that man himself, and he has done a wonderful job. I know my Granddaddy Morris would be proud of his son and the life he has built for himself and his family, while embodying his fathers character every step of the way.

My father has always taught me to remember who I am, to work hard in all that I do, and to shoot for the stars even if it feels impossible because that is what his father taught him. In two short years I will be a first-generation college graduate from the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College of Florida Atlantic University with a bachelor’s degree in Economics. I am from the small town of Fairview Tennessee, but I took a chance after high school, I heeded my daddy’s and Granddaddy Morris’s advice, and moved fifteen hours away from everything I had ever known and loved. I did this so that I could obtain a stellar education and become an individual of our society who embodies the spirit of Deputy John Morris Heithcock. Not once have I forgotten who I am or where I come from, but I shot for the stars and I made it. I am excelling at the

Honors College, continually making the dean's list, and giving it my all. I had the determination and strength to take such a big leap because I knew if my father could take the leap at seven years old to become a man that would make his father proud, I could follow my dreams at eighteen years old and make my father and grandfather proud.

Because of Deputy John Morris Heithcock, and the person he was, I am the person I am today. I am caring, loving, protective, strong, and a hard worker. My father made sure to instill the characteristics of his own father in his children and we all live our lives to be the kind of people Granddaddy Morris would want us to be. I find great pleasure in reading about Deputy Heithcock and even more when I hear the stories about who he was from his children. I wish so badly that I could have met him, and that he wasn't taken from my father and his family at such a young age. But, I know with all my heart that he left behind a legacy that will never be forgotten and he was such an outstanding individual that his values, beliefs, and characteristics have and will carry on in my family for generations. I would be honored to receive the Fales and Fales Law Enforcement Scholarship, and I can confidently say that if I am awarded this scholarship I will work my hardest to make this foundation proud of what they do, and to make Deputy John Morris Heithcock, my Granddaddy Morris, proud of the man and father he was during his time on Earth. Deputy Heithcock has been honored at quite a few ceremonies over the years, and as his grandchild I cannot think of a better way that I can honor him than to become the person I know he would want me to be, a person like him. With the financial support of this organization I will be one step closer to achieving my goals, and I would be able to honor Deputy John Morris Heithcock one more time along the way. Thank you for reading my story and thank you for this opportunity.