I remember countless nights watching my mother pack her suitcase and leave for her parent’s home. The suspicion that my dad was cheating on her fresh on her mind, she scared me with her anger. My father wasn’t around much in my youth, and when he finally had the opportunity my two older brothers and I had built too many walls around our hearts to protect us. In a way, we had already packed our hearts away into our own suitcases, leaving my father behind.

All that time what I didn’t realize was that he was living his life *for* *us*. My father could have been an electrical engineer—he had plenty of opportunities. But, after he got my mom pregnant at age 24 with twins and rushed into a marriage, he had to dive into the workforce. My dad didn’t have money to get himself through school and my mother would never use her Bachelor’s in Math’s degree for the rest of her life. So he worked three jobs and built his own electrical contracting company from the ground up.

His constant working habits made him irritable when he came home to screaming children. Drinking became an outlet. The first time I saw my dad drunk I cried so hard the neighbor’s called the police from the sound. And it happened hundreds more times for the next 20 years. When I was a senior in high school, my father got two DUIs. The first incident involved him flipping his car by the local movie theater. The second occurred at one of my classmate’s homes, where his truck’s engine lit on fire and he nearly hit their propane tank. He should have gotten three but the third went unreported. My dad was forced to go to AA meetings, where he faced the reality that his own brother had been killed in such an accident at the age of 19.

From that day on I saw a change in my dad. To this day he is working on his drinking habits and I can say they have greatly improved. But the biggest change is how he interacts with our family. Instead of drowning his stress in a bottle, he engages with us, his children. I have gotten over my hatred of my father. I love his work ethic and his humor; his quiet persona and even his obnoxious moments. What I once denied I now believe whole-heartedly: my father loves his family and his every breathe is dedicated to us.