

Written by Kathleen Wilson, David's Mother

10 years ago today, life as my family and I knew it, was about to change forever. We had already endured 2 great losses within a month of each other just months before. My brother Kevin passed away in April and my mother Joyce passed away one month later. Then September 20th came, and our lives took a horrific turn.

It was a beautiful autumn morning, as we prepared to shower my oldest daughter Amanda with gifts and well wishes, for our soon to be first granddaughter, niece and daughter Cassidy. I text David that morning to say our good friends from Long Island would be arriving early, if he wanted to come early. David was attending the shower because he was very excited to be Cassidy's godfather and couldn't wait to become an uncle for the first time. He didn't answer my text but that wasn't unusual.

As we gathered in the kitchen of the home where the shower was being hosted, I was nervously pacing and watching out the window. I can never relax when awaiting the arrival of the guest of honor! As I watched out the window I saw my mother in law Bess pull in. Not long after she arrived, I saw my brothers' jeep pull up the driveway followed by a North Kingstown Police car, and two unmarked cars. We joked in the house for just a few seconds that they must have followed my mother in law to the house. I proceeded out the door onto the porch to approach my brother. He never approached me. He signaled me, with his index finger, and motioned to the group of men standing off to the side. I was met by the North Kingstown chief of police, who I knew from our neighborhood, and 2 or 3 other men, I do not remember exactly how many. The chief introduced me to the officers, who were from Newport. David was living in Newport. Ok, now I'm concerned. My thoughts race for a second...an accident maybe? Was he in trouble? The chief begins to talk...David was at the restaurant where he worked last night, and had a few drinks after his shift. He went on ...He stayed over at his friends' apartment and when they went to wake him up this morning.....and that was all I heard. The only sound I remember, and trust me when I tell you it haunts me to this day, was my own screaming. The kind of screaming you see on television when someone is told that same news. My legs crumbled under me and I was instantly sick to my stomach. I didn't get to be the one to tell my daughter Jen who was also there, because it all happened so fast. I was helped to a chair on the patio and honestly the memory of the hours and days that followed are still a blur. For the next few hours my family made calls to friends and family who weren't with us to tell the news before it hit social media. All the while we tried to make sense of what happened. How could this be true? David was a happy hard working young man, who was graduating URI in the spring. He was going to be an Uncle. He had his life in front of him. How could this happen. I kept asking for details from the police and then it hit me. I knew what exactly what had happened.

David was living and working in Newport at a restaurant called H2O (Vader LLC). He was waiting tables, while going to school full time. He liked waiting tables, but he really liked bartending much more. He said it gave him more of a chance to get to know his customers. He had so much personality and I honestly don't know of anyone who didn't love him. He told me the week before that he was being trained by the bar manager at H2O to become a bartender. He told me about a practice of the bar manager called penalty shots. He would ask the employees questions, such as "who is playing the Red

Sox today?" and if the employee didn't know the answer, they had to take a shot. I told David that it was absurd, and he didn't have to take the shot. He responded "Yes, mom, if you don't take it he will follow you around and make you take it." (In the months that followed the lawyers interviewed many employees and past employees of this bar manager, and that practice was confirmed.) The day of September 19, David was training on the bar during the day. He apparently answered too many questions incorrectly and after his shift was not feeling well after all the "penalty shots". He went home and napped before returning to the restaurant for his night shift waiting tables. David's father, and sister and their significant others, had dinner at H2O that night. They remember him saying he had to go home and nap between his shifts because he wasn't feeling well as a result of the penalty shots. At the end of his shift, according to witnesses, he stayed at the bar at H2O waiting for his best friend Ashley to join him. Ashley also worked as a server at H2O. David was there with another waiter who also was overserved that night and fell outside the restaurant on his way home. One of the last texts on David's phone was to this waiter saying "are you ok?" The waiter never answered but, we learned during the civil case that he recovered from that night. By the time Ashley got to the bar, she found David in the men's room, staggering and struggling to button his pants, just as the bar manager came in with another shot, that he was trying to convince David to take. Ashley pushed the shot out of the bar manager's hand and said he had had enough. The bar manager offered to help walk David across the street to Ashley's apartment with her help. She asked the bar manager "is he going to be ok" The bar manager responded "Yes, he just needs to sleep it off".

David went to sleep and never woke up that night. Ashley was the one who had to find him lifeless. I cannot imagine the pain of that moment. She and David were the best of friends. They loved each other so much. Had he not been gay, they would surely have spent their lives together.

We waited weeks for the autopsy which showed the cause of death was alcohol poisoning. No drugs. No underlying illness. Alcohol. His blood alcohol was over the limit where they stop measuring.

I still hear myself yelling at the police that day "I know what happened. He f*cking gave him too many shots".

In the months and years that followed we remained quiet about the events of that night because the lawyers were working on a civil case. I promised myself, Amanda, Scott, Jen, and David, that someday I would tell the story to everyone. It is time. I am not telling anything that I cannot legally say. You can see it for yourself on the RI Court website. The case is listed there. It is public knowledge. Those named in the case, Kathleen Wilson vs Vader LLC and that bar manager.

That bar manager still bartends in Newport. He still serves shots. I know because I see the comments on social media. It makes me physically ill to think that this could happen again to someone's son, brother, Uncle or grandson. I feel he has no regard for human life.

Since September 20, 2009 my family has become so incredibly close. The pain of losing David never goes away. It doesn't get easier. You just learn to hold your head up and go through the motions. He would never want us to be sad. There is a reason this happened, after all "everything happens for a reason", but I just don't know what that is yet.

"Life is too short for regrets, so love the people who treat you right, forget the ones who don't. Everything happens for a reason. If you get a chance, take it. If it changes your life , let it. Nobody said this would be easy, they just said it would be worth it."

I will not allow any negative comments below, and I WILL delete them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Hold your loved ones tight. Always say I love you. Rest in peace my beautiful son. We will all continue to watch for your signs. 87