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## From Change to Casualty to Climate: The Death of My Past Self

*Lydia Verbrugge*

My father has always been my biggest role model. Street smarts are just as important to him as school smarts. As a reservoir of information ranging from the simple explanation of the Dow Jones to in depth analysis of the power sports industry, he always had something that he wanted to teach my brother and I. I still have not figured out how he knows so much, as he blames it on life experience. Born and raised in northwest Iowa, in the same house that my grandparents live in today, he began working at his parents' electric business at the age of 12. He told me about odd jobs ranging from changing a lightbulb to wiring an entire house. He met my mom in high school, got married shortly after in college, and went on to become an extremely successful electrical-engineer-turned-executive-director at the same company he has worked for virtually his entire life. Although he devoted so much time and energy to his work, he knew to keep his work life and home life separate. My dad was my basketball coach when I started playing in kindergarten (although "playing" was a loose term for my participation at the time) until my 10th grade year. He taught my brother everything there is to know about mountain biking and motocross racing, and saw my love for horses and supported me in everything that I wanted to do with them. He taught me so much about life skills as well as school skills, even though those nights spent crying over math homework at the kitchen table were not exactly fun at the moment.

Despite all the love he had to give, for reasons I would later uncover, I could not accept it. We moved around a lot during my years, moving at the end of elementary, middle, and halfway through high school, and I had grown to resent his job. I never felt that I could make meaningful friends, because who knew how soon he would get a promotion or want to change career paths for the 4th time. My junior year of high school was the worst. Although I did not know it at the time, I subconsciously hated my father for making our family pick up and move whenever he wanted. I hated spending time with him, and during the worst of it I would never stay at the house he had provided for us because I could not stand the sight of

his face. During this time, he tried his hardest to try to salvage any resemblance of a relationship with me, to no avail. Countless therapy sessions that solved nothing and shouting and slamming of doors were all too common instances that I thought were mature and normal reactions to his love (they were not). My dad is a stoic person that rarely shows emotion, and even more rarely expresses love in ways that I felt. I remember in one screaming fit saying that he had never and would never love me. This was more of a projection than fact, as I learned that I could not feel love from others until I had learned to love myself. I, specifically my mental health, was a sinking ship that tried to drag everyone down with me, and my dad is smart enough not to fall for my exploits and manipulations. Our relationship was nonexistent for a 6 month period in the middle of 2021, when my parents decided I needed more help than they were able to give. I spent 2 1/2 months at a wilderness therapy program, then 8 months in a treatment facility. The excruciating decision my parents made to send me away for my senior turned out to be the greatest thing that ever happened to me, and I credit it wholeheartedly to how I am able to speak about him as I am now.

While reading *Parable of the Sower*, I noticed many unfortunate parallels between Keith Olamina and his fathers' relationship. The first mention of Keith's personality, alluding to future incidents, is in chapter 2. Here, the narrator Lauren speaks about how her brother is being baptized, although he doesn't care about religion (or anything else). My family is religious, specifically Christian, and I was baptized, willingly, when I was 12. I began to question my faith less than a year later, but never told my family until I was 16 and it drunkenly spilled out. While I had been struggling with losing my faith for 3 years, I did not want to tell my family for fear of rejection, dismissal, or worse. When I finally said it, I distinctly remember my mom looking at me and saying that the only reason I was struggling was because of my lack of faith. Although somewhat true, with my depression stemming from lack of connection with my family, this was the beginning of distancing myself from those that I needed most. Keith was the same way. He receives his first BB gun for his birthday in chapter 9 and shortly after disappears for days. I reflect on days when I would leave the house without telling my parents where I was going or who I was with, to prove an unknown point. Clearly, Keith has been hanging with the wrong crowd, because Octavia Butler writes that he

returned with new clothes and shoes, something virtually unheard of in the community they live in. We hear about how Keith stays out for longer and longer, coming back with expensive gifts and large sums of money from who-knows-where (chapter 10). Clearly, Keith is a troubled kid trying to make it in a world stacked against him, and does it with people who did not have his best interests in mind.

Some of my closest friends in this period cared even less about themselves than I did, which struck me as similar to Keith's "friends". Many times, I would lose my friends in a half-drunken stupor in an unknown location, just trying to find a landmark that was familiar. Admittedly, I stole, vandalized, lied, and completely destroyed my feelings of worth and respect for myself, simply to hope people liked me. The narrator describes Keith's disappearance, saying "May he rest in peace-in his urn, in heaven, wherever." (chapter 10), which tells of how his family felt about him before he died. The only person who really mourned his death was his mother Cory, described on multiple occasions "bursting into tears and found later clutching his urn". While reading this, I had the overwhelming feeling that this was me around a year ago, and this could have been my parents as well. I remember thinking that if I died, no one would care, and there would definitely not be a funeral. I thought my parents would be relieved that they would not have to deal with my tactics once I was gone. I, like Keith, was justifying myself and blaming my parents, when it was always me. My reckless behaviors, much like Keith's, were subconscious self-harm. For him, it was about survival, and feeling in control. For me, it was major insecurity. He speaks about the "insane burn-the rich movement" that took place in their neighborhood because of the drug "pyro". I had this same "F-the-system" thought process doing the things I thought I loved with the people I thought loved me. My actions were justified if I blamed something else. Keith felt the same, talking about robbing people just because he could, and because he had more power than them. When reading *Parable of the Sower*, these thought patterns resonated with my past self, because I thought that taking advantage of people (the destitute to Keith or my family to me) was a way to establish security.

After spending 10 months in treatment, I found awareness both in who I was and why I was that way. Surprisingly, my parents did not blame me. While they will probably never understand why I did what I did, they were able to forgive me. I knew that I needed to

salvage my relationship with my dad, to try to get back some resemblance of a father-daughter relationship. He wanted one too, which honestly surprised me. Our activity of choice? Creating an electric car from a gas-powered one. This is where his wealth of information came into play, because I had no idea that you could completely rewire a car, but my electricity-loving father did. Because of our escapade, I learned how to install the motor itself, how to wire the system, and how to replace hydraulic brakes. My dad knows that electric cars are the future, and with this newly electric car as well as his 2016 Chevy Bolt, he is an avid believer in electric clean energy. Electric cars are more fuel efficient, converting 77 percent of energy into movement, while gas-powered cars only have the capacity to use 12-30 percent of gas energy (DOE). They are also cheaper: they only cost around \$3,500 per year to fuel, while gas cars cost upwards of \$4,300. In every state, it is cheaper to use electricity than gas, varying from \$500-1,700 cheaper per year (Self). They are also better for the earth. A gas-powered car emits on average 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year while an electric car emits none, not factoring in manufacturing or shipping expenditure (EPA). These factors and more are why my dad decided to convert to electric energy. He was the first one who talked to me about climate change, and what we can do as consumers to reduce our carbon footprint. Our family walks as much as we can, uses air conditioning minimally, and of course, drives electric cars. The first climate activist I knew was my father, and he inspired me to help the earth as much as I can. *Parable of the Sower* helped me fully commit to my efforts. If the world ends up even remotely like it is described in the book, I know that I need to do as much as I can as a consumer to try to alleviate symptoms of climate change.

Throughout my reading of *Parable of the Sower*, I found it eerie how many events in my life were similar to what was described in the book. From Keith and Lauren's description of struggles with religion to Keith's behaviors that eventually led to his death to prominent symptoms of climate change, this book was eye-opening. It helped me want to make a difference in my community as an individual as well as appreciate every conversation I have with my parents. It also aided my love for my dad, who taught me much of what I know today, just like Reverend Olamina with his children. I hope that I can inspire to not only lead a life like my father has, but one that does not end up like Keith's did. While he may have died a

painful and horrible death, he taught me and other readers that life is sacred, and you will absolutely be missed once you leave this tumultuous earth.

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