

Sitting down to write this letter again feels so much different. I'm still the son of an addict, but the shame and hate no longer exist. This time I know the addiction is one that I can be proud of. The drugs, the alcohol, the lies, the cheating, the stealing by all accounts are gone, what's left is an addiction to family, and an addiction to God.

So many years ago I felt that the story was already written. The end was clear. Another life was going to be ruined, along with the lives of so many by-standers, those that were aware and didn't get away fast enough, and those that saw it coming and removed themselves as fast as they could. I belonged to both camps at one point and slowly moved to removing myself and my family to the point where a complete non-existence of his memory would have suited me just fine. What I didn't know then, or what I didn't want to listen to, was that through all the struggle, the pain, the hurt, the reward was coming, and when it did, watch out.

I grew up in church, read the word, sang the songs, believed and trusted. Losing my dad, losing the man I thought was untouchable, the guy who never knew how much I bragged about and wanted like nothing else to be like. I watched him as a coach and couldn't wait until the day I could be one myself, he was the best coach I'd ever known. I told a story in my first letter. My passion for sports came from the countless hours throwing nothing fastball after fastball, never a flame-thrower, but could hit a spot like no other. I threw him a curveball once, it was the last time I ever threw one. He stopped, put his glove down, and walked away. I stayed outside for a while before finally going inside to see what he was up to. He just sat there on the couch looking at me. Confused I asked if he forgot what we were doing. He told me if I ever threw it again, we were done. Of course then I just thought he was old, grumpy, and that I knew better. So instead, I began to throw a knuckle, less stress, more effective.

You're probably wondering what any of this has to do with anything, but you see, that day was pretty much a symbol of everything he and I have been through as father and son. Playing catch was the best days, he taught me to perfect things in my life (throwing strikes), he has taught me to adapt in bad situations (hitting spots when I need to), he taught me that when life throws us a curve that we can't just give up completely, but to find ways to work around the problems to find a better solution (the knuckle).

Looking back, before the addiction took my father prisoner, he was just playing catch. When the addiction set in and things started to go bad, he had to find a way to adapt. Now granted, this took several tries with many failures along the way, but he finally started hitting his spots. Plenty of curveballs though continued to challenge him, addictions would re-surface, and things consumed his mind and his heart until he found another way, he learned the knuckle, and he learned to trust the will of God. What came with that? Less stress, more effective.

To say I'm not scared of what could still come would be a lie. I worry everyday about the strength that addiction has over people and what could very well happen again to my dad. Every time my phone rings and I see "Dad Cell" my mind begins to race in a hundred directions, praying that it's not another one of "those" calls that seemed to happen so many times. The difference this time, although the thoughts may creep in, the difference is I now have the knuckle as well. I have the love of God once again. Less stress, more effective. I know that the strength of the addiction is no match for the strength of God's love and I know my dad, right now, is blessed because of it. My dad's journey didn't end with where he is right now, the rest is still unwritten. What I know though is this, although God has never left his side

throughout any of it, my dad realizes and believes that God is there with him now. I trust that addiction to his faith will be enough to handle any demon that may come his way.

Dad, let's keep playing catch. When you stumble, just go back to the word, let that guide you to hit your spots. When it gets hard and you see that curve, keep adapting and working through it. Most of all, know that anytime you need it, that knuckle, the love God has for you and all of us, is there. Less stress, more effective.

You see, I'm still John Allen, Jr., I always will be. I'm proud of that. Above all, I'm proud to be John Allen, named after the strongest man I know. I love you dad.