

Decades Without Daddy

BY TORRI J. EVANS AS TOLD TO AISHA I. JEFFERSON

• **I didn't learn who my father was** until seven years ago. I was 31 years old and engaged at the time. I realized I didn't want my future children to grow up believing that I didn't have a dad or that being fatherless was OK, so I called my mother demanding answers.

It caught her off guard because before I'd never asked anything about him. When I was young, there was a man I spent time with who I thought was my father. But about age 5, I recall going to the doctor's office with him for what I now understand was paternity testing. Shortly after, he vanished from my life.

It wasn't until my college years that the topic surfaced again. One Sunday in church, my mother leaned over, pointed to a man and whispered, "That's your father." My jaw dropped. We met right after service, and over the following month, I saw him a few times but didn't push for a relationship—I was 18 and it just wasn't a priority back then.

Fast forward 13 years later, when I called my mother. She and I had a conversation about my father's identity. She actually named two men she thought could be my

biological dad, and I realized then that my mother honestly didn't know who my father was. Since she talked again about the guy I'd met as a teen, I wrote him a letter and he called me. We agreed to take a DNA test that eventually proved he was my father. Soon after, I traveled from Atlanta, GA, to Kalam-

azoo, MI, so we could meet. It turned out to be a truly transformational experience.

Thankfully, we really had a bond and it blossomed. About two-and-a-half years after we confirmed our kinship, he called me to tell me he was proud of me. That two-hour conversation would be the last time we spoke. Two days later, he fell into a coma and died later that week.

Though I'd never felt incomplete with-



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out knowing my father, meeting him showed me that there was, in fact, a void. It inspired me to help children build relationships with their dads through the nonprofit group I started. A father's love is reassuring, and children need that presence in their life.