



Marc Alessi



Annual Walk for Dave Event

I think the first time I realized something was different about my dad was when he was forced to quit his job. I was 6 years old. Over the next few years, it became clear that some sort of illness was impacting my father's life, later I found it to be called spinocerebellar ataxia. He started using a walker and eventually my brothers and I had to push him around in a wheelchair. Despite the disease that was changing my father's life, he continued to be an inspiration and role model to me. He was (and still is as a guardian angel) the most supportive person I could ever ask for. Whether it be an orchestra concert, a swim meet, or just any kind of ceremony, I knew I could look out into the audience and find my dad with the biggest smile on his face. And that was the best part; no matter what, he always focused on how he could make his three sons happier. My dad had such a positive outlook on life and fought through the disease for my family as if it wasn't even affecting him.

My dad passed away when I was 15 years old. He didn't give up without a fight and never lost sight of what made life great, despite the many reasons why it wasn't. Even today, I look back on his fight against ataxia and feel determined and inspired. He taught me to always appreciate the positives in life and for that I am forever grateful.

Two years after my father's death, I was tasked with volunteering in a local fundraiser as part of the requirements for my health class. Thinking back to my dad's legacy, and with the help of a friend, I seized the opportunity to start a new fundraiser, Walk for Dave, in memory of my father. At first, I didn't really know about the National Ataxia Foundation. I started by getting in contact with Lori, who helped me set up the fundraiser and figure out all the logistics as a beginner. With the help of friends, family, and corporate sponsors I successfully raised over \$5,000 the first walk, all of which was donated to the National Ataxia Foundation for research.

But why would I stop there? I know my dad wouldn't. Before I knew it, there was a 2nd and 3rd Walk for Dave. To date, we have raised over \$18,000 for research to find a cure and have a 4th Walk planned for this August. I am passionate about supporting the National Ataxia Foundation because I know it's a way to continue my dad's legacy. With the recent diagnosis of the same disease of my younger brother, I am more determined than ever to stay positive and find a cure to spinocerebellar ataxia. I will never let the reasons to be negative in my life outweigh the reasons to stay positive. It's what my dad taught me, and I will never let him down because he never let me down.