Life's Beautiful Tragedy

It was a beautiful April day. The sun was shining, and there was a slight breeze. I can remember it as if it were yesterday. Walking hand in hand with my dad as we meandered around the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington DC. I can remember the sense of pure happiness I felt as we strolled along the path, with big beautiful bright pink and white flowery trees as they draped over us. There were people everywhere, and not one person I saw did not have a smile on their face. Children laughing, birds chirping, music playing and people picnicking beneath the breathtaking trees. The whole scenery was breathtaking. It wasn't until the encounter my dad and I had that I truly understood what exactly the festival was about and why it was such a big deal.

My dad and I were just parading along, admiring everything around us, until we met this wise old man who forever changed my life. He kindly approached us and introduced himself as Akito. Before I knew it he began explaining to me the significance of the day. He explained to me that the beautiful trees were known as a Cherry Blossoms and that they were the national flower of his country Japan. He then began to unfold the truth about the flower and what made it so special to him and his country. He began "For hundreds of years, the Japanese culture has looked at the cherry blossom as a representation of life. But first you must understand one thing before you can truly fathom what exactly I mean." To be honest, when he first started by saying "For hundreds of years.." I immediately thought that he was going to give me mini lesson on Japan's history and I started to lose interest. I think he sensed what I was feeling because he quickly assured me before he continued that I would learn a life lesson and he would not bore me. He then continued by first explaining to me that the cherry blossom trees only bloom for a short time each year. Before I knew it he reached up and picked a flower off the tree and placed it behind my ear. "You see?" he questioned. "Look around you, all the happiness among the air and how beautiful it looks." I took a second and glanced all around me. He was right. He continued, "The cherry blossom represents how fragile life is and how the beauty of it. Just like the tree, life is overwhelmingly beautiful but tragically short. So each year when the tree
blossoms it's a reminder of how precious life truly is." I just stood there for while, soaking in what he said. His last and final words to us were, "Just remember how short life is and to appreciate the beautiful aspects of it." I reached out, hugged him and thanked him for what he had shared with me. I could tell he wasn't expecting that reaction from me, he was pleased and after I let him go, he smiled and was on his merry way.

Akito truly touched my heart and reminded me how thankful I was for everything I had and everyone in my life. After he left, my dad leaned over and whispered to me that the cherry blossoms were his favorite tree. He told me that I reminded him of the tree because I was just as beautiful as the flowers. I spent the rest of that day with my dad walking around, treasuring every second with him. I was so jubilant, that I was able to spend such an exquisite day with my dad, it was an experience I will never forget. Akito taught me to not take life for granted.

A few years passed and I was once again reminded of the cherry blossom tree. But in this case it was unfortunate. My dad had passed away. All I could think about was how he now reminded me of the tree. The time I shared with my dad was beautiful and I cherish every moment I ever had with him but Akito was right. Life is tragically short. Little did I know the long lasting effect Japanese culture would have on me. Between the life lesson Akito taught me and my dad passing on, I truly appreciate the cherry blossom tree and everything it represents. Which is why the cherry blossom is and will forever be my favorite tree.