

My first memory is of my mom finding out her brother had been murdered. She lost part of herself that day. I was four years old, at the top of the stairs in my parents' split-level home, with my mother next to me. It was awful.

No one said anything

In a split-level home, only one person can enter at a time. First my Uncle Ralph entered. His sad, red eyes and crumpled face looked up the stairs at my mom. He shook his head and looked down. My mom erupted and crumbled, all at once. He didn't have to tell her what happened. She knew Duane was gone forever.

Following my uncle through the door was my grandpa. He didn't look up. His sadness filled the house. My memories fade in and out after that. One thing is for sure, my mother's screams live with me, even today. They shaped who I am.

Confusion

Somewhere in the mix, yet not fast enough, my father ushered me and my one-year old brother to the end of the upstairs hall and into their bedroom, the master.

"You need to stay in here for a while."

What is a happening? Why is everyone crying? Why is Mom screaming? I'm sure we asked all these questions, but all I remember is my dad quickly turning, shutting the door and returning to the matter at hand – a houseful of sobbing, heartbroken adults looking for answers.

In that room my one-year-old brother tugged at my clothes asking, "what's wrong?" I never remember leaving that room. Only saying over and over, "I don't know." That room aged me far beyond my four years. I had to be the rock for my brother.

Lost innocence

From that point forward, I was a four-year-old who knew there was evil in the world. Guess what? There really is a boogie man. He finds a way to break into your house. And he will kill you, your family and your friends. And you know what else? He does use the closet.

Jonathan Norton's impact on my family and life has been substantial. While I was only four years old on Oct. 4, the repercussions of his careless actions have rippled through my life for the past thirty years.

He stole my Uncle Duane. He stole my childhood innocence. He stole my grandparents, parents and Uncle Ralph – I'll never know what they were like before Duane was murdered.
