

Parents who die early leave a big void

One of Tiffany White's favorite memories of her mother, Elizabeth White, is the tour her mother gave her of her childhood home in Tennessee. She saw her great-great-grandmother's house, learned what an outhouse was and listened to stories about her mother's childhood.

White's mother died from brain cancer on April 18, 2008, five days before her 60th birthday. The younger White was 27 at the time.

Jamala McFarland was the same age when her mother, Camille Thornton, died in August 2006. Thornton, 55, had been prescribed morphine pills for diabetic neuropathy and a patch for severe neck pain. Unbeknownst to her, the patch also contained morphine, leading to an unexpectedly lethal dosage.

Losing a parent, as White put it,

before it's "expected" is something Michelle Yeager, 33, can also relate to. Her father, Thomas Stephen Yeager, was 51 when he succumbed to chronic health problems in October 1993 during Michelle Yeager's senior year in high school.

She was more prepared when her mother, Lillian Yeager, died from ovarian cancer in May 2006 at the age of 62. The younger Yeager was a few days shy of her 30th birthday.

White, McFarland and Yeager all say they miss having their

parents around and being able to talk to them the most. Shortly after her mother passed, White found herself scrolling to her name in her cell phone, forgetting that she was gone.

White and Yeager said their grief was strongest when all the business of funeral arrangements was complete and the phone calls stopped. White is also saddened when she thinks about "the future things" that her mom won't be around to see, like marriage and childbirth, milestones McFarland is living.

McFarland, who got married in 2007 and gave birth to her son in January, said her grief is strongest now.

She wishes her mom could be there to see how fast her son is changing and to give her advice. McFarland had a C-section, as her mother did with her and her twin brother, and "there really wasn't anyone to give me too much input on what was really going to happen. I know that she would've taken care of (us) and every-

thing we needed, without a doubt," she said.

McFarland remembers her mother as "caring, understanding. She didn't know anyone as a stranger, just real open." She remembers her smile and her always saying, "I love you," at the end of every conversation. McFarland has a good laugh to herself when she thinks of times she and her mom just hung out around the house, watching movies and talking.

One of Yeager's favorite memories of her mom is the two of them dancing the Electric Slide at a high school dance her mom chaperoned.

For Yeager, an only child, living in her childhood home has helped her through her grief. "Some people think they couldn't do it, or say that it's weird, but for me, it's very comforting. It feels good to come home and see that all these things that I've grown up with are still here," she said.

She also takes comfort in the memory of her parents throughout the Louisville community. Her father

established a program to honor high-achieving minority students at Jefferson Community and Technical College, where he taught, and several awards have been created in her mother's name. "I feel her spirit is still here, and on a regular basis people will tell me how much they miss my mother and how much she contributed to them or their organization," said Yeager.

White's faith in God has helped her through her grief the most. Sharing memories of her mom and encouraging others have also been healing for her.

"Since my mom's death, I've come across so many people under 30 who have lost a parent," White said. "It's encouraging to know you're not out there by yourself and that people do understand." ♣

Mariam Williams is a Louisville native. More of her deep thoughts and interesting stories can be found at RedboneAfropuff.com.



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