

A Grief Story

My father was an adventurer. All through his life, he enjoyed exciting projects he would work on, plus hiking, hunting and fishing trips – and even a safari. He had been very active during his life, but was more confined to home after my mother had been ill. He decided to take a motorcycle trip, and celebrated his 80th birthday in Sturgis, South Dakota with several friends.

On his way back, he had a motorcycle accident. It took several hours to drive to the hospital, and the doctor who was trying to save him told my brother he would probably be dead when we got there. I tried to pray harder, hoping it would be enough to keep him alive, at least until we could see him. It seemed like we were “in a fog” and that nothing was real. I could not believe that he could be gone - But when I saw the body, I could not deny it anymore.

The hospital chaplain prayed with us. My mother, and most of us were there. When people said, “It was good that he died quickly and didn’t have to suffer”, it sure didn’t seem good to me - I didn’t want him to be gone! But I couldn’t cry.

I was mad because the police didn’t call us. One of the people he was riding with finally reached us, quite a while after it happened. I was mad at myself for being so shocked. Of course, an 80 year old on a motorcycle trip is at risk of having an accident, but he had done **so many** risky things over the years without being hurt.

I offered to make the phone calls to our relatives and his friends (he had a lot of them) and they told me how he had inspired them, and the fun they had together. Their stories were remarkable, and emotional. *What was wrong with me? I felt like crying, but no tears would come out – even at the funeral.*

I felt depressed and lonely, so I slept more than usual. Then I went to a counselor to sort out some of my feelings. I realized that I always got the feeling from my dad that I was not good enough, and I doubted that he loved me. His personality was quite different than mine, and he didn’t seem to want to share things with me as much as with other people in his life.

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As time went on, I realized how difficult it must have been for him to stay home and help my mother, and that getting away on his exciting trips was really important to him. He had been very upset about physical changes as he got older, and would have been devastated if he became disabled.

I started to think of his life and how he went out of it “with a bang!” He loved fireworks, and it probably was a fitting way to end his extraordinary life. There were even some positive things that happened after he died. My brother started coming home almost every week to help my mother. (He only came to visit about twice a year before that.) We all took roles in helping my mom, so she could stay home alone safely. We became more respectful of each other and our relationships grew.

One of his grandchildren made a book of all the stories he wrote about his adventures. It was fun to read, and it helped me to understand why he did some of the things he had done. He also had written said some positive things about his family in his stories.

We realized how fortunate we were to have known him. Some of our Dad’s enthusiasm and spirit were passed on to each of his children, although our strengths seem to be different. Part of accepting his death was to realize that he loved me in his own way, even though he did not readily show it.

I began to heal in spiritual ways as I grieved. My faith in a higher power was very important, and I made more effort to go to church. I had the support of my family and friends, as well as some wonderful neighbors who helped us take care of my mother. It took almost a year before I cried - It was like floodgates opened up, and then I felt better. I have accepted his death, but I will never forget him.

Because of the grief process, and the ways that I coped, I now know that part of the meaning and purpose in my dad’s death was for me to spread some of his inspiring spirit to others. I have started this by telling his story.