

Grief Without Closure

Category: Recovering

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | November 1, 2024

I just returned from the cemetery. It was 10 years ago today—November 1—that my beloved father died in my arms. The sun has daily risen and set during this past decade; I have gone about my business of reading, attending theatrical productions, napping, and meeting with friends. My children and I have gotten closer. But there is a hole in my soul from which I will never recover. Until I take my last breath, I will miss, mourn, celebrate, and love my father.

Grief, I am told, has stages. A healthy person travels through those stages until she reaches acceptance—when memories remain, but the pain of loss has subsided.

I have not yet reached that stage. I have not recovered from the years I cared for Dad and promised him that everything would be okay. I have not recovered from that last night when, at 1:45 in the morning, I was awakened by erratic breathing sounds on the monitor that connected me with his room. I rushed in, crawled into the hospital bed to be next to him, and held him for 45 minutes until he took his final breath—with a serene smile on his face that my tears blurred.

Living now in the apartment he shared with Ma, I see him everywhere—dozing in his recliner, standing at the kitchen counter snacking on ice cream directly from the quart, drinking his coffee drowned in milk while reading the newspaper, and always looking at me with love in his eyes. How does one manage to endure the emptiness of her home while being surrounded by so many tangible reminders of a loved one? How does one recover from such a loss?

I try my best to lose myself in a novel, to escape into the magical world of theater, to dream of fantasy worlds where death does not occur. I cherish every moment with my children. But a voice whispers in my ear, telling me how much Grandpa would have enjoyed being with these special people.

My dad is forever with me. I wear a mask of normalcy, but behind that mask is a face of sadness—the face of a daughter who will never, ever recover from the death of her father. That is my reality.

Ronna L. Edelstein

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania