

# Holding On for Dear Life

Category: Holding On

written by Mary Kay Jordan Fleming | February 4, 2019

Dad came from a family of smokers consumed by emphysema, and now it was his turn. Barely out of my teens, even I understood there was no hope of improvement. Only death would bring relief from suffering.

Our family took turns keeping vigil at Dad's hospital bedside, always in pairs for moral support. During each of my stays, I offered a silent prayer: *Please don't let me be here when it happens and, especially, don't let me be alone.* I was scared to death. Mostly, I was scared of death.

My brother and sister-in-law were scheduled for the overnight shift with Dad on a sweltering evening in July. When a conflict arose at the last minute, I was the only one available to fill in.

I summoned a nurse each time Dad awoke. It was often "too soon for more pain medicine," (these were the days before palliative care), but we offered whatever comfort we could. Dad's struggle was particularly intense, so the nurse called my mom to come back to the hospital. No answer. Mom was exhausted, asleep in the only bedroom that had a window air conditioner, unable to hear the phone.

We lived a block away from the hospital, and I ran as fast as I could to collect her. I was never athletic but, on that occasion, I could have sprinted to the ends of the earth if it meant escaping the knowledge I had said my last goodbye. As long as I kept running, Dad was like Schrödinger's cat, simultaneously alive and dead. I clung to his life as long as possible, begging a merciful God not to make me discover the truth.

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