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When My Daddy Died

By Sherine Brown-Fraser



All photos courtesy, Sherine Brown-Fraser

▲ Sherine with her father in 2008.

AS I WAS RECENTLY DRIVING to the store with my 17-month-old daughter, I saw a man standing on the side of the road who reminded me of my father. The emotions flooded over me and the tears poured down my face. I immediately calmed myself by quietly saying, “Sherine, Daddy is resting in Jesus. You will see him again. Remain faithful.”

Coping with loss is never easy. For me, looking into my sweet daughter’s face, staying around positive people, helping others, walking, laughter, staying busy, and reflecting on inspiring Bible texts or precious hymns keeps my mind in a good place. These things don’t always take away the sting, the tears or even the burning in my heart, but they do help me cope as I grieve the loss of my father.

I miss my daddy dearly, and have many precious memories of him. One childhood memory that comes to mind was each night when he came home from work. I would hear his keys jingling as he approached the door, then I would race to hide behind the door. As

he walked in, I would jump out from behind, leap into his arms and say, “Love you, Daddy!”

There were times I would come home to visit my family from college or graduate school. Occasionally, it would be a surprise and I would arrive in the evening, giving my daddy a big bear hug as he was sleeping and say, “I’m home!” He loved that. I also remember when Daddy took our family deep-sea fishing. Besides getting a bit seasick (except Daddy), we had a great time! I caught 17 fish with his help.

Another fond memory was my brother and I watching my parents bowl on Saturday nights, for over 20 years, in their monthly league. A particularly precious memory was singing a duet with my daddy for Sabbath school at church. We sang “How Great Thou Art,” one of his favorites. My father was known for his beautiful tenor. It’s what swept Mommy off her feet in their early years. Finally, attending the 59th General Conference Session in Atlanta with my family has such rich memories that tears swell up in my eyes as I write. This was the first and last GC Session my daddy attended. I can still see the sparkle in his eyes as he listened to the messages, walked through the expo or reconnected with old friends.

Fast forward through the years, and I arrived at Andrews University the summer of 2014, as department chair and tenured associate professor. One month after arriving, I received a call from my mother that Daddy fell.

It was after church on the Fourth of July weekend. My father suffered a traumatic brain injury, leaving him in a coma for more than two years. There are no words to express the emotional and physical pain of seeing your loved one in such a state, especially since I was pregnant with our first child and my parents’ first grandchild. My father was never able to meet his granddaughter, Samantha Juliet Fraser.

The second call came from my brother on August 19, 2016, at 5:15 a.m., that Daddy was not responding. “He’s gone.” The anguish was suffocating and we cried inconsolably.

So, then how does one cope? How do we continue to live full lives after loss? For me, clinging to Jesus as a new mother was my salvation. Literally. Asking for help; when the hurt became unbearable, letting the tears come without apology; spending more time with family; and doing things that matter most.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), mourning the loss of a relative or close friend “takes time, but research tells us that it also can be the catalyst for a renewed sense of meaning that offers purpose and direction to life.” Here are some strategies APA shares to help come to terms with loss:

- Talk about the death of your loved one with friends and colleagues in order to understand what happened and remember your friend or family member.
- Accept your feelings. People experience all kinds of emotions after the death of someone close. Sadness, anger, frustration and even exhaustion are all normal.
- Take care of yourself and your family. Eating well, exercising and getting plenty of rest help us get through each day and move forward.
- Reach out and help others dealing with the loss. Helping others has the added benefit of making you feel better as well.

- Remember/celebrate the lives of your loved ones. Possibilities include donating to a favorite charity of the deceased, framing photos of fun times, passing on a family name.

Daddy’s funeral was a beautiful tribute to his life, our family, 46 years of marriage to Mommy, and the amazing God we serve. The reflections were deeply heartfelt, weaving memories of my father’s life with those he loved and who loved him. The music lifted our hearts. Songs such as “The Holy City,” “Ship Ahoy,” “I’m Going to Make It” and “We Shall Behold Him” comforted us in ways only music can.

O, death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Jesus, thank you for your blood, your resurrection and your soon return. Daddy, “on that great gettin’ up morning,” I will see you again and leap into your arms (with Samantha) . . . for eternity. ■

Sherine Brown-Fraser, PhD, RD, CPT is the chair and associate professor of Public Health, Nutrition and Wellness at Andrews University. She is a biochemist, registered dietitian, personal trainer and new mom who resides in Berrien Springs, Michigan, with her husband, Handel Fraser.

