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Chapters

turning the pages through grief

5 Life Lessons

Losing My Father Taught Me

by Confidence Coach Susie Moore
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My Father was just 59 when he passed. I was 19. We knew for a few years that it was coming — he had a bad heart and an addictive lifestyle. But the finality of it was still shocking and heartbreaking. That was almost 11 years ago. I think of my father every day and the funny, assuring thing about time is that it allows grief to change shape. Certainly if I remember certain tender moments my dad and I shared, on a particularly sensitive day, I can weep as if losing him were yesterday. Over the years however I have consciously sought some positivity in the loss and have tried to live a life he would be proud of.

When I reflect upon my life without him I realize that there are five key things that the past 11 years have taught me.

1. Love is stronger than death.

My relationship with my dad continues. He lives on through my sister and I. When I make a delicious roast lamb, win at scrabble, watch old English television, read the classics and even write an article (my father was an author), I feel as if we are together. Physical planes cannot separate love. My sister feels this way, too. And I know we are right.



"I feel like you're trying to instill something in me, but I gotta be honest, I do not know what."

2. People who are going through the most can often hide it the best.

I hid my loss from people to avoid sympathy. I still do. Anyone who had lost a parent, or anyone for that matter, knows the awkward moment when family arises in conversation. Like when people ask about our parents and we talk about only one. It's not that it upsets us to talk about it (although sometimes it might), we don't want to explain, make you feel comfortable with having asked etc. When I was struggling the most I had the shiniest veneer to deflect any further discomfort. Never guess what someone's story is or what they are going through. It's impossible to know.

3. Mortality is motivating.

If I live to my dad's age, and I hope I am fortunate to live much longer, my life is already half way through now at age 30. This sounds morbid

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"My dad taught me to never be satisfied, to want more, and know that what is done, is done."

~Thierry Henry

what's the meaning of this?

LEAVING STONES ON GRAVES

There are several reasons and traditions that explain why visitors leave small stones or pebbles on someone's grave. For thousands of years, people were buried in tombs, or directly in the earth where they had fallen. Stones were then rolled in front of a tomb as a way of sealing it from scavengers, animals and the belief that they would keep evil spirits from escaping out into the world.



It is also a custom to place a stone, rock, or pebble on a headstone when one has visited a grave to show respect for the deceased.

The stones may symbolize that love and remembrance are as strong and everlasting as a rock.



SYMBOLS ON GRAVES



Taking a walk through a cemetery can be almost akin to an art gallery. Artwork, sculptures and headstone designs run the gamut of objects, animals and nature.

Here's a few examples and their possible meanings.

ACORNS: Power, authority, victory. Often seen on military graves.

ANCHOR: Hope, steadfastness.

ANGELS: Spirituality, guardians.

ARCH: Door to salvation.

DOUBLE ARCH: Being rejoined with a partner.

BEEHIVE: Masonic symbol of productivity.

BELLS and Doves: Marriage.

BIRD: Eternal life.

BOOKS WITH OR WITHOUT APPLE: Possible teacher.

BUTTERFLY: Shortened life.

CHERUBS: Innocence.

BROKEN COLUMN: Loss of head of family.

DEER: Outdoor enthusiast, hunter.

DRAGONFLY: Immortality and regeneration.

LAMB: Usually marks a child's grave.



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but to me it is encouraging. I think when we come to terms with our death, both metaphorically and literally, we are at our most courageous and powerful. I also simply don't sweat the small stuff like I used to.

4. To write memories down.

I share this advice with friends when people they lose a loved one and they often thank me later. It is such an intense time — the months we grieve — there is so much we can forget. Write down the last moments you shared and the most precious moments you can remember with that person. Be vivid in your writing. You will reread this many times over the course of your life.

5. Get to know the people you love.

As the old Baz Luhrmann song, "Wear Sunscreen," said, "Get to know your parents, you never know when they will be gone for good." Spend time with your parents, your siblings, your old friends. Ask them questions about their lives. What did they think about the world when they were your age? What are their passions? When were they the happiest in their lives? I did this recently with my mum and the answers surprised me. Nothing is more important and worthy of your time than the people you love. Nothing.

What has loss taught you?

Susie Moore is a writer & life coach based in New York City. She inspires and educates people to live the lives they imagined by tuning in to their authentic power and unlocking the confidence to ask for what they really, really want. You can sign up for Susie's free weekly wellness newsletter at www.susie-moore.com.

bookmarks

Your Guide to Cemetery Research by Sharon DeBartolo Carmack

Cemeteries not only can give us comfort, they can teach us a lot about history. Not just the history of a given place or society, but in many cases, our own personal and family histories as well.

Your Guide to Cemetery Research is wonderful and helpful tool for genealogy research, and for understanding the meanings behind the stones, and carvings.

Sharon DeBartolo Carmack begins by explaining how to locate your ancestor's vital records, including death certificates, obituaries, death notices, wills and probate, prayer and memorial cards, and mortality schedules. She then illustrates how you can use this information to find out where your ancestors are buried (and also tells you how to go about locating the cemetery itself). She describes the different types of cemeteries, as well as what sort of records they may have kept. The reader will also learn how to search a cemetery for the desired grave or plot, and how to read, record, and interpret the information on and around the marker. Especially interesting is her discussion on how the aggregate information in the graveyard can give you a picture of what the community was like when your ancestors were alive.

