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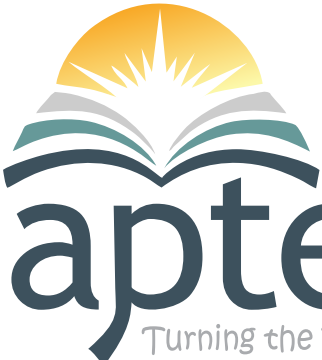
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# Chapters

Turning the Pages through Grief



# LOSS

## Before the Loss



By  
Eileen  
Madsen

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**I** recently experienced the loss of both my in-laws within three months of each other. But they were lost well before then. We've been grieving them for the last two years as they slowly-but-surely faded from their former selves, living in a care facility, unable to communicate clearly, if at all, confused, angry, at times accusatory. Visiting them became a dread, especially as it was a four-hour drive to the nursing home from where we live.

I was closer to my husband's dad. He was a vibrant, funny, talented guy, sometimes full of mischief. Well-respected and admired, everyone wanted to be in his orbit. Until a fall in his home changed everything, leading to his inability to walk, as well as his cognitive function taking a big hit. Even though he seemed to appreciate our visits in the moment, his lack of ability to remember the past five

minutes, or understand his situation much of the time, eventually made our "heart-in-the-right-place visits" almost pointless.

Prior to his death, each trip to the nursing home became a hope and a dread. **Maybe this time we'd get lucky, we'd think, and my father-in-law would be in semi-good spirits.** And yes, sometimes, he would be, even if what he was talking about was complete fantasy. Such as the time he told us a bus took him and his fellow residents to a big city for an outing, but he decided to take a walk around and go out for lunch instead on his own. Never mind that he was in a wheelchair as he regaled us of his meanderings. Or the time he said they all took a day trip to what he described as a hippy commune, where there were 50 couples, and he got to hang out have a couple beers. Oh, if that were only true, we thought. But in his mind it was, so we went with it.

*continued...*

**JUNE  
2026**



**"The older I get, the smarter my father seems to get."**  
—Tim Russert



...continued

No reason not to as it was an entertaining tale and he seemed to have had fun.

Eventually the stories weren't so whimsical, and his paranoia would overtake even the most innocuous of situations, and our dismay over it echoed his desperation.

**After his passing there was acceptance, and a huge sense of relief for everyone. But then came the struggle and the sadness, coming to terms with who he was, and who he became.**

The challenge after the passing of a loved one who changed so dramatically from what they once were, is remembering them at their best, not their worst. It takes time for the negativity to fade, and for their true self to come back into focus in our memory.

However, even as painful as watching someone with dementia or other debilitating issues in their final months or years, there is always something to take away from it. Maybe it was how you had more interactions with friends and family as you experienced and discussed the situation, and with that you grew closer and learned more about each other than you otherwise would have.

We also have been enlightened with some practical things about eldercare, finance, health and safety, and have had discussions about what care facilities are doing well, and what could be improved as we try to see things from a resident's point of view. And we've learned so much about ourselves as well, where our strengths and weaknesses lie. Or what our own futures may hold when the time comes.

**It's been about six months now, and this will be the first Father's Day without him.**

But it's becoming easier every day to remember him how we knew him to be. A fisherman who loved sailing and boating, a respected and talented architect, a person who made us laugh, and with whom we could talk about anything. We've shifted from talking about the nursing home experiences, to the many good times during the course of the 45 years I knew him, as well as my husband's childhood memories of their adventures as a family.

My only regret is that we didn't get to have a beer with him at that commune.

## Happy Father's Day?



Father's Day without a dad is a painful day of grief, love, and longing, and it is crucial to know you are not alone or forgotten. It is okay to feel sad, angry, or numb. Honor his memory by speaking his name, doing an activity he loved, or simply resting.

Here are ways to navigate this day:

### Honor His Memory

- *Share Stories:* Gather friends or family to share favorite stories and memories.
- *Visit Special Places:* Go to a favorite restaurant, park, or place you shared.
- *Engage in His Hobbies:* Watch his favorite movie, listen to his music, or play his favorite game.
- *Do a Memorial Act:* Plant a tree, make a donation, or light a candle.
- *Write a Letter:* Write a letter to your father sharing what's happened in your life.



### Care for Yourself

- *Allow Emotions:* It is okay to cry, or to feel fine, or to feel a mixture of emotions.
- *Set Boundaries:* It is acceptable to unplug from social media to avoid others' celebrations, say no to invitations, or stay in.
- *Acknowledge the Pain:* Do not pressure yourself to act happy; honor the grief and the love you still hold.
- *Seek Support:* Lean on friends, family, or support groups who understand the pain of loss.

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

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