

Making Amends

I had a dream the other night. My dad was sitting outside the gates of heaven dressed in a long white robe. He was bare foot, talking, laughing and eating at the same time. He addressed a woman passing, "Hello Missus," he said, "how are you today?" His laughter echoed, and I realized that he was happy and content.

It was 18 years ago this June 20th that my father took his last breath. He had fought cancer for four years and had time to contemplate his death, and to prepare for his leave taking.

My siblings and I met at his deathbed with mixed emotions and feelings. This shrunken, vulnerable man who was at death's door, looked like our father, yet he was different. He was trying to make things right with us. I believe, that while we have breath, we have opportunity to make things right. It's never too late. We may not be able to erase the past, or the consequences of actions taken, but we can say "I am sorry", "I love you.", and "will you forgive me?"

The nursing staff in our little community had lovingly cared for him. They experienced my father as a funny, talkative man who had a very interesting interpretation on things. Sometimes he would speak to them in Italian, other times he remembered to speak in English. I was glad that they had had this good experience. My siblings and I had other memories, memories which have followed us to this very day. Those memories were not funny but painful with long lasting negative results.

My father was a very abusive man. Our home was in a constant uproar. Anger and rage was threaded through out our formative days. One day he left us. The house became quiet and peaceful. My father moved to the other side of town. We saw him occasionally. Once a year we had a visit with him, but he was no longer involved in our lives emotionally or financially. To be abandoned by your parent has deep seated consequences. Your worth, validity and who you are, are greatly affected.

Today I do not think of those memories. Instead, I consider that moment when I felt I needed to forgive my father and make some moves towards him. Up to that time I thought that I had dealt with my father, but I was isolated from him. How does one make such a move towards someone who has caused so much hurt? A first step I took was to put down those expectations of what I thought an ideal father should be and come to terms with the reality of who he was. Regardless of whether he was good or bad, he was my father. I then needed to start accepting him as he was. I was then able to make a conscious effort of visiting him and spending time with him when I was at home.

A relationship needs the involvement of two people. Each has a part to play on what the relationship will be. He was happy for me to visit him once a year, and to call him once or twice a year. That's all he wanted. Secondly I had to mourn the loss of a father who had not been there for me. I had to let go of all those hurts, experiences and neglect. Allowing myself to grieve the loss helped me to move towards him. In those last years, I saw little moves that let me know that he was thinking of me. It wasn't all that I had wanted, but it was all he could give. I learned to accept what he could give.

In that hospital room, my father was able to make his own amends. He asked for forgiveness from my mother. They had been separated for 32 years. He kissed her and hugged her. He kissed and hugged us. A miracle of amends had taken place. The amends did not take away the memories of the past, however it neutralized the past so that each person could finish their personal journey of healing.

Finally he knew he was going. He called the family in, hugged and kissed everyone and spoke to everyone. I held his hand and he fell asleep. He did not talk to us again, although at various times, we could see that he was conscious. His breathing slowed down, and the death vigil began.

At the end, all one can do is try to make things right with their family and those they love. To be mindful that one should take the opportunity, to create good memories, while they still can. Most importantly that one takes the time to make his or her peace with God.

The attending nurse remarked that my father's passing had been one of the most peaceful ones she had seen. "He was ready to go", she stated. Yes amends had been made, and he was free to go.

I woke up from that dream, knowing that my father was very much alive and well. He was happy and content. Food, laughter and conversation surrounded him.