

Reflections

In a pond. In the mind. In one's sleep. On the calendar. The days linger on and the memories persist. It hits twenty-five. That's hard to believe. It seems he was just here, sharing his wry smile and laughter. He loved to putter – both on and off the golf course. It seems that's where I have some of the fondest memories of my Dad. August 20, 1978 was when we said good-bye. It has haunted me ever since.

When I reflect back each August, I shed tears amidst the chuckles. His easygoing manner always made me proud to call him Dad. His word and a handshake were how business was done. His reputation was spotless and sterling. Why did he leave when he did? I've never gotten my answer. Was it to turn over some of life's major responsibilities to me or was it his wicked sense of humor that perhaps only I could appreciate or understand? Or maybe both?

It doesn't seem possible that "Sonny" has been gone for 25 years. That's an anniversary. In fact, it is my sister-in-law's 25th anniversary. She got married amidst joy and tears just a few hours before Daddy left us. We were miles apart and had no way of knowing we would become family years afterward. I can never really help her celebrate her joys on these August 20ths without feeling mixed sentiments. My loss remains too strong. The hauntings continue.

Four o'clock on that fateful Sunday afternoon. Our last visit to the ICU. I remember it vividly. I felt the same shock and numbness when I learned President Kennedy had been shot. What now? Daddy, you weren't supposed to leave this way. I tell you "I love you," and you acknowledge my love by saying, "I know." Alarms sound, nurses storm the room. We're being forced out. I don't want to leave. One last look as the oxygen mask is removed. I watch as Dad's eyes roll back in his head. I feel a sinking feeling. I move in slow motion. I get Mom out of there, in time to motion to my uncle, June, that Daddy is gone. The nightmare begins. Numbness sets in. Snapshots of the past linger forever in my mind.

Some days I feel I'm talking with him as if he were here just yesterday. Other times, I feel as if I've been swept up by the hands of time and am reliving another era. I'm transported back to our living room and a Saturday night. Dad's just fixed some of his "Saturday Night Special Firehouse Chili." I wonder if he realizes I'm from another time. I don't think he does. He's still himself. Why would he be any different? He's my Dad.

One moment I'm playing golf when I'm about 10 years old and Dad's giving me some pointers. We played golf just about every Saturday. I thought this to be the norm. Didn't other kids do this? As that memory fades another one quickly replaces it. He's working on our boat. I'm growing impatient. What's new? That's something I didn't inherit from him. I'm getting better, though.

I really miss conversing with him. I miss his perspective. I want to share my interests and concerns and thoughts and opinions with him. I want him to tell me “that’s not a good idea” if it really sucks. But more importantly, I want him to tell me why. Daddy always had a steady head about him, no matter what the situation. I think I may have gotten some of that through osmosis.

When Daddy left us, Mama said I changed. She didn’t know me anymore. She didn’t like that feeling. I remember telling her she should be worried if I had not changed at all. I had no idea what lay ahead for me on that August day, 25 years ago today. It seems like an eternity ago for me. I’m at the half-century mark now and can’t believe that. What would Dad say? What would he be thinking? Ah, reflections, they never end.

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