

Grief Journal

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In 2018, I lost an uncle, my father-in-law, my own father (Richard) and an aunt. January 4, 2019 my mother, Jane, went to be with the Lord. She is finally at rest but I feel I have not grieved properly. I have told my counselor it was hard just to get it out. As I write this journal, there are tears, but not the deep tears that I believe God wants me to experience.

When I was still wearing diapers, I still remember how my day would be messed up if my dad did not give me a kiss goodbye before he went to work. Some of my earliest memories I remember standing in a corner by the front door hoping for someone to care. I used to hide under the crib at night wishing that I was gone so they would miss me. I remember spilling my milk on the table while I was still in my high chair. I felt my mom's anger and displeasure when it happened. I remember when she expressed displeasure when I lost my glove but thankfully it was in my pocket. I remember asking her to read to me once and she instead said, "You read it." I believe it squashed any enjoyment of reading. I remember hitting my head really hard after falling off a swing that we had in the house. With a lump on my head I went to her but did not receive the comfort I needed. I remember how I tried to shine the candlestick brass holder not realizing it was tarnished and would not brighten. I wanted to please her so badly. One night my brother and I were in our own beds laughing and joking when she came in. Perhaps she gave a warning to go to sleep but we kept laughing and then my mom hit us once with a belt.

I wanted to have a deep mother-daughter relationship but there was none. Yet, I remember wanting to die with her; that I couldn't live without her when I was in grade school. I remember wanting to still hold hands with her when walking outside and one day she told me, "Don't you think you're old enough to stop holding hands?" Perhaps I was about 10. I am an affectionate person but I didn't know it at the time. I don't remember her hugging me but I do

remember laying my head on her lap when I was young. I remember telling her that I wished I was small again to fit on her lap.

My mom had her “good” days. I remember her buying me special things. She took us to church and had my brother’s friends over for meals. We used to bake together and I remember one time going to the movies with her. As for my dad, he took me to Radio City Music Hall alone one time to see a movie and one time we went to eat raw clams. I remember we would have game night but that all stopped. I don’t remember when. He threw out our games when our apartment needed to be painted. I remember seeing them in the hall by the elevator and he never asked us or told us he would do it.

My mom eventually went to work full-time and my aunt watched us maybe for a year or so. My brother is 3 years older than me but he did not like me. We had intense fights, verbally and physically. Looking back, I wished my family had more dialog. I used to wish for a set of parents like Dale & Roy Rogers or something like that.

Somehow...I don’t know when, my mom was against my dad and I felt I needed to take sides and I sided with my mom. To make it worse, my dad would walk around naked after a shower. It aggravated me. I would tell him to stop it but he would do it. So I became “closer” to my mom.

My parents’ marriage started to go awry. They fought over money. One day I happened to be there and they were having an intense argument over groceries. He put his hands around my mother’s neck. I started to laugh nervously and said “stop.” My dad was so angry that he took the head of lettuce and threw it out the window. We lived on the 9th floor in the projects. I remember looking afterwards hoping no one got hit. It fell on a grassy spot.

What made my formative years worse was my mother wanted my brother and me to attend parochial school. This is what made the money so tight. Parochial school was not a fun place. Their policy was “be seen but not heard.” I remember hating going to school. I was there from kindergarten to the 8th grade. The 8th grade was the worst of all my school years.

Life in the projects was not safe. My father was robbed by a man with a knife while I helplessly watched in the elevator. My mother was hurt by a mugger and had a blood clot in her leg. A man contemplated yanking a cross off my neck in the elevator.

Fast forward...My Mom had mental illness. I do not remember when it started to manifest. I just know as the years went on, it got worse. She never consented to go to counseling. She went to our pastor once, but she said he audio taped her and therefore, never stepped in that church again, even when I got baptized. She had paranoia and schizophrenia. It was never medically diagnosed but everyone knew she had problems from her statements and behavior. In 1996 my mom and my aunts decided to move to CA. I tried to convince her to stay but she would not hear it. She eventually divorced my dad even though he did not want it. My dad waited 6 years hoping my mom would return before he remarried.

Fast forward. We finally have peace as my mom’s craziness was not near us. However, every Christmas I was blue. My husband was good and we visited CA a few times to see my mom. She moved back in 2015 as her health began to change. I did not want her back. My husband and cousin said it “was time.” My mom and I had “issues.” She felt I was demanding and controlling and I felt the same about her. In 2016, my husband asked us to prepare for a very early departure for vacation. I told her to hurry and she missed holding the stair rail and fell missing 3 stair steps. She was in ICU. I became her full-time caregiver.

I pushed myself to be “perfect” in taking care of her. I became resentful and yet I felt it was my fault for telling her to “hurry.” Her health would yo-yo up and down due to care she did or did not receive in the nursing home or hospital. Thankfully God would heal her.

When my father was dying, I asked my mom if she wanted to go see him. She did. One of the most difficult things for me was my father was lying in the bed unable to speak or respond. He may have been able to see us and maybe hear something. I’m not sure. He had fallen and there was blood in his brain. My mom took his hand and held it for awhile. I felt everything in me cry out in my thoughts “you don’t deserve to hold his hand.” That was difficult to watch yet, I’m thankful they made their peace. I think my father would have wanted it that way.

My mom had a blood problem, myelodysplasia. I did not realize time was running out. Outwardly I did all I could possibly do to take care of her. Everyone said I was a good daughter, yet, I was so angry and bitter that she broke our family up and how she treated my father. I was upset at how I felt I could never please her. I was resentful of her mental illness and the accusations she made that we were doing things to her food, clothes, furniture when we were still living together. I knew mentally my mom loved me as she did so much for me and I knew she would give her life for me. And yet that is not enough. I grieve that I did not have a mother/daughter bond. I know I need to forgive her and yet I feel I “mentally” did it but not whole heartedly. I know God will not forgive me if I do not forgive. Yet deep down I am unable to be free from her. It is like a tormenting spirit that I do not want to face and yet I know spiritually I will not grow if this continues.

I believe my grandfather abused my mother and her siblings. Unfortunately my mother never talked about the abuse and I was too afraid to open the “Pandora’s box” and not know how to handle her reactions.

Eventually my mom's time to go to home to the Lord had come. I was so angry that I had to take care of my mom mostly by myself. I was so filled with worry was I making the right decisions regarding her care. I hated the paperwork and worried over making major decisions for her. It was difficult not knowing if I was handling her funeral arrangements properly.

I find it difficult to understand why I had to go through the sadness in my life. Sometimes I wonder whether a "curse" was put on our family. I used to fear becoming mentally ill like my mom. God is gracious that I realized the pattern of "divorce" that runs rampant on my mother's side of the family. It is His grace that my husband and I remain married.

Looking back however, I realize that God was there in all these events. I know this "mentally" and believe it is a matter of time for my wounding to be healed. I have much I need to thank God for. Even though my mom had mental illness, she loved the Lord and she was still able to function in her daily activities for the most part. She was a giving person and she loved my brother and me.

My father gave his heart to the Lord a year before he passed. He was able to forgive my mom. As difficult as it was going through some of my loneliness and depression, the Lord has kept me mentally. While I may tend toward fear, the Lord is gradually setting me free. God has finally supplied the counseling that I always needed and wanted. Additionally, taking Spiritual Formation with Dr. Reimer last semester and taking this PPTFM course has supplied me with tools to use to train me to be set free.

I believe God will not leave me as I am. He is constantly drawing me closer to Himself and to a deeper walk with Him. I realize the time will come soon that I will forgive fully. He is constantly showing me new things.