

Trying to Honor My Dad

6/18/2022

When I found the courage to honor my mother back in May, I knew Father's Day would be just around the corner, and I would have to address the issues regarding my dad. I wasn't fully aware of my emotional scars that had been buried for so long until just a few years ago. As a teenager I lived alone with my mother, and we seemed to have disagreements daily. I imagine she took the brunt of my suppressed anger, so during that time my dad won my favor by default.

Tom Nolis Ward was born in Kenova, West Virginia in January, 1936. He was the youngest of eight children, having only one brother who died right after I was born. He grew up in humble surroundings but made his way toward being a popular young man in high school as he excelled in sports. I don't know much about my dad's childhood since he wasn't around during the years when I might have had the gumption to ask him. He joined the Coast Guard after high school, and was transferred to Oakland, California, and I assume is where he met my mother. Ironically, my mom bore a striking resemblance to my dad's high school sweetheart, Lucille.

When I was little, my dad had his own special nickname for me, SkeeziX. I didn't know where the name came from, but I do know it made me feel special because it was his nickname for me alone. I was around nine or ten years old when we visited with relatives. My dad was playing with my younger cousin when out of nowhere he called her SkeeziX. He never called me by that name again. I can still feel the hurt I felt then. After twenty-three years of marriage, my parents divorced. At the age of twelve or thirteen, my dad left our home and our lives at that crucial time in a young girl's life when she needs her daddy the most.

I didn't see my dad again until I was eighteen years old. He bought me a plane ticket to visit him in Indiana where he was living with his new family. I felt like a houseguest the entire stay because he had become a stranger to me. He ended up marrying Lucille, taking over as the head of her household. It was during that visit when I met my half-brother, but no one ever discussed it. He was about ten years old at the time. It was obvious to me that he was my father's son, since he had my dad's facial features and didn't look anything like Lucille's other two children.

That trip was the last time I saw my dad. Not long after, he developed stomach cancer and his illness worsened quickly. He was in the hospital because of the cancer, and his body became too weak. He suffered a heart attack which caused his death. We scraped enough money together and flew my sister out to represent our side of the family at his funeral in West Virginia. As I recall, I didn't cry at the news of his passing for quite some time.

I had corresponded with Lucille's daughter for a while after his death, and then we lost touch. A few years ago, it started to bother me that I had nothing from my dad's belongings, just because he was my father. He earned medals in the Coast Guard, and I thought it was sad that none of us four kids had anything to connect us to our dad. It was through Ancestry.com that I contacted one of Lucille's cousins, who put me back in touch with Lucille's daughter. I was driving into work one morning when I received a phone call from her, stating that she had some news she wanted to share. I told her that I already knew what she was going to tell me.

It was finally out in the open that her youngest brother also happened to be my younger brother. I told her I had always known, but no one else talked about it so I wasn't going to either. I have since met my 'baby brother' as an adult. There is no doubt he is my father's son, since he looks just like him. He shared with me that my dad was a great father to him, although my dad never did acknowledge that he was his son. I find that to be cruel. My new brother has had many difficulties in his life, demons to battle, I'm sure due to the lack of affirmation of his identity.

When we met for the first time as adults, it was on a rainy Veteran's Day, 2019. My new brother brought with him a photo album of pictures of 'our' dad. I too brought a photo album with my pictures in it. Would you believe we both brought our pictures in the same exact, red photo albums? We sat together, comparing pictures and memories, and then my new brother handed me one of the two folded flags he received from the two separate military funerals held. One took place in Indiana where my dad had been living, and the other was from his hometown of West Virginia. He gave me the flag from West Virginia. It was the first thing I possessed that was from my dad.

During our brief time together, my new brother and his sister shared what a great father my dad had been to them. They shared how he seemed so happy and loved to sit around playing his guitar. They told me that my dad loved we four kids and missed us all very much. It was at that statement that a huge lump formed in my throat and all I could utter was, "Well, I wouldn't know about that."

The harsh reality was upon me, that I had been abandoned by my father. Not just once, but I count three times. First, when I was no longer his Skeeze. Next was when my parents divorced, and he disappeared from my life when I needed him the most. Finally, when as an adult I finally realized we had been replaced by an entirely new family, one that made him happy.

It isn't easy to honor my father after reading what I just wrote. He was my dad, and I have his brown eyes. My individual features favor his side of the family, but I'm often told I look like my mother. He served our country and retired from the Coast Guard. He served in Vietnam. He earned those medals I mentioned, but I never did receive them from Lucille. As his dependent, I was able to submit a request from the Department of Defense and received duplicate medals of those he had earned. I was glad I did that. My sons or grandsons might like to have them one day.

I am told my dad returned to his Christian roots before he died. With that, I can say with confidence I will see him again. I'm glad about that. I have missed having a mom and dad for such a long time, but the sad part of that statement is that I have never longed for the mom and dad from who I was conceived. There is no comfort to be found there. If you are wondering, I have forgiven my parents. They did the best they could with what they knew.

My comfort now comes from God, my "Abba, Father." He is my daddy, and I thank him for loving me so well. He accepts me and loves me for everything I have and all that I am, and I am so grateful.

Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there. Please love your families.



