

I cannot believe it has been a year. A whole year. April 2nd is not a day I plan to commemorate each year, there is just something about the first year. It went too fast. I am not ready. Sometimes, I am sad. Sometimes, I am mad. I think back to how I wish we had known and could have fixed it and had more time. Sometimes, I wish that he had not gone so fast, that we had had time for closure.

Then, I remind myself of all the time we had that many do not get. We had a dad, husband, co-worker, uncle, father-in-law, uncle, friend that was present and impactful his entire life. I think in particular to the widespread impact he has had as Uncle and Gramps. His frequent visits were highlights for our kids filled with imagination, stories, games, hikes, sports, hobbies, homemade gifts, food and endless fun. He introduced our kids to rituals Andy and I had like Old Rag, Great Falls, amusement parks, Broadway shows, state fairs, Pawleys Island, etc. The simple things it turns out were the most memorable and for which I am most grateful. He had such excitement for what each of us was doing and since he cannot be here to see us succeed, we should be inspired to reach the potential he always saw in each of us.

Whenever I cannot believe he is no longer here, I see him in the beauty of nature when I am walking Jet, or listening to music, or hearing a news bit on NPR that he would have been interested in, or reading a particularly poignant magazine article. Dad lived life on his terms until the very end, and that is all anyone can ask for. Sure, would I have loved to have seen him at the weddings of his grandchildren and being present in the lives of his great-grandchildren? Of course. We will just have to make sure the very best of him shines on for the next generation. We had so much time with him, that I should not be selfish to want more than we had.

My heart aches for all of us but it would have ached more had Dad lived but not have been able to do the simple things he cherished most each day, which would have been the case. To be stuck in that hospital bed for a month was awful for him. So, I know that we are lucky he went quickly if he had to go. There is no recovery from pancreatic cancer. Think of the people with means who struggled with it for years and years like Patrick Swayze, Steve Jobs, Alex Tribeck, Aretha Franklin, and Ruth Bader Ginsberg, or died quickly after diagnosis like dad - Michael Landon, Alan Rickman, and John Hurt. They all had the best treatment available, but the end result was the same. I know Dad suffered some in silence before diagnosis but true to form, he was out hiking the day prior to being admitted to the hospital. I think he knew, but did not want to admit it, and thought he could stubbornly ignore it and it would go away if he kept on doing what he loved doing.

In the end, none of us can escape our fate. Dad's legacy to all he knew and loved is a powerful one. I love that he lives on in our kids and his online archive. Mom, you had so many great years together. I am sorry for your pain but proud of your resilience. Mom, Dad and you are the only grandparents my kids truly know. Johnnie's parents died so early that they never met them. I think about ways to be more like dad and think the most important lesson I need to do better about is being truly present and engaged with the important people in my life before it is too late. So, I plan to stop and smell the roses more, tiptoe through the tulips as it were, laugh out loud, take risks, play hard, work hard, and tell people (like you) how important they are to me more often.

Love, Christie

As we pass the year anniversary of Jim's death, I reflect on his legacy left for us to share, emulate, and appreciate with thanks for Jim's presence in our lives.

Today, I am surrounded by wall photos, personal loving letters, tingling cardinal chimes outside the kitchen window, numerous homemade plaques and gifts celebrating special occasions which Jim made, plus garden plants now emerging in the yard that Jim loved planting.

Family continues to be a priority in our lives. Jim epitomized this in his rapport with Christie and Andy, our grandchildren, and other family members with his unique ability to endear himself to them at their comfort levels. His joy of living permeated all of us in our encounters for which we'll be forever grateful.

I am so glad to have shared so much of my love and life with Jim who gave us many "happy times" despite his unexpected final exit. Memories will continue to sustain us as well as the promise to be reunited once again.

Love to all. Sue

I really enjoyed the reflections from both of you as we mark the first year since dad's passing. The love that flows from words etched in your hearts is a beautiful sight to me. Pondering of recent including Tuesday directed toward the power of family to unite around the best and worst of times.

We had concerns but no idea of the immediate/upcoming severity of dad's situation when admitted to George Washington University hospital. Nor could we comprehend the mountains each would climb, as well as the collective journey shared by the three of us. My strongest emotions this week centered around the inherent power within families when time stands still and the world around fades like background lighting in the midst of foreground flurry. The power to comfort, share the breadth/depth of unfamiliar suffering, be voices of reason and solidarity, and many such scenarios are only possible when hearts become knitted together in the throes of life's greatest challenges.

I will forever remember the three of us trying our best to provide dad with the best care possible from limited access to insights we so desperately needed to validate. I cherish the time by his bedside where parent and child roles became reversed. Traveling through proverbial DC traffic and performing duties for tiny quality of life improvements in that room always seemed a privilege and not a burden. I felt an unusually calm and cheery disposition when taking care of dad on my solo trips. We had long overdue conversations about deeper matters and discovered commonalities that made us roll our eyes and laugh at the same time. I felt a sixth sense (lack of better expression) that was attuned to his declining emotional and physical state as days turned into weeks. It wasn't a conscious awareness so much as spiritual connection to feel some of he did (I experience periodically with others). Such increased compassion and helped sift through his lesser concerns to find what mattered most in those precious moments.

While understandably angry and confused at times from the uncertainty of this situation, dad showed determined resolve to hold out hope for a release and homecoming with the world he adored full of nature, Laci, people, and a simple life in the house that was constructed by love and infused with family. I admire the tenacity as he cleaved to that in the most difficult of circumstances until he slowly let go of this world and began preparing for the next. In my soul, I know he did have a release and homecoming, just not the one we all desired for him here. Into the arms of awaiting ancestors comprised of known and unknown generations he went. I respectfully say these things only because I have witnessed for myself the thinness of the veil between heaven and earth with ancestors from our family tree while in the temple doing their work (or elsewhere).

Before the final decision was made together and we cried out in sorrow from the finite loss of physical death that goes against the grain of immortality sewed into the soul, our individual efforts became swallowed up in an increasingly united presence to be with dad as the frequently shifting news naturally led to such comradery. I will forever hold and cherish the nights in hotels and waiting rooms where we effortlessly deepened bonds that are temporarily lessened when vicissitudes of daily life descend upon all stages of life. As I contemplated resurrection this past week, I noted the rich symbology and metaphoric representations. Spring is perhaps the best example of renewal in nature. After a long dispersion down life's many paths, it was remarkable to feel that same theme in the relationship between the three of us that is always present yet

magnified in shared suffering. In my experience, when life whittles down to the core of our being, that is when the longing and presence of family becomes a powerful force.

There is much significance and impact from a year ago that we all feel in various ways. What cannot be disannulled by death, or any separation resides uniquely in families who bore the heat of the day and became connected in ways none can fully understand here. It may be that observation is most prevalent with shared tribulation and loss, but enduring this trial nevertheless changed each of us in how we view the sanctity of life, existential worth we bring to each other, and the triumph of walking through life altering situations together to meet the thralls of adversity. Such a loss will never be fully reconciled until we are reunited with dad once again. But I find solace in the upside of what we have gained through our combined journey and ongoing transformation from wading through the furnace of affliction all must face here.

Although I talked about events in the past now, I do so with an eye to the future where infinite hope is available each and every day to make a small or "one person at a time" positive impact in a divisive world. Some are acts of noticing and showing kindness to others who suffer as part of dad's influence in uniquely personal and similar ways. As we mourn his passing at times while continuously celebrating the life and legacy bestowed upon us, I feel proud to have a dad who did his best to pause life so he could share playfulness and unbridled childlike enthusiasm. He is a simple man who grew from a boy connected to the natural world. He never cared much for the complexities of life as they frustrated him. When the going got tough, he sported a Mary Poppin's briefcase with abundant gifts not bought at stores, which lightened the load of those around him. I have felt his presence watching over me at times, while observing with a different perspective during other occasions. I testify with all my soul death is not the end, whether that is a personal belief or not. I also know that families created on earth were designed from before birth to be together forever in a perfect felicity we cannot enjoy in this present life. I share my witness about the infinite expanse of eternity as intelligence begets intelligence forever. For this end are we born into the hardest part of that journey.

I love you both and thought of a quote from the movie, "When Dreams May Come", with words I typically do not use anymore. It is a flashback where Chris Nielsen (Robin Williams) says to Ian (his son) in the past, "If I was going through fu***** HELL, I'd only want one person in the whole g**damn world by my side.". We went through hell and found glimpses of heaven in deeper understanding of dad and one another. You two are the parallel in this quote. I have been to many dark places in my life, but the light of family was never stronger than when we bonded while walking the incredibly hard path of losing a dear friend and loved one. May you both be blessed in your best attempts of reconciling the challenge of sorrow to see beauty for ashes that could not have come in any other way. Help is always available. Some of my best moments of life unfolded only after wading through the most opposition known at each juncture. We can become truly humble, loving, and strong after the fires scorch the already parched ground. The phoenix is reborn from these ashes unto beauty. So, too, there are many rebirths here with power to open our eyes anew for the first or millionth time.

Love

-Andy

Thank you for sharing these beautiful words Christie. So much to be thankful for, your father was a beautiful soul, always positive, always happy, and most of all always engaged. Everyday he captured the worlds beauty and made every effort to share the same. Thanks for keeping us in your heart and know we stand right by you in our pride and love of your dad. We hope to see you out in California one of these days, and in the interim please give our love to Johnny and the family from their California cousin.

May your Dad's memory continue to be a blessing for all of us. We love you!

-John, Kerri, Isabel, Diana and Chalky

I Agee  your dad was a perfect example of staying present. Living and truly experiencing life with eyes wide open. That's a testament to who he was and how he will be remembered 

Love, Jennifer

Christie this is a profoundly beautiful and poignant reflection. Thank you for sharing it with all of us. Your dad was truly a spectacular father, uncle and grandfather. I'm so grateful for his example on how to be present and live in the moment with loved ones. My kids all loved and appreciated him as I did.

XOXO

Mary Beth

Ditto, to all of the above. At 4 years, I am still mad and sad. It is the little things that are the painful reminders among a typical bustling day. Like the pictures of the cherry blossoms I took last night. Dad celebrated one Easter here with us and wasn't a huge walker, and had allergies, but wanted to walk and look at the trees blooming.

It's the little reminders. It does get easier, but even being a faithful person, there isn't an answer to the why. And everyone else around you doesn't understand. Until they do, which is also sad because you know that pain.

But, there is happiness in those memories and moments as well, and sometimes just as quickly as I could tear up, I also chuckle inwardly thinking about what he would have said or done. Deep breath and out. Sometimes it's those moments that are a gift.

You are correct, take each day as a gift, because in my heart, I know that I, my sister, and Michael and Lauren were a gift to him and treasured.

You are in my thoughts today and always,

Jo Ellen

This is beautiful! Thank you for sharing. The first year is rough, I just passed 10 years this past December. That doesn't seem possible. Boy do I miss her. You will always miss your dad, but you will also always have the things you mentioned, the memories, the lessons the love. They are always with you, and I am sure he is as well. Much love to you and your men.

Shannon

Many Thanks and so well said!

Uncle Phil