

Turning Grief into Action

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What was your biggest concern when you were nine years old? Was it trying to memorize your multiplication facts? Was it that the school cafeteria might serve your least favorite vegetable at lunch? Perhaps it was something more serious; perhaps your parents were talking of getting divorced. My biggest concern at age nine was how to keep my daddy's secret, the one he revealed to me as we sat alone on the hill near our home. My dad wanted to be a woman, and along with that revelation he included several sordid sexual details.

His confession left me confused and hurt. I desired to have a dad who would love and cherish me—who would make me feel special. I wanted to try to “fix” him so he'd be the kind of dad any normal nine-year-old would want. But I couldn't fix him. And, as I soon learned, he didn't want to change. By the age of eleven, I had experienced emotional and sexual abuse by my dad. I continued to keep my dad's secret and mine locked away deep down in my heart.

I began to reason that my dad's apparent lack of love for me meant I wasn't really his daughter: he and my mom must have adopted me. Often, when I was home alone, I'd scour the house—even the attic—for paperwork that would confirm my suspicions. But my searches were fruitless.

My teenage years revolved in drowning myself with bottles of wine as I began to look for a father's love elsewhere, each time coming out with emptiness my heart. Time passed by and I had become 15 years old. By this point I had struggled with my own sexuality and my gender. I had begun to seriously consider taking drugs, but God had another plan. God had sent a friend named Mark into my life. Mark showed me respect and always presented a genuine caring heart. During our dating years, he could not understand my cold shoulder attitude towards my dad. One day after a date, Mark parked the jeep in the school parking lot and said “I am not going to take no for an answer this time, I want to know why you dislike your dad so much”. So I spilled the beans, and guess what? He did not run the other way. Instead he listened and heard every word and feeling that I expressed.

Soon after that Mark presented me with a Bible, my very first Bible. I hungered for the words of its contents. Every free moment I had, I was reading the Bible and devouring its every word. I knew I believed in God, but did I have a personal relationship with Christ? No, not really. It was through the time of studying the Bible that I knew the

Lord was calling me to repent of my own sins and to be His. I asked the Lord to be my personal Savior. Yet my journey with my dad still had to unfold.

I was twenty-seven years old and married to Mark when my dad left his family to pursue what he thought would bring him his long-awaited dream life. I thought about him every Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter celebration. My birthday was on my parents' anniversary, so I didn't care to celebrate much. I remember hoping that my mother would forget my birthday and be spared some pain.

Thirteen years later, I was informed that my dad was dying from cancer. When I found out that he was trying to reach out to his family, I was upset with him. Who did he think he was, deserting us and then looking to us for love and comfort? It hurt knowing that my dream of my dad coming back into our family as a husband, dad, and grandfather was about to die. I grieved many times because of the choice he made of choosing his weakness over his family. My dad was not interested in seeking help or therapy for his gender and sexual confusion.

I visited my dad often while he was in the hospital during his last months. Seeing him in a lady's nightgown and slippers was difficult, as was seeing all the teddy bears in his room. I was shocked as I watched him remove his woman's underclothing. The nurses called Dad "her," "she," or by his chosen name: "Becky" And when they did, I corrected them. I said "him," "he," or "my dad." I looked at my dad with sorrow because of what the choices he had made had done to him.

Throughout the lost years, while he pursued his elusive happiness, he took hormones to grow breasts, and lived as a woman. If you had walked past him on the street or in a mall, you would not have recognized him as a man.

My dad's final days at the hospital created many memories. I was able to hold his hand and kiss him on the forehead, and gradually, by God's grace, my anger turned to sympathy and love for him. During this time I was able to forgive him for the pain that his choices inflicted upon both him and our family.

I was not surprised to learn after his passing that he had been in a homosexual relationship. I remembered the way he had looked at my boyfriends. As a child, however, I chose to ignore the truth.

I knew his life was filled with pain, and with little, if any, happiness. The very real pain and confusion that is upon people who struggle with GID is difficult. The pain that the families deal with can seem unbearable as well.

Not everyone applauds at the end of the TV talk shows. Some of us cry and mourn over the loss of our loved one. We mourn their losses as well.

God had a lot of work to do within my heart and soul. I never thought it would be possible to get beyond the anguish I felt and the disappointment I had with my father. My heart was hardened through many years of harboring anger and sadness. I know now what God's grace is all about. I cherish the experience that I had on that last day with my dad as I tried to comfort him. God did indeed work within my heart and brought me to a place of healing.

Help 4 Families provides the service of connecting with others who feel they are alone or have a need for the understanding of someone who has "been there." I have opened up my father's life and mine in hopes of bringing a deeper understanding of these issues.

As a child and young adult, I couldn't understand why churches were not ready, willing, and able to support people dealing with these issues. The truth is, churches should be safe places to receive Godly counsel and love while facing these issues. Our loved one deserves the truth, and God expects the churches to live up to His standards. Speaking the truth can be difficult, but our loved ones deserve the very best, which means presenting the truth with God's grace.

After my dad passed away I had found this note that was addressed to me from my father:

Denise, I know I have done you wrong in many ways. I am sorry for that. But please "Don't throw me away," as though I never existed.

I believe in my heart I am doing this out of respect and love for my dad and for these words he wrote.