

My Dad

It is hard to believe he's gone.

My whole life, my dad was enormous. Yes, he was a tall guy with a big personality, but it was more than that. He was my constant—a steady and safe presence, unconditional love, and unwavering devotion to our family. He made the world feel smaller and safer. He believed I could do or be anything I wanted if I was willing to put in the effort. He was my biggest fan while also pushing me to do better, try harder, and dream bigger.

My dad was my true north, always leading the way, helping me make sense of the chaos of being human, and offering grace and a soft place to land when things didn't go my way.

Sometimes you can see the exact moment when things change. For me, it was a FaceTime call in 2022, when my parents shared that my dad had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. None of us really knew much about Parkinson's, only that it made people shake.

My dad had not been himself, which is why he had gone to the neurologist. He was apathetic, unmotivated—just different. Looking back, Parkinson's had been inching its way into our lives for quite some time, just in little, less obvious ways.

From that moment on, we could never quite get ahead of it. The five of us—and each of our families—did everything in our power to slow its progression. But try as we might, this cruel disease marched through our lives, taking him from us a little more each day, never relenting, and bringing us all to our knees.

What we know now is that my dad had a less common form of Parkinsonism called PSP. This rare version is more aggressive and faster moving. Looking back, there was no amount of encouragement, exercise, or physical therapy that would have made a difference.

While we can all agree that he was dealt a terrible hand, that it is unfair and not right that his life was cut short, he never complained about that. It was all of us who screamed and yelled, begging him to try harder, do more—but really, just not to leave us.

Can you blame us?

Even now, with him gone, it feels unreal. I wake up each day confused. He left a giant hole, an unfillable space in our lives.

To truly understand the magnitude of this loss, you need to understand who my dad was.

And to tell you the truth, I had almost forgotten.

The last four years had taken my dad, but they had also buried my memories of him, replacing them with doctors' appointments, hospitals, hard conversations, and tears—so many tears.

But as it became clear we were nearing the end, and decisions about hospice at home were made, my siblings, my mom, and I gathered close and began watching the home movies my dad had worked so hard to record.

And there it was—our big, beautiful, vibrant life together, and my dad, the narrator of it all.

Watching those movies brought it all back, pushing the darkness away and reminding me who my dad was.

I want to share some of that with you now.

From an early age, I knew my dad was funny. My first memories are blurry snippets of laughter—mine and my siblings'. My dad would play piano on our bellies until we were laughing hysterically.

He was also endlessly amused by us.

His delight gave me permission to say whatever I was thinking, knowing that my voice, personality, and spirit would always be well received by him. It was a treat to make him laugh.

His biggest, truest laugh was internal—a silent chuckle marked by a giant smile, crinkly eyes, and maybe a few sharp inhales—a perfect contrast to the spirited, signature laugh my mom, my sister, and I share, which he loved to provoke.

My dad was always curious about my ideas and opinions, talking to me directly and listening to what I had to say. He pushed me to think for myself and to form my own thoughts and opinions.

As kids, he expected my siblings and me to be able to speak to adults, look them in the eye, and answer their questions.

He attended every recital, game, and event we participated in, sitting in the audience with his camcorder, never missing a moment.

As I got older, I realized my dad was also the most fun.

My parents loved to throw a party, and he loved to mingle, laugh, and be with people. He was the perfect host—joyful and engaging, always making sure everyone was having a good time.

He really loved people. A true extrovert.

He could find a way to connect with anyone and saw the good in everyone.

He loved the beach, getting a tan, good music, and dogs—and when all those things came together, he was in his happy place.

My dad taught me how to drive, how to make a good cocktail, and that Alka-Seltzer could cure any hangover.

Long before ChatGPT, I ran everything I wrote by my dad and received back what I thought was a final draft, now covered in red-pen edits and made much, much better.

He was incredibly smart, knowing not just the answers to every question on Jeopardy!, but also exactly what to say in every situation, a whole bunch of languages, and how to tell a good joke in each of them.

My dad had a lot of jokes—none particularly funny—but the joy he got from telling them was the best part.

He was ridiculously proud of me, even for the smallest things.

When I opened a yoga studio, he became a yogi.

He not only listened to the opinions of others, but he could change his mind. He started out as a Hillary supporter in 2016, but after talking things through with me and my siblings, he was knocking on doors for Bernie.

My dad was passionate about the environment and believed that every little bit could help move the needle. He pushed for environmental programming at the embassies where he worked. He got excited about composting and solar panels.

And he loved the bees, carrying a giant bag of clover seeds on his walks and sprinkling them wherever he could.

My dad believed in peace.

Even as someone who spent much of his career in the Middle East, he still believed that small acts of connection and building community could make a difference. He worked to create programs and opportunities and to do what he could to help those in need.

My dad instilled in me a love of live music.

He had great taste in music and never disparaged what I was trying out. Instead, he would try new music with me.

He took me to so many concerts—some of what I loved and some of what he loved: The Offspring, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Three Doors Down, UB40, Santana, CSNY, Steely Dan, and more.

My parents even attended a music festival in Colorado where they had to camp.

He loved it.

Chatting with all sorts of people, listening to music, lying in the sun—cocktail in one hand, cigar in the other.

He was just an easygoing, cool dude, without even trying.

Most of all, my dad loved his family.

And he made sure we knew it.

Anytime he saw me, whether it had been a while or just for the first time that day, his whole face would light up.

And he gave the best hugs—long, full-body squeezes that left you feeling completely adored.

During his last stay in the rehab hospital, a particularly wonderful occupational therapist was helping him with some standing exercises. Standing had become so difficult for him, but when he finally made it up, he brought my mom over so he could hug her. Then she had him do it again so I could get one too.

That was the last hug I would get from him.

And he put everything he had into it.

I spent a lot of time during the last weeks of his life sitting by his bedside, watching him sleep.

At one point, he blinked his eyes open, his face lighting up when he saw I was there, and with the quiet whisper his voice had become, he said, “You look so beautiful.”

Disheveled and puffy-eyed, I was far from it.

But that's how he was.

He saw the beauty in everything.

As hard as it was, I wouldn't trade those last days for anything.

He held on longer than expected, and one nurse told us she thought he didn't want to go because it was such a good hang.

We always loved being together, and this was no different.

There was so much love in that room that every person who entered commented on it.

They told us to tell him he could go, that we would be okay.

And we tried.

But each time, we took it back.

Don't go.

We lied.

We're not ready.

But he chose the perfect moment—just the five of us, the Fin Five.

In the end, there was nothing left to say except, "I love you," and "Thank you," on repeat.

And that's how I'll end this, too.

Thank you, Dad.

I love you.