

## She Was My Dad

I've known my Dad my whole life but I've only actually, **really** known him for 12 years. The first 3 years of my life, I can't remember any of it. For me, my life began when I was 4. I remembered places I had been to a few weeks before and I began to recognise the scent of garlic in the kitchen. Dad was always the one who cooked and he was a good cook. The only food I ever remember rejecting from him was broccoli but what kid even likes broccoli? My dad was a brilliant cook but even he couldn't make broccoli a good thing.

Mum never cooked us any meals, not after I turned 6. She tried to cook but everything seemed to turn to disaster. The potatoes were too hard and then the pasta was too rubbery and the beef was more black than brown. She tried and tried but eventually she just gave up. She always told me that I had to pick my battles and that sometimes it was okay to let something go. Dad didn't believe in letting anything go, he always said 'never give up, never surrender'.

He was a conqueror was my dad, an absolute beast at cards and chess and that military game 'Risk!'. He knew strategy very well and he knew people very well too. I was honestly surprised that Dad had never applied for the army, but then again, everyone can surprise you, delight you and sometimes even shock you.

My dad could have been a magician actually, he knew plenty of card tricks and he was always making things disappear. At first, it was mum's socks. Then it was her underwear and then it was her shoes. I always wondered where they went but whenever I asked, he used to smile and ruffle my hair. "I'll tell you when you are wise enough to understand." He never said when I was old enough. Simply, when I was wise enough and that was far better than yet **another** person telling me I was old enough to understand. Even mum used to say I wasn't old enough and then, as I grew older, she told me that sometimes even she wasn't old enough to understand, especially concerning Dad. It took me years before I finally understood what Mum was talking about.

I had always been quite close with my Dad which was unusual. After all, it's Mummy's boys and Daddy's girls but we aren't exactly a conventional family. My Dad taught me so much more than my Mum ever did. He taught me the difference between coffee beans, how to brew my tea the 'British Way' and the balance of flavours and spice that would make the perfect curry. My dad always knew so much and I was in awe of him, no doubt about that. You could say that I hero worshipped him and you would be right. I loved my Dad and I should never have forgotten that.

You're probably thinking 'how can you forget that you love someone?', but there's a simple answer to that question; very easily. You just get caught up so quickly and deeply with all these emotions and you feel like you could drown in the waters. Love is like the precious watch from your grandfather that you lose in the waves. It hurts you that it's been taken from you but your survival is more important at that moment. Hindsight is a terrible thing and you mourn your mistakes. I can tell you right now, if I could take it all back, I'd do it in a heartbeat, in **his** heartbeat. I won't ever stop regretting everything I did, and wondering forever if it really was my fault. I know my faults, and I know how it feels when you've done wrong.

I remember when I was 12, I had a massive argument with my Mum. We were arguing about something stupid like my behaviour at high school. She was so angry and I was so angry and she insulted me, she told me that I was going to end up as delinquent as my Dad. Well, I just lost it then and that anger burst out of me like a volcano and my Mum was in the flow path. I hit her, I hit her so hard she battered against the wall so hard and I was frightened she would break like the glasses on the night she told Dad to leave home.

As soon as I had done it, I knew it was wrong. Within seconds the anger had gone and all that was left was that bitter emptiness, the hollow in my heart. I apologised and I cried and then she cried and we hugged and we vowed that we would let ourselves be that way again, that we would never be so angry.

My parents officially divorced 2 years ago and it hadn't taken me long to figure out why. When Dad told me, it all made sense, like that last piece fitting in to complete the grotesque jigsaw. I knew then where Mum's socks and underwear and shoes had disappeared to. It hadn't been a magic trick at all. It had all been a lie, everything had been a lie, especially my Dad. In that moment, I thought I had lost my Dad and he was going to be slowly consumed by this witch with clawed nails and lipstick red as blood. In that moment, I broke my vow to my Mum and I snapped, like the elastic band stretched just too far. I screamed and I shouted and I regret every word I said and I won't ever forget his face and the unshed tears in his eyes. The anger had me imprisoned and all I could do was spew hateful words at a man, **the** man who- who-

Who loved me unconditionally, no matter what I had done or said. He had always looked out for me, cared for me and did all he could to give me the best start in life that I could have had. I was selfish and all I cared about was my own emotions and to hell with what Dad thought and felt, to hell with what the world felt.

That was the last time I seen my Dad and it kills me that the last words he ever heard me say were that he was dead to me. I was so selfish, so stupid! He was all alone, shunned by his own family, a lone man in the world with everyone and everything against him. I was angry for so long and I ignored every text and every phone call. I still have the texts and I look at them every day. The last one he ever sent me, Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> October at 8:45pm, he told me that he would always love me, that he understood my anger but that he couldn't keep living the lie and he hoped that, one day, I would be wise enough to understand and that he would forever be proud of me, despite what had happened between us.

They found my Dad's body on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> October. Mum never told me any of the details from the police and the undertaker did a good job. Still, I could pick out the marks around the neck and I knew how it had happened. I found out by accident, overhearing the conversation on the phone, that he had done it on the Tuesday night. He had been left there for nearly 2 days, swinging in the hallway like a Halloween decoration. I can't help but think, did we kill him, did I kill him? It was his choice and I don't care what anyone else says, my Dad was the bravest person I ever knew. I loved him and I still love him but with one difference.

Derek James Bowman was born on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1964 and died on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017 but not as Derek. I don't know her name but what I do know is that she was my Dad.