

Jerry Ida Dec 2, 1942 - June 21, 2026 (Father's Day, a very special day)

So, I've known for years that I wouldn't have the heart to talk about it when my father passed away. I wrote something years ago, when I had the foresight to make a way to describe my love and affection for my dad. We were very close, and the hole in my heart is never, ever going to be filled this side of eternity. Please read and enjoy. Thank you for your love for me and prayers for my dad and family over the years. It means more than I can say. These times never fit into the right words.

ONCE UPON A TIME, I was a girl looking for worms. I was not a friend to worms. Rather, I only found myself in the woods one day, digging up bait with my father for our fishing trip.

I hated worms. They were scary (I was five), and they crawled and wriggled without my permission. That freaked me out. They weren't furry and cuddly like a kitten, either. Worms in my vicinity jarred the delicate balance of my pre-school happiness. My father knew that, and he sought to correct it that day.

As a good dad, mine recognized my squeamishness, and he knew the true threat of a nightcrawler: none. He also knew that I would trust him - because he hadn't let me down, and we both knew it. Some of my greatest memories had always been with my dad. Frankly, if I were on the verge of something new, I knew to step into it if he beckoned. On this fine Saturday morning, he beckoned.

I hopped into the truck with my dad that morning. It was a powder blue Ford from 1970, barely younger than myself. All of her surfaces were steel and black vinyl plastic. A gyroscopic can holder dangled from the dash, holding my dad's dancing beverage can as he drove along bumpy roads.

I loved that old Ford, not just because it was the epitome of what every truck should be, but because she facilitated so many of my fondest memories. This was where we gathered for long trips, and my mother would hold me on her lap while my brother sat alongside. I rested my head on Mom's chest as she held me and stroked my hair, kissing the top of my head from time to time. We would go for miles, she chatting with my dad, and I listening through her chest wall to her heartbeat, her breathing, and the gentle cadence of her musical voice rising and falling to the conversation or a song she sang with the radio. My brother would sit between Mom and Dad, leaning on his papa or peering over the dash to spot wildlife and other sights as we traveled. Will and I would take turns resting upon Mom's lap: this most comfortable, desirable of thrones.

But I digress. Dad and I hopped into the truck.

Dad drove us up to a lake I will not name.

I will not name it because it's beautiful, and like most Montanans, I want you to visit, but I do not want you to mess up our most sacred places. I am sorry. I love you.

A small deciduous woods stands near this lake, and Dad drove to that spot. After I realized we weren't getting today's earthworms from the bait and tackle, I saw the shovel Dad brought was for a purpose: we were going to find earthworms in the dirt. Earthworms. Like the ones I had avoided in our garden. The moment of truth had come, and I could no longer avoid it. Yet, even at five, I was holding out hope that I comprised the "Watching and Cheering" part of the "Gathering Worms" team. This would make Dad the "Digging and Picking" part, and I was pretty much fine with that.

Dad, however, was not.

Down the shovel went, into the ground. A clod of cool, dark soil the size of the spade plopped upside-down on the humus beside it. Dad smacked that clod with the back of his shovel to loosen it, and nightcrawlers as big as the ones from Great Falls Sporting Goods squirmed, writhed, and crawled out of the depths of the mound.

"Pick 'em up," Dad said.

He must have been crazy. This was not the reel I had playing in my mind. He had to be mistaken...but no, it was not so. My father was the director of this horrible sequence of events. "C'mon, honey. They won't bite."

After a minute or two of crying, whining, and standing there, stammering, I thought I had surely convinced my father that I did not need the test before me. My father beamed with pride, laughed a little in his adoring way, and scooped up a nightcrawler. He plopped it atop my head and instructed me to reach up and take it off by hand.

Why did I not just shake my head or run? I have no idea. I was five; I was not the great master of strategy my father was. I knew only two options: to wait for my dad to remove the test from me, or to trust and obey him, accepting the invitation to overcome fear.

I opted for the first. I stood there, screaming and crying and wailing for help.

My dad was faithful to me, and to my growth, and to his good purposes for my life (and fishing). He stayed firm and loving, even though he saw me in my distress. I am so glad he did! Today, he is my favorite fishing partner, and nobody is a close second. My Dad stayed right there with me that morning, comforting me and telling me what to do.

To this day, I remember the sight and the feel of that nightcrawler tickling my tiny palm. I remember the well of pride I felt gushing forth within me because I became bigger than that worm in authority, and I knew it was not going to hurt me! It was faith that got me over this hurdle: faith that my dad would not steer me into pain. By obeying that faith, I took action, and the results gave me the pride and zeal I needed to help gather worms for a great day of fishing at an unmentioned lake.

When between a rock and a hard place, trust your heavenly Daddy. He knows what challenges you are up for, and what ones need to be left aside. He is good and faithful to complete his purposes in your life as you walk beside him in obedience.

If your earthly father wasn't all this for you, forgive him. Don't do it just to free yourself; do it because he needs the forgiveness, and you know it. Love him as Christ has loved you. Your Heavenly Father wants to re-parent those areas of your life so you can feel full and free, vibrantly living a sound and abundant life. Dads don't have to be perfect; your Heavenly Father is, and he can make up for their imperfections.

Thanks, Dad, for being a great example of God the Father to me. I have learned so much from you, and learning to trust a good dad is like being handed a heavenly can opener that unlocks eternal, manifold goodness from our Heavenly Father! I know you weren't thinking of that when you raised me, but you artlessly performed the task God set out for you to do in me: raise a God-loving, sold-out daughter. My Heavenly Dad is my soul's delight because I know I am your delight.

Your love for me opened my heart to see my value - to see that God delights in me, too. If God delights in me, then I am delightful! You pointed me to God's truth about this, and it has made worlds of difference in my life. I taste and see that the Lord is good! He has certainly opened a can of his best for me, and I am wholeheartedly grateful to you for issuing your excellent earthly invitation to his grace, goodness, and holy, sweet intimacy.

You are such a fabulous dad, and I hope my life expresses that I am quite proud to be called your daughter. Thank you, Papa Bear. I will always love you and am excited to chase bears with you one day in our forever land. Please make up a full list of adventures for us to go on together, and I will join you when I get there (I have a lot to do here, now)!
XOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOX

Jerome Niel Ida December 2, 1942 - June 21, 2026 (Father's Day, united forever with his own Heavenly Father...with a wink and a hug for his kids).