

My Own Terms



(image by Microsoft Designer)

In the early 1960s when I was in Kindergarten through 2nd grade, my family (Dad, Mom, older brother and younger sister) lived in Coffeyville, Kansas. My father was a store manager for a “five and dime store” named Kress & Company. We always just referred to it as Kress’s.

After 2 - 3 years in Coffeyville my father got sick and we moved back to Denver where his parents and other family members lived. As a little boy I never knew exactly what his sickness was because it wasn’t something physical that you could see. It was mental.

That could have been in 1964. From that time until his death in 1980 (I think that’s the year he died) he was in and out of mental institutions and half-way houses and finally landed in nursing homes. When I was 16 or 17 I visited him in a home around Federal and 26th. My final visit with him could have been 1980 at a nursing home in Commerce City.

At some point, not long after that, he died. I didn’t learn of his death until after it had happened and he was interred at Fairmount Cemetery in Denver. His parents (my grandparents) never said a word about it until it was all over. I still don’t know his exact cause of death.

While he was still alive, I once spoke with my grandfather about him. At that time, Grandpa was tired of taking care of Dad. He complained how he would bring Dad a new belt and Dad would lose it. Grandpa had been dealing with my Dad and his illness for over 15 years. He told me at that time it would be better for everyone if Dad would just die. That was the best outcome. Dad was never going to get better. He should just be dead.

I remember being taken aback by that statement, but as I’ve grown older, I see the world and its consequences more like that of my Grandpa.

I accept the fact that we all must die and that sometimes it is under the most difficult circumstances. I don't get very emotional when someone dies. It's a fact of life. Nothing is guaranteed and sometimes you just get screwed. Life's a bitch and then you die.

It wasn't too long after the belt discussion when his wife (my Grandma) died. I think it was cancer.

My Grandpa spent his final years in a nursing home strapped to a chair so he wouldn't fall out. My final memory of him was seeing him in that chair. When he saw me, he was kind of out of it. I remember him saying, "You're Marvin's boy, aren't you."

Neither my Dad nor my Grandpa left this planet on their own terms. I firmly believe that had my Grandpa been given the choice, he would have taken his own life rather than winding up in a nursing home where he was strapped to a chair while his body was ceasing to function.

As I write this, I don't know when or how he died. I don't know what role his surviving children (Uncles Gerald and Gary) played in his care over his last years.

I've always thought it a cruel twist of fate that Grandpa's final days were spent wasting away in a nursing home - nothing like the vibrant man who I so adored many years prior. If he could have mental clarity for just one moment, he surely would have said it would be better for everyone if he would just die.

It is my intention to leave this planet on my own terms. We'll see if that happens. You never know what plans GOD (Grand Order of Deities) might have in store for me.

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