

Letting Dad and Mom Go

By Anna Von Reitz



My Mother was a brilliant woman and a loyal wife and Mother. She was, in many, many ways, a rock. But she was not entirely normal or sane; she had suffered a great deal in her life and had PTSD that regularly got out of control.

This led to everything from paranoia to severe bouts of anger and depression, which she took out on my Sister and I. It also meant that in order to survive intact, I had to distance myself from my Mother at an early age, recognize that she had these problems for these reasons, and -- in a sense, let her go.

I had to understand the dark place where she was coming from and her constant efforts to protect me from that darkness, even while discerning reality in the present moment.

It wasn't easy.

My Sister never succeeded in separating herself entirely from Mother's mental damage, and still suffers because she feels that she never had a mother --- and she wanted and needed one.

Many people have similar issues with parents -- either because the parents were damaged by their parents or by poverty hardships, or because of social attacks (race, creed, color, religion, sex, age), or war, because of alcoholism, drug addiction, or all the other reasons there are that render people unfit, unable, or undesirable as parents.

We can't let our parents' wounds be our wounds.

We can't let the cycle of fear and anger and hatred continue.

The Mercenary Wars that our country has been constantly embroiled in for more than a century and a half mean that millions of Americans have been more or less maimed by loss of friends and family, loss of limbs, loss of mental integrity, loss of security, loss of peace, loss of trust, loss of culture, loss of family integrity, loss of moral standards, loss of a common set of national values, loss of religion.... the list goes on and on.

And on.

We are a whole nation of the Walking Wounded. Virtually nobody, including the successful Draft Dodgers, have escaped unscathed from the horrors of WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf I, Gulf II, Afghanistan and all the hundreds of nameless horrifying incursions into other countries that we have been goaded and deceived into.

Not only was my Mother wounded by WWII, but my Father was, too. His life and his quality of life were greatly truncated by physical injuries sustained and never compensated. He somehow found the strength to laugh in the face of a long, terrible death.

Yes, the Greatest Generation may have been the Greatest, but they were also the most wounded.

Most of my friends' Fathers were not intact emotionally, cold, distant, violent, competitive, profit-driven, unfeeling, uncaring, critical, demanding, and amoral, they trampled on their children and their wives and their mistresses, leading to an explosion in unwed mothers and abandoned babies.

For me, my Father's illness meant that from the age of fifteen to twenty-five, I had to be an active wage-earner and a nurse and a handyman and a mechanic. I had to put myself through college. I had to scrub dishes and walk dogs and do all the most menial labor you can imagine, just scraping by and trying to deal with all the other heartbreaks and lessons learned as a young adult.

By the time my Father died, I had the eyes of a forty year-old woman. I sang at his funeral and didn't let my voice tremble.

For the Mother I never really knew as a whole personality, for the Father I so dearly loved and lost so early and under such terrible conditions, for the poverty and the toil, for all of this I could certainly grieve and give up, give way to tantrums of pain and guilt and every other emotion that doesn't help.

After all, doesn't every child look at their parents and think --- well, if it happened to them, it will probably happen to me?

God help me, I was made of sterner stuff. I did not give up. I did not let my parents' misery become mine. I loved them to the best of my ability while they lived and then, one drop at a time, I let them go.

Many people try to face grief all at once and all alone; I advise against that approach. Better to stand off at a respectful distance and let grief come to you, a little bit here, a little bit there, in the quiet moments, in the joyous moments.... just let it come, a drop here and a drop there, until the reservoir of grief is gone, and only the memories worth keeping remain.

Many people get caught in emotional feedback loops, endlessly reliving incidents that caused them pain and fear or shame or anger, or some combination of all these combined, unable to break out of it. For many of us, this kind of damage occurred when we were so young, it never crossed our minds that we could break out of the misery and distance ourselves from it. Look back on it as if it happened to someone else in another lifetime.

And whether we ever knew our parents or not, we are somehow aware that these two primal relationships matter -- or were supposed to matter, and so we are fascinated and often quietly troubled even as adults, by unanswered questions. Why did.... how could she....and most haunting of all --- was it my fault? Could I have changed it somehow?

The answer, of course, is that no child bears the guilt for failed parent-child relationships, and often, neither do the parents, who are wrestling their own limitations and demons.

In the end, if we manage to grow up physically healthy and mentally able, we have to count ourselves lucky and learn to deal with the emotional scars of growing up in a War Tribe Society, where nearly everyone has been wounded and crippled by war, war, war, war, and more war.

And we have to swallow the bitter fact that 95% of all this violence and loss and degradation and bloodshed was for nothing more or less than the rich man's profit, and yes, for most of us --- in the words of the modern prophets, "I Ain't No Fortunate Son".

The majority of our parents who were supposed to protect and nurture us, couldn't protect and nurture themselves. They were the casualties of war, whether or not they came home. They tried their best and one by one they lost, so we, their children, observe this and go our own way to the grave.

Or do we learn to let it all go? Not in one great tidal wave of disappointment, anger, or remorse -- but drop by drop, and bit by bit, until all our wounds become our strength? Until we stand like great fortresses undaunted, aware, and alive, not needing anyone to blame anymore, not needing to apologize, not yearning for some other life or some other answer, but content with the task before us: to build a new world.

This month, visit with your parents, alive or dead. Bring them up in your thoughts and memories. Look at them for all they are and all they aren't. Accept them. Just accept. You don't have to like them or love them. You don't have to agree or believe. Look at them and their lives with as much objectivity as you can muster -- and let them go. Let them be. In peace.

You aren't doing this review for their sake, though it may lead you to see things you never saw before. Adult compassion has a way of replacing childhood grief, but even if that miracle doesn't come to you, you can have peace. You can give yourself that gift this New Year-- and be free as a bird that found its own wings.

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