

## Chapter 4 - The Gift that Rekindled My Soul:

### Dad's Message in the Night

Life as I knew it was over. Not just for me, but for all of us. The third and final tornado-like force had hit my family. After a heart attack and two strokes, Dad was gone. Our foundation crumbled. It was too soon to tell what the full impact would be. But, one thing was certain – tonight I needed a distraction.

It was Sunday, February 22, 2015, one month after Dad's fatal stroke. I was alone in the living room, which was unusually quiet and calm, except for the ticking and chiming of the mantle clock. "The Oscars would be perfect to take my mind off of everything – whisking me far away into the fantasy of Hollywood," I thought, as I wrapped the soft, velvety blanket around me. Exhaling, I mindlessly sank into the down-filled sofa, and mechanically, turned on the show.

Minutes into the broadcast, the award for best supporting actor was announced. J.K. Simmons won the Oscar for his role in the movie Whiplash, which I hadn't seen. As I listened, not too intently at first, I was jolted into attention by this:

*"And, if I may, call your Mom, Everybody. I'm telling this to like a billion people or so. Call your Mom. Call your Dad, if you're lucky enough to have a parent or two alive on this planet, call them, don't text them, don't e-mail them, call them, talk to them, tell them you love them, thank them, and listen to them for as long as they want to talk to you. Thank you. Thank you, Mom and Dad."*

Oh my God! I couldn't escape. Not even at the Oscars. "Wow!" My own voice broke through the waves of applause. Never had I heard an acceptance speech end like that. This quote turned out to be one of the most memorable of the evening. I looked at Simmons' sincere expression, as he put his hand on his chest and looked upwards, thanking his Mom and Dad. His message was delivered straight to the heart of those still blessed with living parents – wake up and reach out to them while you still can.

And to people like me, a painful wave of grief returned. I felt Simmons longing and his plea. I had learned firsthand that life's last breath is exhaled in an instant.

Wistfully, I reflected. I was grateful that I had as many phone conversations as I had with Dad over the last 20 years. But, it was due more to his tireless efforts. He called often – to all five of his adult children, his sister and brother, nieces, nephews and grandkids. I called him as often as I could, not nearly enough; and I didn't listen intently to him nearly enough.

What was hardest for me now, in fact, incomprehensible, was that I would never, ever have a phone conversation with Dad again. I felt so lost having to go on without those calls. His calls started and ended my day. Dad's cheerfulness and steadfast loyalty had the uncanny way of simultaneously lifting me up and grounding me in the very same moment. When Dad and I finished talking, I felt like I belonged to something SO good. If Dad was there, all would be right with the world; and, if it wasn't, we would stick together as a family and get through it.

Suddenly, I was distracted by the glitz and glam on the screen and I returned to the Oscars. I was glad for the 2 hours of entertainment. Tired and with about 30 minutes left in the show, I was trying to decide whether to go the distance, or go to bed. Just then, I got a second jolt to my core; and this one changed the course of the rest of my life.

My cell phone vibrated. First, a minor startle. It was 11:40 PM. Who would text so late? I looked down and saw "Dad" and his cell phone number across the top of my phone. OH MY GOD! This was a shock like hearing glass shattering in the dark. My heart and my breathing stopped. I hesitated for a few moments, took a deep breath, then opened the text. There was no written message, only a picture of a

bush with blue flowers. Tears were lining up along the rims of my eyes, but holding back, pacing, like nervous racehorses at the gate, ready to break away any minute.

#### WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

The gravity of this text was too much. I sat still for a while and slowly tried to clear my head. Surely, there must be an explanation. I rationalized. Gail must have sent that text from Dad's phone, maybe it was a bush she planted before leaving Dad's house today, closing it up, and taking Mom to Audrey's. I took a long breath. Why not respond? I thought, smiling, as I texted back, "Beautiful! Thank you for sending from Dad's phone." It felt good to be included. It felt even better to text back to Dad's phone. Relieved, I nestled back into the cushions. Soon, the Oscars came to a close; and, I powered off, hit the lights, climbed the stairs, and peacefully went to sleep.

The next morning, I drove to my office for my normal day of seeing clients. While driving home that night, I instinctively reached for my phone to make what was the usual call, a ritual I had with Dad for years. This time, though, I called Audrey. We talked about how Mom was adjusting to her new surroundings. I was about to hang up and I suddenly remembered. "Wait, Audrey, ask Gail about the blue flower bush, the one she sent me a picture of last night from Dad's cell phone." "Gail," Audrey yelled across the house, "Mary Ellen wants to know where you got the picture of the blue flowers you sent her from Dad's phone." I heard a lot of scattered conversation as Audrey and Gail were trying to understand my question. I wasn't getting an answer and was almost panicking at that point.

To my complete shock, I learned that no one sent me that picture from Dad's phone!

"At 11:40 last night, we might not have been sleeping, but the phone was in the room with mom on her dresser. We were all in our rooms in another part of the house. No one was near the phone at that hour

but mom, who was already in bed and, anyway, Mom has never used that cell phone or any cell phone in her entire life, she doesn't even know how to answer it. So strange," Audrey replied.

"Wait a minute!" I shouted "What are you saying? I'm not believing that I'm hearing this!"

My eyes were flooding so badly; there was no holding back. The tears just gushed. I could hardly see to pull off to the side of the road. I was immobilized.

In that moment, I remember feeling connected to Dad the way I felt holding my daughter, Alex, in my arms for the first time. It was that profound. Audrey later said, "Dad knew he had to send that to you because you're the only one who would immediately take it seriously." Of course, I took this seriously. In fact, it took control of my life. This was the only text of that picture that was sent from Dad's cell phone that night; and nothing like this has happened since.

What did it mean and why did I get it? A forceful message that rocked my entire world wrapped in subtle, gentle flowers. The tenderness in the tattered. An absolute paradox.

Strange? Coincidence? Technological fluke? Or what?

When I got home, I sat in the living room in the dark. Brad came in and asked what I was doing. I did the best I could to explain what happened, from the text message from Dad's phone Sunday night to learning tonight that no one sent it. Brad walked out of the room and said absolutely nothing.

Yes, I was crushed at what felt like complete insensitivity to one of the most important events of my life. I came to understand that this type of paranormal experience is so powerful, so frightening, so unbelievable that in self-defense, the objective listener must avoid and deny it. Even I initially rationalized that this text from Dad had to come from my sister. The mind simply can't accept it.

Acceptance has to enter through the heart. For the listener who is not yet awakened and curious, acceptance of soul communication has to seep in slowly, in incubated measure.

I woke up the next morning and the sceptic in me wanted to settle this question objectively with input from a reliable, non-emotional, non-involved source. I thought of the perfect person, my computer technician, T.J. At the risk of ridicule, I called him and explained what happened asking for any logical explanation. I feared he would hang up on me. What he said, gently, thoughtfully, but with authority, was completely unexpected: “A cell phone cannot spontaneously send a picture text without someone operating the phone and performing the necessary steps. There is no logical way that could happen.” He paused before continuing, “I would take this as a wonderful blessing and a treasured keepsake.”

Whoa!! Again, I was stunned by this entire experience. The logistics expert’s response felt like permission to tell my story without shame. At least to people I could trust with this treasure.

I couldn’t wait to call Alex, my 23-year-old, intuitive daughter. She listened quietly as I told her of Dad’s message. She was truly excited and amazed! I forwarded her the picture of the blue flower bush. Alex was especially intrigued by the bush and wondered about its symbolism. “It has to mean something that he sent that exact picture of that exact bush. Is that a hydrangea bush? We both agreed the flowers looked like hydrangeas. “I’ll look into it and let you know,” she said, and I was now just as intrigued as she was.

Soon, she emailed me confirmation that the picture I forwarded to her was, in fact, a hydrangea bush. She shared the results of her google search:

**Hydrangea** symbolizes *heartfelt emotions*. It can be used to express *gratitude for being understood*. The hydrangea flower is often given as a sympathy gift to those who have lost a loved one.

**Blue Flowers:** What blue symbolizes - the clarity found in our dreams, thoughts and imagination. The color blue speaks to the dreamers in our world, and blue flowers are the perfect gift to call out the muse in the poet, artist or musician in your life. Or, gather up a bunch of blue flowers when you need a boost of inspiration. They are also the perfect hue for enhancing calm and tranquility.

This was my surrender, and I welcomed it. I could now wholeheartedly accept this precious gift. Dad called that night, inspiring me, arousing the muse in me – jolting me to attention just like JK Simmons did with his speech. Both messages were unmistakable. It's time! Pay attention. Do it now! Dad offered the inspiration to keep me going. Hydrangeas from Dad! Beautiful, symbolic, the way I imagine divine messages to be. And, even more importantly, Dad was thanking me and telling me he felt understood; and, I was overcome with wanting to express my gratitude to him as well.

Nobody knew but Dad and me. Alone together in those early morning hours on the day he died, I held his hand and promised him I would write something honoring his life. Apparently, the time was now. And Dad was guiding me. While everything was still fresh. Like the beautiful blue flowers I was now holding in my hands.