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Real Men Do Cry



On January 19, 1996 my life was forever changed when my brother, Carl, died. I will never forget the moment a family friend called me out of my chemistry class to give me the awful news of Carl's death. Time stood still as I listened in disbelief as I was told how he was found at the bottom of a radio tower. Those few endless minutes triggered a series of painful recollections and realizations which surface from time to time in quiet moments as well as surfacing suddenly at inopportune times.

Such painful recollections do not occur as frequently today as they did in the days and weeks following his death. Others who have walked through the early days of grief and those currently walking amidst the swirling haze of early grief know the continual bombardment of pain and memories as the permanence of loss is painfully realised.

My early days of grief brought me home for a week away from my new existence as a college freshman which seemed suddenly so distant. While home for the week I sought to escape my thoughts by watching television, such brief respites from my intense pain were not only necessary, but few and far between. As I walked into the den, I caught my father sitting on the edge of the couch in the grip of his own painful moment of grief.

I could see him facing the stark realization that his son would never again walk through the door, ask to go deep sea fishing, try to weasel a couple of bucks before rushing out the door. I sat quietly down beside him, not quite knowing if he would be receptive or embarrassed by my presence. I slipped an arm up over his shoulders which began to shake silently before my arm could even come to rest. The silent shakes of his shoulders gave way to heart wrenching, gut churning, whole body sobs. I reached up across his chest to grasp his opposite shoulder and lowered my cheek onto the shoulder nearest me; feeling his tears fall across my forearm. I couldn't tell you how long we sat there sharing our tears, our pain

It was the first time I had ever seen my father truly break down, the first time I witnessed something more than a single stoic tear trickle down his cheek. As I look back on the experience I recognize it as a turning point in our relationship. His intense pain did not create for me a greater burden in my grief. I was not frightened. My world did not cave in because my father allowed me to see him grieve. In all honesty, my world was enriched because my father not only allowed me to see him grieve, he allowed me to grieve with him, beside him in a moment which laid the foundation of our current relationship.

His actions let me know it is alright for me to allow myself to feel pain and to share it with my family. I do not hesitate to call my parents, or show up at their doorstep when I am desperately missing Carl, or grieving the loss of our unrealised future. I desperately want Carl to know my daughter; to be an uncle to her just as much as I desperately desire to be an aunt to the children he will never have. Grief is not only missing what was, but missing what would have been. I am grateful to my father for showing me I am not alone in my grief.

Only time can lessen the pain of grief, but my pain is more bearable when I share my grief. I have grown up with the knowledge of people who believe real men don't cry. Maybe they haven't lost a son. Maybe they haven't had a chance to be an example to the daughters who share their grief. As General Schwarzkopf said in an interview with Barbara Walters when asked if he was afraid to cry, "I'm afraid of any person who won't cry."

Carrie Kearns
TCF/Atlanta



DON'T LET OTHERS' SNAPPINESS BURST YOUR BUBBLE

"Watch where you're going!" snarls the stranger as he bumps into you. You watch where you're going, you mutter to yourself as you move on in the crowd. While you didn't make an issue, over it, his nastiness annoys you and, yes, it now puts you in a bit of a growlish mood, as if he's thrown the "Mean Ball" and you've caught it. Like the common cold, other people's moods sometimes can be catching. So what do you do, accept that, and spend the rest of the day snapping at everyone else?

Hopefully not. You can call a halt to the process by taking a deep breath and then thinking along the following lines:

- Maybe the offender is having a bad day. That's unfortunate, but it's still his problem.
- Maybe he's mad at someone else. That's his problem too.
- Maybe he's learned to treat the world that way. And that, too, is his problem.

Yes, you say, but he's dumped on me! True. And so you have choices:

- You can find His Nastiness in the crowd and tell him off.
- You can let the resentment you feel put you in a bad mood (in which case you've caught the "Mean Ball" beautifully and now you, too, have a problem.)
- Or, you can acknowledge your resentment at being dumped on but decide to let the problem remain with the offender where it really belongs.

Remember, just because the ball is thrown at you doesn't mean you have to catch it.

Barbara Turk Baltimore,
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