

Losing My Father

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It was Monday night and I was studying for a final exam that I was supposed to take the following day in the evening. My sister Fatma was in her last year of high school and my sister Rawda was a medical student. I was called for dinner. We all sat at the dinner table and were unusually quiet, specially my brother Mohammed. I was feeling bad as I had a bad dream the night before. In my dream, I saw a full moon appear among dark clouds and fall in the sea, in a stormy and cloudy weather. After dinner, I finished studying and went to bed. 4 o'clock in the morning, the doorbell rang. To our surprise, my uncle and grandmother had come from Riyadh.

The following morning, I went to school, as I was a teacher. In the school broadcast, the students read an article about death. When I went to class, I looked at the board and saw the word death on it. When I returned home, the gate was wide open and there were people in the house. I entered my room and to my surprise, my aunt was sitting on my bed. She had also come from Riyadh. Her eyes were red and swollen. I asked her why she had come from Riyadh and why she was crying. She said that she wanted to see us. I insisted that she tell me the truth. She said that my father had a car accident and that he was at the hospital. I started to cry and told her that I wanted to go to the hospital to see him. She tried to calm me down and asked me to go to the reception room to say hi to the other ladies. There were many ladies and I did not know why they were there. An hour later, my oldest brother came after he picked up Rawda from King Abdul-Aziz university in Jedda, he hugged me and said that our father had passed a way.

Shortly, my oldest brother came back and asked us if we would like to go downstairs to look at my father for the last time and say good-bye.

He asked us not to scream. My legs were shaking and could hardly walk downstairs. But I wanted to see him so bad as I was his favorite daughter. I had to push myself as I thought that that was my last chance to see him and I wanted to see what happened to him as a result of the accident. I looked at him. His was pale, his head was rapped in a white bandage and his eyes were closed. He looked so peaceful. I tried to get close to him and kiss him, but I could not. My hands were shaking.

My father was 53. He was strong and healthy. He used to go to Lebanon and Syria on business. Every time he went to there, he always filled the car with all kinds of gifts such as clothes, chocolate and baklava. He would arrive at night, ring the doorbell and never stop until we all wake up, and run downstairs to meet him. We would sit around him talking and laughing, eating and looking at the gifts. But on this last trip, he was on his way home from Syria and Lebanon. He had reached Rabigh shortly after midnight. He was in his pick- up truck when it went off the road and rolled over several times. The police came to the site. They tried to find who he was, but could only find his driver license. So they called the police department in Mecca, who in turn called our store there. My brother, who was 20 at the time, was the one who answered the phone and knew about dad's death. He did not know what to do, so he called my uncle in Riyadh and told him about it, but he did not utter a word when he came home and was silent at the dinner table. The police collected as much as they could of the gifts that were scattered everywhere. The gifts came but my father never did.

After the funeral was over, I tried to study for the final exam that I missed hoping my instructor would give me a make-up test, but I could not concentrate. For six hours, I was trying to study one page, but did not comprehend a single word. A week later, I went to college, told my instructor and why I missed the final exam. I told her that I had not been able to study and asked when I could take the text. She said that I had to take it in about an hour after discussing the project

with my classmates and suggested that I study in the time being. I started crying and thought I would fail for sure, as I was unable to concentrate. My classmates gathered around me. Some offered to tutor me and others offered me their notes. But I felt that it was impossible to review the whole course in an hour. I was pretty sure I would fail. So I just cried.

After the discussion was over, I went in, helpless and hopeless. Instead of giving me a written test, my instructor started asking me oral questions about the course. She asked few easy questions and I was able to answer them all. I passed the course with an A.

When my other instructors knew about my father's death, they were so sorry and each gave me words of sympathy, wisdom and encouragement. I still remember Dr Farouk (my psychology instructor), who turned the mic off at the end of the class hour, and offered to be a father for my brothers, sisters and myself. Every time my sister Rawda needed medical books, he either got them from Egypt himself or ordered them for her and never accepted to be paid for the books. Whenever my sister Fatma was crying and unable to accept dad's death and the poor grades that she got in her final exams, he always offered to talk to her and made her feel better. When my brother Mohammed defended his thesis, he was the first one to come to the defense room. He sat there and waited. He always provided me with advice and he is the one who motivated me to pursue a Ph. D. degree. Now he is retired and he is back in Egypt with his five children and grandchildren. Whatever success my brothers, sisters and myself I achieve, we owe to him. May god bless his heart.