

## **SOFTBALLS**

### **A Personal Essay**

**Written by L. Joy Putnam, at Age 16**

The cottony clouds seemed to open up to reveal the bright, blue sky above. The warm sun spread its rays through the opening and the brilliant, spring colors shone in its glory. A soft wind crinkled the new grass sprouts and wrapped my dress gently about my legs. What an ironic setting for my father's funeral.

We sat there in silence, in front of that deep, foreboding hole, and I tried to remember.

I had been a delinquent of sorts, unable to cope with a dying father. Before that, I had been an innocent child, unaware of the events that were happening to shape my life.

I remember the first time I heard anything about my father's cancer. I had just come home from Girl Scouts and we were supposed to have a family meeting. A family meeting? What for? We had never had one before, and I wanted to go play with Donna and Vicky. But, I sat there and listened, without understanding. My mother started crying and then my two sisters. I decided that it was an expected reaction, so I cried too.

*Reverend Marston began, "We are gathered here today . . ."*

My father went for radiation treatments and his cancer went away. Meanwhile, he taught me how to play softball, we went shopping for tools to fix up our basement, we completed three rooms downstairs, and he helped me with my schoolwork. I was getting the best grades I had ever had. Then the cancer returned. This time, twice as bad.

*" . . . he was husband, father, friend . . ."*

He was my friend, one of my best friends, until I found out about this new culprit. How could he leave me here, now when I was just beginning to grow up and needed him the most? How could I cope with losing him? I couldn't.

Dad was going down hill; first his appearance showed this, then the X-rays. The cancer had spread to his lungs, and now when he needed me the most, I turned my back and ran.

*“ . . . we were all witnesses of the wonderful things he did in his lifetime . . . ”*

His speech became jumbled and he was weak. He had to quit his softball team, and he took a leave of absence from work, permanently.

As the days grew shorter, the realization of my great loss pierced my thoughts, and I knew I was not strong enough to let go of someone I loved. My answer was simple. I would detach myself from him.

*“ . . . and he always had a kind word to express the love and confidence he felt . . . ”*

I began sneaking out of the house at night and getting drunk with my friends. I was thirteen at the time. I ignored my father. He would try to talk to me, although his voice had descended from being strong and vibrant to a hushed whisper, and I would pretend I did not hear. He would repeat what he said, and I would yell, and stomp out of the room, not listening to a word. He was just going to leave me anyway. Didn't he love me anymore?

*“ . . . he always expressed his satisfaction in loved ones with a warm smile . . . ”*

I remember one time when he was trying to get ready for a meeting. No one else was home so I had to help him. It felt wonderful to have the closeness we used to share. I was very happy. However, after the meeting when he returned, and everyone else returned also, I fell back into the same old pattern of ignoring him. I guess I was afraid of losing my father. Most people

said I looked like him. My mother always commented on the resemblance of my feet to his. An insignificant detail such as this really gives one nostalgia.

*“ . . . now, as we lay this man into the ground from which he was ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ . . . ”*

The time was drawing near.

Dad had one more request on my behalf. He wanted to have at least one conversation with me. I found out later from my sister that he wanted to express his love, and share any of his knowledge that I would accept. I kept putting this meeting off until it was too late.

*“ . . . though his body lay buried here deep in the earth, we know his soul is safe up in heaven with the Lord, and we pray . . . ”*

Two friends and I sneaked out of my house around midnight, and walked over to another neighborhood. As we talked, one said, “What would happen if your father died tonight?” I answered jokingly, “Well, I guess I wouldn’t have to call and tell you!”

We returned around four-thirty, worn by a night of childish frolicking. About fifteen minutes later, my mother came downstairs. I thought she had heard us come back inside and I was prepared to defend myself. Instead, she meekly stated, “He’s gone.”

*“ . . . that he will now guide us in the path of righteousness, along side the three Divine Powers. And . . . ”*

I did not cry; not one drop fell for my own grief. At the funeral home, friends and relatives wept, so I joined in to follow their lead. If they cried, shouldn’t I have cried?

*“ . . . we pray that our lives may be patterned after the examples we have seen in this man and the Lord Jesus Christ. In God’s name we pray. Amen.”*

I opened my eyes and I saw the reddened eyes and glistening cheeks of others. Mine were dry. Why couldn't I cry? I did love him, honest. Why couldn't I cry? Then, I realized that all of the frustration and hatred had built up inside, and it was all against myself. I had let my beloved father slip through my fingertips.

A year later, to the day, my mother gave me a letter written by Dad. He had dictated it to my aunt a few days before he died. Although some of his thoughts were jumbled, he basically said all of the things he wanted to get in but could not due to my stubbornness. He knew me perfectly.

Today is exactly three years from the day he passed from this world into God's perfect land. I now find the tears that help me express all of the lonely days and all of the joys I would have liked to have shared with the wonderful person I used to call Dad. Many memories have been lost to the stubbornness and corruption I faced. Now, this teenager, who really lives as a fearful child, wishes for the virgin days of youthful play, with a new glove and a wonderful man pitching her softballs in the backyard. If you can hear me now, I love you, Dad, and I'm sorry.