

*I had vowed not to cry. This was another test of my manhood, another in a series of tests I was constantly giving myself for no other reason than to prove my manhood.*

- Writer Lewis Grizzard

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **Men's Styles of Mourning**

With the funeral over, the father's body consecrated, and the shock wearing off, a surviving son often feels pressure to finish his grief and become "normal" again. After a brief bereavement leave, the son may be encouraged by his employer to return to his pre-loss productivity. Colleagues and friends may stop asking about the impact of the death. Even a man's loved ones, who have depended upon him for stability and security in the past, may quickly start to lean on him again.

These external pressures combine with an almost universal male urge to "get over it, already." Many sons I spoke with expected themselves not to "lose it," even over a loss this great. After the death, they moved with urgency to try to recover whatever psychological equilibrium they might have possessed beforehand.

Eventually, most regained their balance. But not always so fast. In what might be called

the "active grieving" period - usually the several weeks or months following the loss - most sons I spoke with adapted only gradually to the new circumstances, and new psychology, of their lives.

The method of adaptation was varied, but sons tended to fall into one of four basic styles of grieving. Not that the styles were mutually exclusive. The majority of sons seemed to rely primarily on one style, and then mix in aspects of the others. The styles they chose - or that chose them - depended largely upon the son's personality, the circumstances of the father's death, and the son's previous relationship with his dad.

About one in five men I spoke with could best be labeled as *Dashers*. These were the sons who sped through mourning; many hardly noticed it. Dashers tended not to cry, but rather to create, almost immediately, an intellectual framework to help them manage the loss. The father was old, or out of his misery, they told themselves. Or, "that's life." In essence, Dashers *thought* their way through their grief. Emotionally, they were settling down even as other men were just beginning to feel.

Edwin Hunt was sixty-three when his father died of heart failure at the age of ninety-three. The son, a bespectacled biologist, had gotten along well with his dad ever since childhood, and had watched him gradually lose his physical and mental agility over two decades. When the death came, the son heard the news, flew with his wife to attend the funeral, and then returned home B all with little commotion.

"His death and the funeral didn't really have much of an effect," Edwin told me when I spoke with him five years after the death. "I accepted it. I don't even know what happened to him after we left the funeral home. He was in an open casket, and I saw him there. I remember going over and looking at him, and he looked the same as I last saw him.... I don't really remember having grief about my father's death."

The death of Edwin's mother, a decade earlier, had a much different impact. After that loss, Edwin recalled, he was depressed on and off for a year. In the months after his father's death, however, he was philosophical: "I had a realization that he'd had a complete life, and I guess I appreciated that. Other than that, I didn't dwell."

A cattle farmer who was sixty-three when his dad died, was similarly undisturbed. The man's father, aged eighty-five, had deteriorated in his later years, and the son was expecting the phone call with the news of the death. After the funeral, "I just went back to my life," this son told me. "I couldn't bring him back. I couldn't push him further. I couldn't turn him over.... I saw to him the last part of his life. I'm happy with that."

As with these two men, many Dashers are older men. Experienced with loss, they are less often shocked, or knocked off balance, even by such a significant death.

Not only do older men have experience with loss, they are more likely to have taken action to prepare for the father's death. My survey showed that sons who lost fathers after age

fifty-five were most likely to be involved in the father's medical care, to have talked with their fathers about the impending death, and to have resolved their relationship with their dads. In my conversations with these older men - most of whom were born before the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - there was also a high premium placed on traditional male stoicism. One 78-year-old man told me: "I don't believe I shed a tear. Men keep those things within their bodies."

Dasher status, however, was not reserved exclusively for older men. Several middle-aged and younger sons also told me their mourning was quick and non-chaotic. Most of these men had watched their fathers die gradually. Like the older men, they had accomplished some of their grieving in advance. Religion often played a part as well.

Patrick Bryan and his father, who had Parkinson's disease, spent many hours together in the father's last months. Patrick, who was forty-six at the time, sat at his dad's bedside while they talked about their lives, and read a book called *Steps to Peace With God*. Three years after the death, I met with Patrick, a well-dressed man with carefully combed dark hair, in the office where he was a pastoral counselor.

When I asked him about the period immediately after his dad's death, he said: "The grieving process was pretty short. There wasn't a weeping and moaning and sobbing and gut-wrenching kind of reaction to it. I remember a couple people in my family talked to me: 'Seems like you're not reacting much.' I began to evaluate myself. I believe there was a reality that I knew he was in a better place. The Scriptures talk about we'll have a new body. He's with God and he

has a new body.... That's what I kept thinking about."

This son added: "Here was a man who lived out the years he was supposed to live. If I felt sadness at all, it was for my mother because they had been married for almost sixty years, and she had never spent a night alone."

Another college administrator, who also spent a lot of time with his father in the last month of the older man's bout with cancer, said his grieving was muted. This man, who was forty-seven years old at the death, explained: "I did not have terribly strong emotions. There was some sadness, some relief.... My father's mother had died as a result of his birth. My religious beliefs are strong, and I thought: 'Well, I hope Dad finally is having an opportunity to get to know his mother.'"

Another group of men who tended to be Dashers were those who had never formed close bonds with their fathers during adulthood. They often lived at a distance from their families of origin, and saw their fathers only occasionally. They rarely connected with their dads in an emotional way, positive or negative.

Mark McGhee's father was an Army drill sergeant who became a public school teacher after retiring from the military. Mark recalled that his dad generally adopted the role of "instructor and critic" with him, rather than mentor or supporter, even in Mark's adulthood. When they embraced, Mark recalled, there remained even then a distance between them. "Think of Russians

hugging with big fur coats," the son suggested.

After Mark became a father himself in his thirties, the tensions began to ease between him and his dad. And in the years before the father's sudden death, which occurred when Mark was forty-seven, the two men concluded their phone calls and letters with expressions of love. That helped Mark let go of any lingering anger after the death, but it didn't create a strong emotional attachment. When the death came, Mark said, there was no intense mourning. Mark told me: "I had resigned myself years before that it wasn't going to be like in the movies, a big catharsis.... I would have liked for things to have gotten better sooner. I would have liked to know: 'Has your opinion of me changed?' But things were about as good as they were going to get."

A writer who was forty-six years old at his father's death, had moved away from his home in Michigan in his early twenties, and had gradually disconnected from his dad. While he saw his father at least once a year, their talks skimmed the surface of their lives and thoughts. The father sometimes expressed racist attitudes, which made the son angry. But mostly, the son told me, he didn't engage his dad. The son said he was saddened when his father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, but the progression of the disease only furthered the distance between them.

The father died at age seventy. I talked with the son a few months later. He said: "I didn't feel much grief. I didn't have that much real affection for him anymore.... We had grown far apart."

This man, as well as several other Dashers I spoke with, acknowledged that they were not entirely comfortable with their lack of emotion after the father's death. They wondered whether they were suppressing their own strong feelings. As it turned out, some sons who originally seemed like Dashers, only later realized that they actually represented a second style of mourner: *Delayers*.

Among the men I interviewed, about one in five could be categorized as a Delayer. That was about equal to the percentage I considered to be Dashers. Like Dashers, Delayers did not betray a powerful reaction to the death in the short-term. But months, years or even decades later - often after they had built a community of support, or had come to understand themselves better - these sons experienced mourning symptoms related to the father's death.

In Chapter Two, we met the prototypical Delayer. Walter Wang was the man who lost his father at age twenty-two, then buried his emotions through the funeral, his wedding three months later, the entire childhoods of his four children, and his passage into mid-life. Finally, at age fifty-five, at a management retreat, a facilitator encouraged Walter and his colleagues to meditate on various eras in their lives. When he reached the point when his father died, Walter wept over the loss for the first time.

When I talked with Walter twelve years after the retreat, he told me he regretted holding in his emotions for so long, but added that he came by his stoic disposition honestly: "I was following the example of my father. I never saw him break down." Walter added: "I was doing

what I believed to be right at the time. Someone needed to be the strong one. Everyone in my family was falling apart."

Ray Hyatt also felt like he needed to hold things together after his father died of a heart attack while the two were playing basketball. Ray was twenty-seven at the time. His father had a history of heart trouble, and as they played one-on-one at a park near their home, Ray recalled, his dad suddenly "turns around, swoons, and falls.... It was almost like someone pulled an arrow out and shot him. You could hear the gasp."

Ray recalled kneeling by his dad, rolling him over, and accidentally bumping his father's head on the concrete. Then Ray yelled for help. About five minutes went by before an emergency squad showed up; by then, Ray's father had stopped breathing. Twenty years after the death, Ray told me: "The part I hold myself responsible for is that I never attempted mouth-to-mouth resuscitation because I didn't know how. It seems like I should have known how."

Ray cried a little in the days that followed, but "by and large, I took a man-of-the-house attitude." Looking back on the months following the death, he recognized that he began suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress: nervousness, sweaty palms, muscle tension. It was not until fifteen years later that his grief was expressed in a direct way.

Ray was seeing a therapist to deal with what he thought were unrelated issues when the "watershed" event occurred. Ray described it: "I remember leaving the therapy session. We'd been

talking about my dad. It was a rainy day. I was driving home. And I was just sobbing. It was like I was in synch with the rain. The rain was pouring down. My tears were pouring down. And it was clear what I was doing. I was grieving the death of my father. And I was grieving in a way I'd never grieved before. That unabashed grief, accompanied by loud sobbing noises and tears. And since then, it's been more fluid. I haven't been blocked.... I'm more open to hard feelings."

In the first years after the death, Ray regularly drank beer to numb himself to his pain. Heavy use of alcohol and other drugs was a common trait among Delayers. According to the men I surveyed, sons between eighteen and thirty-two were at least three times as likely as sons in any other age group to use alcohol or non-prescription drugs to help them cope in the first month following a father-death. By using substances, these men often succeeded in burying their immediate pain, only to experience it later. It's one reason that young adults so frequently turned up in the Delayer ranks.

Stanley Meyer, for example, lost his father when he was twenty-five; two years after that, his mother died. After each death, he went into "my iron man mode," during which he papered over his emotions with marijuana and booze. He also used sex, he said, to blunt the pain of his losses.

As if to underscore his delaying tactics, Stanley refused to complete probate on his mother's will for nine years. When he was finally threatened with heavy fines, Stanley finished the paperwork. Not surprisingly, that's when his grief surfaced over the deaths. Stanley told me: "It

was like I was disinterring my parents. I had to bring them up to bury them again." During this period, he cried over the deaths for the first time. The mourning went on for several months, he said. It was difficult but, he said, it ultimately "showed me my own strength."

For Walter Wang, Ray Hyatt and Stanley Meyer, the death of the father was the first major loss of their lives. This was another common trait among Delayers. Sons who lacked experience with major losses seemed more likely to bury - consciously or not - the immediate pain of a father's death.

Marvin Russell was fifteen years old when his father died in a car accident. I talked to him seventeen years later. He told me that in the first months after the death, he felt little sadness, anger or other emotion. He recalled having no interest in talking about the death, looking at pictures of his father, or spending time evaluating their relationship. While he was curious about his lack of emotion, he didn't worry about it.

Then, five years after the death, following the suicide of his brother, Marvin's mourning for his father began. He explained how it happened: "My father came into my dreams. A recurring theme was that he wasn't really dead but just hiding from the tax department. (In the dreams,) I felt an overwhelming urge to hug him. I was so glad to have him back and didn't want to let go. I wanted to be with him for the rest of my life."

The dreams, Marvin continued, "started the mourning process. Actually, they *were* the

mourning process. They made me think about him, wonder about him, miss him.... My mother had always portrayed my father as a negative, impulsive, uncaring person. After these dreams, I think I broke free from this view of my father and started to thread together little pieces of objective information. It was like I used to see the world through my mother's eyes, and now I started to use my own."

Marvin was thirty-two years old, and a stay-at-home father of two, when we spoke. He still considered his dream life to be the chief avenue of mourning for his dad. Interestingly, over the dozen years that he'd been dreaming about his father, only one major change had occurred in the content of those nighttime visions. Whereas in the early dreams, his father had resisted Marvin's attempts to embrace him, in the more recent ones, the older man warmly accepted them.

While I characterized the sons we just met as Delayers, these men, and most other Delayers, generally also carried qualities of the last two major types of mourners, *Displayers* and *Doers*.

Among the sons I spoke with, Displayers were about as common as Dashers and Delayers; they also represented approximately one in five men. The primary trait of Displayers was a powerful, acute emotional reaction to the father's death. In the first weeks after the loss, these men often felt flooded, or overwhelmed, by sadness, fear, anger, or guilt. They tended to experience their grief as happening *to* them; they were not in control of it.

Here's how some Displayers described their process:

A psychologist who was forty years old at the death: "Death has always been hard for me. I don't know why that is, but it is. After Dad died, I was just really devastated. I cried all the time. Getting up in the morning, in the shower, on the way to work. Listening to music, watching a movie, I'd come to tears. My mental capacities began to suffer, and I found myself . . . forgetting things, getting confused, with a lower attention span. It's constitutional. I'm a sensitive person, someone who feels things easily, and doesn't defend against it. I often wonder how other people do it. There's a guy at work who lost both parents. I watch him. There's no difference in his behavior. How can he do that?"

A real-estate agent who was fifty-three when his dad died of Alzheimer's Disease: "I thought the grieving would all be over after the funeral. But it didn't stop.... I cried a lot. I even cried with my sons.... I was very close to my mother, very close. But dad's death was more of a shock. I feel like it's the male connection. I could always depend upon him. 'Dad, the hot water heater went out. What do you think I should do?'... In the beginning, my business slid. I couldn't concentrate. I'd go over to the cemetery to talk with Dad. I think the whole grieving process will go on the rest of my life."

A business consultant who was thirty-nine: "What's helped the most are all the tears. At times I've felt embarrassed that it's such a tender spot for me. But I eventually just added that to the reality that this go-round in life, I have my feelings close to ... the surface."

A mechanic who was thirty-six: AI had a real sense of despair. What's it all for? We live, we die, and what's left? My father had made a good salary for most of his life; he was an important person at the church. By the time he died, he had nothing. He left me a car that I sold for fifty dollars.... If it hadn't been for my kids, I might have just stayed in bed. I had this feeling about life - that I got up, went to work, came home, ate gruel, went to bed, and did it all over again. I kind of felt like I was waiting for it all to end."

For all of these men, the months after the death were emotionally erratic and draining. They felt the sadness of the loss powerfully, and could not, or preferred not to, avoid that feeling.

While sadness was the dominant feeling among the Displayers I spoke with, it was not the only one.

After his father's death, Ned Keith became extremely angry. Ned lost his father when he was forty. The father had abandoned Ned and his mother when Ned was five. He was gone from Ned's life for a quarter-century, then had sporadic contact with Ned in the last decade of the father's life.

After the death, Ned told me, "I put up his picture on the wall. I couldn't walk by it without yelling, 'You son of a bitch!'" This went on for about six months before his anger began to ebb. It helped that Ned got to meet a half-brother who had grown up with the father. The half-

brother told Ned that their father was "distant even when he was there."

Another man I interviewed also had a powerful anger reaction - one that turned into violence - after his father died when the son was in his mid-twenties. The son had to quit graduate school after the death, and took a low-wage job to help pay family bills. This frustrated him, and one of his sisters felt the brunt of his anger a few weeks after the death. The son recalled: "I told her not to get on me in the first five minutes after I got home (from work). One day, she did. I had a jacket over my arm. I struck her across the face with it."

The last category of mourners was the largest: *Doers*. Among the sons I spoke with, about 40 percent seemed to fit most suitably into this category. Most of these men were deeply touched by the father's death, but unlike *Displayers*, tended not to be overwhelmed by their emotions.

What set *Doers* apart was their focus on *action*. In the last chapter, we saw how some sons took action - walking, driving somewhere, riding a cable car - in the immediate aftermath of the father's death. For *Doers*, action continues long after this initial shock to be their primary way of processing the loss. Most often, this action involves doing things that consciously connect them with the memory of the father. It is as if *Doers* believe that they can begin to let go of their dads only after they first connect more closely to him.

The *Doers* I spoke with chose a variety of creative methods to make a connection with the lost father. Perhaps the most common was to spend time with physical reminders: photos, tools,

books, medals, and other mementos. According to my survey, 72 percent of men, (including some who were not primarily Doers) used mementos to help them cope in the aftermath of the loss.

Several sons I spoke with placed great importance on their fathers' clothes. One 34-year-old son, whose father died at age seventy-two, sorted through his dad's closet after the death and took home shoes, jackets, shirts, and ties. "One brother was too big (to fit into the clothes). The other brother was too small. I was his size, exactly," the son recalled of his father. He added, "There were times I was completely dressed in his clothes. It was a very positive thing." I talked with this son four years after the death, and he said he had thrown out, or worn out, most of his dad's clothes. But he still had a jacket that he wore on days when he had planned to meet one of his brothers.

Frank Hernandez, the man from the last chapter who took his father into his home, also kept most of his father's clothes after the death. He kept other items too. On a small wooden table in the corner of his den, Frank placed the folded pajamas and reading glasses his father wore during the time he'd lived with Frank. Next to those, Frank set a photo of his dad as a young man, and a commemorative plate from the father's hometown. Finally, Frank placed on the table the ivory urn containing his father's ashes. "I put (the shrine) in a spot where maybe it was out of the way. I thought it might have unnerved some (visitors)," Frank recalled. Frank liked to spend time at the shrine himself, sometimes only fleetingly. "I took time to reflect for a few moments, and then went on. It was a way to give honor and respect."

Of his father's clothes, Frank said: "I put them in boxes, and kept them" after the death. "Over the next few years, I moved five times. Each time, I'd give some of the clothes away. The last time I moved, I gave the last box to Goodwill."

Gary Isikoff, the one-time Hospice volunteer from Chapter Five, kept his father's wallet in the drawer of his desk at the union office where he worked. Gary, who was forty-three when his dad died, reported: "Sometimes, when I'm filing away a medical form, or pension check stub, I'll pull my dad's wallet out and look inside. I'll open up one of the scraps of paper he kept in there, maybe a note about a part for the dishwasher, and look at the neat printing or writing, and just imagine my dad writing it."

Gary also saved the .22-caliber rifle that his father taught him to fire and clean, a few tools, and a copy of one of his father's favorite books of poetry. Gary had placed another copy in the father's casket.

In addition to using physical items to connect themselves with their deceased fathers, Doers also used places. In the months after his father's death, for example, this same son, Gary, occasionally visited the attic in the home where he grew up. It gave him a chance to remember the summer of his 12<sup>th</sup> year, when he and his father worked together refurbishing the upstairs room.

They never completed the job. But sitting in the half-finished space after the death, Gary "got a rich feeling" as he remembered "that summer of no bedtimes, and the smell of sawdust and

Old Spice." Gary recalled the summer well: "My dad was almost tender in the way he would show me how to drill, or have me complete some task. I really wasn't much interested in the actual work, or how things were done mechanically. I was just happy to be with my dad, to be in close physical proximity, to admire his muscle and be part of a man's job."

A construction worker, who was forty-one when his father died, took a road trip - from his own home in Wyoming to the Florida home in which his dad had last lived. Along with his two brothers and a nephew, this son "threw a few sleeping bags" into a van with no back seats and drove more than thirty hours straight. The son recalled: "When we got to my father's house, we loaded everything up. Then we took our time coming back. Four days on the road." Years later, the son remembered the road trip fondly: "I sure do miss those pancake houses."

Sal Pierce had to go only as far as his back yard to create an extraordinary connection with his father. Sal, who was sixty-four when I spoke with him, was fifteen years old when his father died. On the night of the death, he recalled, he cried by "the roots of a monstrous elm tree until my Grandma came out to sit and comfort me." That was the bulk of his grieving until nearly three decades later. As Sal approached the age of his father's death, he told me, he used birthdays and death certificates to calculate a particularly poignant moment in time. "Then," Sal said, "when that hour arrived, I remember sitting in a chair by the pool, thinking 'this is the exact moment I'm as old as Dad was when he died.'" Sal couldn't pinpoint the benefit of this act, but felt he was "honoring" his father by carrying it through.

The concept of *honoring* was repeatedly mentioned by Doers as their inspiration for their actions. One man I interviewed was a college English teacher; he always found a way to work into his curriculum one of the books his father had loved. Another son took over his father's company after his dad died. A third set up a foundation to combat the disease that had killed his dad. A fourth, whose father had taken his own life, became a volunteer suicide counselor.

An accountant who lost his father at age twenty told me about an act of honoring he performed soon after his father's death. The man's father had been a professional baseball player in the 1940s. When the father died, the son was a collegiate player, and the season had just begun. The younger man was deeply shaken by the death, but also felt that "my father would want me to get back on the field." So he returned to the line-up a week after the death. Two decades later, the son told me: "I can remember standing at home plate on my first at-bat (after the death), with my knees shaking, and hitting the ball at the pitcher. He caught the ball and I was out, but it didn't matter. I knew my father would have wanted me to (play)."

Why does honoring the father and connecting with his memory help sons in their mourning? Maryland psychotherapist Thomas Golden, a specialist in men's mourning, sees grief as an accumulation of energy in the body; the purpose of mourning, he told me, is to release that energy. Generally, Golden said, men are less comfortable than women with dramatic release, preferring "to slowly, deliberately chip away" at the grief. Masculine mourners will often intentionally suppress their sadness during certain times, then consciously bring it up at a later time. Golden calls this practice "sampling;" other psychologists have referred to it as "dosing."

Golden has written *Swallowed by a Snake*, a book on the masculine approach to grief, and frequently writes about his father's life and death. Golden is not alone among Doers. According to my survey, about 25 percent of men wrote about their fathers, or *to* their fathers, after the death.

Sometimes writing offered a son a chance to crystallize his thoughts at a difficult moment. Jesse Hefner, whose dad committed suicide when Jesse was thirty-six, wrote a letter to his father a couple of days after the death. Then he placed it in his father's casket. Three years later, he shared a copy with me. It read, in part: "It's been three days since you shot yourself, and I still don't understand. I know how much you loved us all. You showed that through your whole life, especially the last few weeks, trying to finish up things. But if you loved us so much, how could you have done this, knowing what pain it could cause us? Why couldn't you just say, 'I need help?'"

Jesse told me that writing helped him articulate his greatest fears. "I'm just like you," he said in the letter, "and that scares me so much right now. I hear those voices of worthlessness too. What am I going to do?" One thing Jesse did was get help; he joined a suicide survivor group.

Researchers at State University of New York and North Dakota State University recently found that writing can have therapeutic effect, at least in some circumstances. In a 1999 study of patients with asthma and rheumatoid arthritis, the researchers found that those patients who wrote in a journal about the most stressful experience they'd ever undergone showed marked

improvement in their disease state; those who wrote for the same amount of time about their plans for the day showed no improvement at all.

The authors of the study suggested that releasing emotion around a stressful incident, through writing, may boost a person's immune system. No studies have been conducted to see how this works with the bereaved, but Paul Harris, one of the men in my survey, found that writing helped recapture a dramatic memory, and jump-start his mourning.

Paul was forty-three when his father died after a long illness. Upon hearing the news by phone, Paul recalled, he got up from his easy chair, poured himself a glass of whisky, and remarked to himself: "This should be momentous. Why doesn't it feel momentous?" It was, Paul remembered, "as if I was in a trance."

Until this time, Paul had always thought of himself as coming from "a pretty bland, suburban, boring family.... My parents were church-going people. Both of my grandfathers were ministers." Paul recalled that generally, he and his father fought in high school, often about politics (it was the 1960s), and sometimes about the father's assessment of the son as irresponsible. Paul was glad to leave his father's home at eighteen.

Through his twenties and thirties, Paul struggled in his career as an artist. He earned little money, which fed both his and his father's image of Paul as inept. Paul maintained a perfunctory relationship with his mother and father during this time, but felt it necessary to ask them for

money to help support himself, a young wife, and their first of two children.

The father began a 10-year physical deterioration when he was sixty-seven and Paul was thirty-three. During this period of decline, the two men mostly didn't communicate. After the death, the son's indifference continued for some time. When he thought of his father, there was only a vague feeling of disgust. But when marriage problems arose at about this time, Paul started writing in a journal each day as a way of sorting out his thoughts. It was in this daily writing that he came upon a crucial revelation.

One day, words poured off his pen that he did not intend to write, and that held no apparent meaning at first. The words were: "Hit me again, motherfucker!" As they appeared on the paper, Paul recalled, a terrible tremble shook his body.

A few days later, on a trip to New York City, Paul shared the journal entry with his younger brother Anthony. It struck a chord with Anthony too, and soon, over dinner, the two men were piecing together the outlines of a violent childhood both of them had substantially repressed. "We talked until the sun came up," Paul recalled. "We had never talked honestly in our lives. We had never compared memories.... The next morning, the world had changed. I had an awareness that there was a reason for much of the way I felt and dealt with my life."

The revelations from his writing spurred Paul to more action. First, he initiated conversations with his mother, who acknowledged that the abuse had occurred, and that she'd felt

powerless to stop it; the father had beaten her too, she said. Paul then contacted other relatives as well, who suggested that the father might have learned his abusive behavior from his own dad. Paul's grandfather, it turned out, had been so violent that one of his sons had run away from home in the middle of the night. Paul also joined a men's group, at which he was encouraged to unleash any rage he felt toward his dad.

When I met Paul, a self-reflective man with shoulder-length brown hair, it had been three years since the death. His anger toward his dad was diminishing. He told me: "The compassion I have for my father is we share a similar childhood" - they had both been beaten. Paul said he "can see the energy being released" by bringing up his old memories of abuse. And he added: "Now I just think, God willing, as I plough through this, the rest of my life will be great."

Most of the Doers I spoke with took action that was in some way connected to their fathers. But in a few cases, sons told me they were helped by doing things that diverted their attention from their loss and memories.

A maintenance man who was twenty-three when his father died of cancer said that in the weeks after the death, he spent an hour or two a day drawing designs on paper. The designs did not directly represent his father, he said. Rather, since his teens, he'd found that he "could draw for awhile and the negative feelings would pass. It would take me away from the situation for awhile. It got me through hard times."

I talked with this man three years after the death, and asked him if he thought he might have been avoiding deeper emotions by drawing. He didn't think so. He said he felt sad a lot in the weeks after the loss, and that cartooning helped him when he was overwhelmed. "It relieves stress," he told me. "It's instead of smoking or drinking."

Another man I spoke with, a retired machinist who lost his father at age forty-one, told me he coped with the death in part by going fishing every day. "I fish on the Missouri River. I'm 100 percent out there with nature. I really enjoy that. Me and the fish and nature." Mostly, this son said, fishing helped him "forget about everything." Occasionally, however, he'd think about his father, with whom he did not get along for most of his life. "I have forgiven him for a lot of bad stuff he did in my life, a-settin' out there."

Several men told me that going back to work was valuable in helping them through the loss. One man, a social worker who returned to work after a three-day bereavement leave, said: "I enjoy helping." His daily contact with disadvantaged people, he said, reminded him that "there are a lot of serious things happening other than my own problems."

The Canadian psychologist Philip Carverhill has found that working can be helpful for men in grief, in combination with other forms of emotional release. Work, Carverhill wrote in a 1997 article on men's grief, may "serve as a setting in which the bereaved male feels that he has some semblance of control during a very uncontrollable time."

Few men fit neatly into just one of these four categories of grievers. If I had met Paul

Harris - the man who discovered his abuse while journaling - in the weeks immediately after his father's death, I might have labeled him a Dasher, not a Doer; he betrayed no emotion at the time. A year after that, as Paul started remembering his father's abuse, he had strong emotional reactions. At that point, he may have fit the definition of a Delayer.

What matters, of course, is not whether a man can label himself, but whether he can understand, and accept, his particular style of grieving. Drs. Terry Martin and Kenneth Doka, co-authors of *Men Don't Cry, Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief*, have found that men are more likely than women to be intellectual, action-oriented mourners, but that the important task for a member of either sex is determining one's own style. Doka told me: "We experience grief differently, we express grief differently. The key to successfully dealing with a loss is to recognize your own adaptive strategies and use them effectively."

For example, a man who tends to feel a lot of emotion after a loss, but suppresses it because he doesn't want to appear unmanly, may be risking his health. "That's the one you hear about who five years down the road has ulcerative colitis, alcoholism, is extremely depressed, and quits his job," Martin told me. On the other hand, Martin added, if a man doesn't feel a strong sense of loss after a death, it doesn't automatically mean that he's suppressing his real feelings.

Some people would label as "crippled" a man who doesn't feel losses intensely. But Martin, who is a psychology professor at Hood College in Maryland, contends that emotions are sometimes over-rated in American culture. "The whole emphasis has been that feelings are the real key" to a full life, Martin said. "Frankly, playing with a great idea for me is as rewarding as

being stirred emotionally.... It's interesting that feelings are one thing we probably share most with the animal kingdom, whereas our higher cognitive processes really separate us from the animal kingdom."

Martin believes there are reasonable explanations for the masculine tendency toward emotional reticence, and they have their roots in men's long-standing role as society's protectors. He explained: "If you're out there defending the walls from the barbarians, after the initial attack, you can't afford to look around at your dead companions and start grieving. You have to pull it together for the next wave."

Ultimately, Martin and Doka say, grieving for most men and women tends to involve a mixture of emotion, thought, and action - a mixture that varies with each individual. One grief counselor I spoke with said he tries to remind himself, and his clients, that "there are as many ways to grieve as there are people in the world."