

June 20, 2021

*How We Survive*

Dear Friends,

Today is Father's Day, a difficult day for me, even though it has been 38 years since I lost my dad when I was 20. I still miss my father and I still love him. I still feel his love for me, as it is part of the fuel that keeps me propelling through life. I live in constant gratitude for the wonderful father I was privileged and blessed to have. Every year, both Father's Day and Mother's Day are reminders to me that grief is a life-long journey that evolves as we evolve and unfolds as we unfold. It's a reminder to me of the importance of cherishing those we love while we have them and equally cherishing our precious memories now that they are gone.

Mark Rickerby is a writer and poet from Belfast, Northern Ireland and many of his poems have been featured in the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series. He also wrote a book about his relationship with his distant father called *The Other Belfast*. I published his most famous poem, *How We Survive*, last year in another reflection, but I feel it is well worth repeating in its truth and its message. The poem aptly, acutely, and sometimes painfully describes the truth of loss; it certainly captures my experience in losing not only my dad, but the multitude of people I have loved and lost. I share it today "with loving reflection more than hopeless longing" as Mark puts it.

*How We Survive*

by Mark Rickerby

If we are fortunate, we are given a warning.

If not, there is only the sudden horror,

the wrench of being torn apart; of being reminded

that nothing is permanent,

not even the ones we love,

the ones our lives revolve around.

Life is a fragile affair.

We are all dancing on the edge of a precipice,

a dizzying cliff so high we can't see the bottom.

One by one, we lose those we love most

into the dark ravine.

So we must cherish them without reservation.

Now. Today. This minute.

We will lose them or they will lose us someday.

This is certain.

There is no time for bickering.

And their loss will leave a great pit in our hearts;

a pit we struggle to avoid during the day

and fall into at night.

Some, unable to accept this loss,

unable to determine the worth of life without them,

jump into that black pit spiritually or physically,

hoping to find them there.

And some survive

the shock, the denial, the horror,

the bargaining, the barren, empty aching,

the unanswered prayers, the sleepless nights

when their breath is crushed under the weight of silence and all that it means.

Somehow, some survive all that and,

like a flower opening after a storm,

they slowly begin to remember

the one they lost in a different way...

The laughter,

the irrepressible spirit, the generous heart,

the way their smile made them feel,

the encouragement they gave

even as their own dreams were dying.

And in time, they fill the pit with other memories

the only memories that really matter.

We will still cry.

We will always cry.

**But with loving reflection more than hopeless longing.**

And that is how we survive.

That is how the story should end.

That is how they would want it to be.

Peace and Serenity,

Kevin