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My father left me and my siblings out of his will - and left everything to his new family



Kate Morris had a complicated relationship with her remarried parent, which compounded her grief and sense of abandonment after his death CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES CONTRIBUTOR

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By [Kate Morris](#)
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My father died two years ago. He was in his early 80s but not frail or unwell so the news was extremely shocking. He always looked younger than his years and his mind was clear and astute; I had expected him to live well into his 90s. He had seemed invincible, which on reflection is strangely childish; but maybe it was because I didn't want to imagine life without him.

It was deeply painful to grasp the idea that I would never see him again, or hear his voice, which was still present in my head – if I try hard, I can still hear it now. I learned that he died alone, of a heart attack, and that saddened me. I wondered if he'd been scared, or in pain.

At the time of his death, I hadn't seen him for many months, but we had planned to meet at a family gathering and during those first unreal days, it was a small comfort to know I had finally made a plan to see him, even though he had died before it happened.

My parents separated when I was 12 and my father remarried in his 60s and had a child. I was pleased that he was a much better father this time around – loving, interested and committed. He had been completely absent during my childhood. He never came on holiday with my sister or me, or read us bedtime stories or talked to us. When we were young, his way of communicating was to test us on capitals of the world or French phrases.

He didn't really appear in my life until our parents separated. At that stage he began making more of an effort. During my teens, his charm, intelligence and good looks all combined to make him seem like an exciting father, obscuring the more contentious issues. He did not always tell you what you wanted to hear, and he didn't suffer fools, but he would listen and be present when he could. He was stimulating to be around and as the years went by we formed a bond. He became my biggest supporter, always interested to know how I was getting on, stepping in if I need help.

Our relationship changed after he remarried. A few years later, I too got married, and we both had babies at around the same time. We continued to see each other, but both our priorities had changed and gradually the cracks became entrenched. He stopped calling so much; he invested less in me. Our long lunches dwindled to one a year, although I could still drive out of town to see him, he rarely if ever, visited me. I suspect that having failed at marriage and fatherhood the first time, he was keen in his 60s and 70s to really make it work, to be present, and to give himself to his new family. I can see now that we both had to prioritise our burgeoning families, but still, it was hard to readjust.

The reason for our estrangement was sad and complex. One of the issues was the strong intuition that he would not include his adult children in his will, even though he could well afford to. Of course no one knew for sure but there were rumours based on throwaway remarks he had been heard to make.

When I voiced my concern, he didn't deny it or confirm. It was not necessarily the money or the sense of security that would bring, but the fact that he would not name all his children that was deeply hurtful on a psychological level. I understood that he had a wife and a child who needed support but I felt that the three older children were surely entitled to be remembered in some way, particularly as the bulk of the estate came from our great-grandparents.

It was about a year after he died when we finally discovered we had been right; he had not named my two adult siblings or me in his will. Nothing, not even the jewellery that had belonged to our grandmother. By this time, we were all hurt and miserable, as none of us could actually believe that he would leave us with such abandon, and no thought to our feelings.

When I talked to the psychotherapist and author of Grief Works ([Penguin, £9.99](https://books.telegraph.co.uk/Product/Julia-Samuel/Grief-Works--Stories-of-Life-Death-and-Surviving/21623431/)

<https://books.telegraph.co.uk/Product/Julia-Samuel/Grief-Works--Stories-of-Life-Death-and-Surviving/21623431/>), Julia Samuel, she said that, "If the final act of your parent is to leave you out of their will it causes complex grief because it blocks you from grieving the parent you thought you knew and now wonder if you knew them at all. It is

as if you have been wiped out – for legacies are experienced as an expression of love, of being loved even after death – so it engenders complicated grieving, disenfranchising the child from their legitimate sadness and replacing it with confusion and fury.”

Julia Samuel advises that to get through the disappointment and confusion it's a good idea to write a letter to the person and either file it or put it somewhere. I think that could be a very healing act. CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES CONTRIBUTOR

That very much resonates: I felt as though I had been rubbed out. In fact I began to question whether my father had, in fact, ever loved me. And whether it was right to carry on loving him. I often wonder why he left us like that. What was he thinking? Did he not understand how hurtful it feels to be erased? And if he had reasons, it would have been a good idea to meet with us to discuss his will, or leave us a letter with some explanation. There are so many unanswered questions.

On difficult days, I simply can't believe that my father left me out of his will, but when I'm in a brighter mood, I try to focus on the times when we were close. I remember him laughing at my jokes, or listening carefully to my views on politics or ethics or current affairs. I remember the walks around his garden, and him saying, "I love you," when it was time to leave. I am truly thankful that when I committed to being a writer, but was full of doubt, he gave me my first computer and believed in me. Sometimes when I hear Carly Simon or Boz Scaggs being played on the radio, I will remember being a child and sitting in the front on his car. He would drive very fast and play loud music and my sheltered life would suddenly expand and fill with excitement and joy. It's those memories that make me cry.

I often wonder when I will be able to move on from all of the hurt. Samuel advises that to get through the disappointment and confusion it's a good idea to write a letter to the person and either file it, or put it somewhere and I think that could be a very healing act. She says that in therapy she often does visualisations with people where they say what they need to say and then do a healing ritual for what hurts.

"The psychological work is to grieve both for the death of the person and grieve what has happened," she says. "Pain is the agent of change, by allowing yourself to feel the pain of it, is how you heal and finally get

lots of love and support from others. When love dies, it is the love of others that is key to our accommodating the loss and learning to live and love again.”

Have you had a similar experience? Do you have any advice on how best to manage it? Tell us in the comments section below.

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