

✓ Dear Dad

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My Dad



Dear Dad

I wish that I had found the words to write or talk with you sooner.

I remember your 80th birthday, not long before you passed away. We planned this in order to honour you.

You spoke because we insisted you speak, and you shared things that you had buried, and that I had never heard you share about before. It was really the first time that I started to see you, the real you. You had always seemed so emotionally and relationally distant to me.

I will turn 80 soon, and am looking back at my life and relationships, especially with my wife and family, I am beginning to realise that I also have buried things that I have never really been able to see or to share openly before this.

I am your firstborn, born shortly after you returned from four and a half years of the horrors of World War 2.

I never really knew of the traumas that you experienced in frontline warfare, seeing all your friends die one after the other, surviving prolonged heavy artillery attack, surviving many near death experiences, experiencing the unforgettable horrors of bayonet charges at an enemy that were just frightened people like you, not wanting to be there.

I didn't know what trauma was until I became an adult. I didn't know the deep personal impact of fighting and surviving massive battles in places like El Alamein and Monte Casino, and that you had seen and experienced things no human heart is meant to carry

I did not understand growing up, how you emotionally collapsed with the weight of your trauma experiences. I didn't understand that they removed you from the frontline for rest,

and then sent you home to New Zealand because you were no longer able to cope with more trauma.

Nobody knew how to recognise or heal trauma then. They just called it "Shell Shock" and gave you a medal, and sent you home to survive as best you could.

The man my mother loved and married and watched leave for war, returned a completely different man, traumatised by war, and totally changed.

You came home, but you never really came back

Growing up, I did not understand you. You seemed emotionally distant and so far away relationally, and often so easily irritated. I used to wonder who is this man. I am not able to recall you ever holding me, and hugging me, and affirming me. I longed for closeness, but we didn't talk about feelings and those things in our family

On Saturday's, I never recalled you once coming to watch me play sport. Instead, you spent the day away from home, away from family, spending time with men who had also experienced war trauma.

I thought you did not care what I did, and that I was not important to you.

I did not know that you were carrying the unresolved anxiety and conflicts from war, and that you were seeking rest from the pressures of life and providing for us

I always felt alone. Somehow, I felt responsible for keeping the peace, for being the "good" boy, quiet, never causing trouble or conflict.

Always I thought that if I just worked hard enough, and was good enough I would see you smile and approve of me.

I did not understand that the irritation you frequently showed with me, was really the overflow of your unresolved inner traumas

I never really understood that although you had come back from a war, you were still fighting battles long after the war had ended and you had no one to help you .

You were fighting them alone. No one understood, not your wife, not your children, only those who had shared war conflict experiences. There was a silent knowing and understanding shared by all who have experienced the horrors of war

I never understood until recently that some of the things that I have personally struggled with through my life, were the generational and relational impact of war trauma that you had experienced.

Being anxious, deeply fearful of conflict, over responsible, emotionally disconnected, unable to express feelings and needs, overly people pleasing, and perfectionism are now recognised as a common generational and relational impact of War Trauma.

The war trauma you experienced was not yours alone. The sadness in mum's eyes from time to time could not be hidden.

The war trauma you experienced affected us all, each in our own different way.

Sadly, it also impacted our own marriages and families emotionally and relationally in ways that we did not realise, until the effects eventually became visible

I never understood this, and just came to believe that the tension was "my fault", that something was "wrong with me", that I didn't really belong, and that "I must be unloveable"

Dad, I never really knew you, never knew your heart and who you really were. I still feel a deep sadness about this, and especially now that this opportunity has been taken away from me by your passing away.

I am sorry that you did not have the help that you needed.

You had no one to help you. You just did the very best that you could alone.

Thank you for the way that you loved me even when it was difficult for you to express it.

Thank you for doing the best you could to provide security and a good education

Thank you for teaching me the importance of hard work, and honesty, and perseverance, and the importance of a faith in God.

There is so much I would love you to talk with me about. I am sad that this was taken from us both.

I want you to know that I "see you" now

I forgive the silence, the emotional and relational distance, the irritability, the perfectionism.

I choose to carry forward the very best parts of who you are: committed, reliable, hardworking, honest, courageous, and your unforgettable loud laugh.

I Love you and I miss you.

Michael

