

By [Leonard Clinton Williams III](#) At January 7th, 2024

About Me | My Father

The Day That I Forever Changed



I don't know what to say about him. I'm sorry to say that I'm not sure that he loved me the way that most fathers love their children or that he was capable of love in the way most people are.

My mom left him when I was around 3 years old, out of necessity. He was up to all sorts of stuff he shouldn't have been, and he was up to it with me and her in the house.

I cried for him many nights for years. Then at age 11 or 12, he sent me a check for \$600, which was a hell of a lot of money to a poor little kid in 1992. He also sent my mother a large check for unpaid child support.

I went to see him when I visited my grandfather on the weekends. He lived with an old woman he was "taking care of" and a bunch of construction workers who were occasionally there and had a bad habit of leaving empty beer bottles all over his room (those weren't his).

I got a \$50-a-week allowance from him during this time, for doing nothing. This was 10 times what I got paid for my normal chores, which were listed on a 3-foot-long poster board in my room at home. We'd go to the mall, and he'd buy me a new \$150 pair of shoes, a \$125 basketball goal, or a \$60 game cartridge. Then we'd get a pile of quarters, and I'd play Mortal Kombat for hours before we went home, with my \$50 bill still intact.

This didn't last long because he began to act in ways that would scare me. He would chastise me and guilt-trip me for not coming over enough and not wanting to live with him.

I figured out later in life that if you want to understand why Dad does something, you brainstorm about how it could benefit him and then work backward from that. You'll be able to deduce his reasoning. The child support, the \$600, the allowance, the clothes, his nice wardrobe, his truck, his stump grinder (which looked nice and new sitting in the

yard, never used), his pet chickens (he said they were some expensive, rare breed), his satellite dish—all of it could be traced back to the pocketbook of this old lady he lived with, along with his mother, in the old lady's house.

She was quite charmed with me, and I figure that somehow, Dad thought it might accelerate her dumping all she owned into him if I joined their happy family. For whatever reason, he was mad and acted strange and scary, and I didn't see him many more times until his dad died years later.

At my grandfather's funeral, Dad counseled me about death and about things being part of life. Dad had an ability to impart wisdom and knew and understood a lot about life. He was also very intelligent, and that was recognized by everyone in my family, although I'm not sure that this was ever brought up without the qualifying "but he's not as smart as you."

He could be a normal father and even occasionally self-sacrificing for periods of time, and he seemed to sometimes have a heart, even a big one. But there was this dysfunction that hijacked his brain, and 99% of all his efforts were to improve his own lot, with little thought about what it did to others.

He disappeared, and we lost touch until he popped out of the woodwork when I was around 20. He was happy to make contact and talk on the phone regularly, and he was also full of ideas about what we could do with my life's savings. He had a roundabout way of going about things like this, but he wanted me to invest in his idea to start a restaurant. Dad was short of a lot of things in life, but he was never short of ambition.

Over the next eight years or so, a pattern repeated over and over. We'd have a good relationship and enjoy talking, and then he'd make a stab at me for money or something for him. He'd often be a little manipulative going about this. I didn't like the idea of giving him my hard-earned anything (for all I had to learn about life, I cannot remember hardly any time past age 8 when I did not work far more than anyone I knew) after he'd done next to nothing for me my whole life.

I didn't like that he had the nerve to ask me for anything. So, I denied him the \$300 digital camera he needed for his eBay business, the \$8,000 he needed to lease his restaurant space, the \$30,000 for the real estate he knew about and wanted to go in on with me ("go in on it" is not the best way to describe me putting up all the money), the \$2,000 he needed for a billboard, the other \$2,000 he needed to make good on a vow to a prosperity gospel minister. On and on, for eight years, he didn't get a penny.

He wouldn't have gotten a call back over those eight years if he didn't grease the wheels with a good period of a normal relationship with me in between the money grab attempts. But it seemed to be a deliberate and probably calculated behavior pattern, and I felt burned at the end of eight years of it.

I became numb to most of what came out of his mouth. This included what came out of his mouth the day he called and told me he had cancer. It included every time he called me for the next nine months, telling me about not being able to hold food, telling me about looking like someone from a picture of the Holocaust, telling me about hospice nurses coming to visit him. I didn't really know what made hospice nurses different from other nurses.

Then one day, I called him, and someone else answered the phone. She told me it was my cousin Vickie and that I hadn't seen her in so long that I probably didn't remember her. She said that her mother, my aunt, had found him passed out on the floor where he lived. She told me he was at my aunt's house with them and that I needed to come down "soon, if you understand what I mean...".

The reality that hadn't hit me suddenly did. I thought about the man who told me years before that no matter how bad a person my dad was, I needed to make every effort to find him because there are things that I would want to say to him, and there will come a time when I no longer have the opportunity to say them.

I broke down. I was in pain like I couldn't believe. I made arrangements to visit him that Saturday. Then, on Thursday, they called and said the hospice nurse had been by and said that he might not make it through that night. I was destroyed that much worse, and my mom drove for me, and I went down there.

His father had cancer many years earlier, and I had heard this "he might not make it" half a dozen times with him over a period of five years. We'd only been about nine months. I brought him an MP3 player that I loaded up with gospel music.

Dad was a religious fanatic by any sane estimation. He had read the Bible cover to cover at least 100 times, could quote verses verbatim on the fly for almost any situation, and would plow all over his father when they had a debate, pointing out things like his father had said that people weren't worthy to do such and such, which used an adjective, but the scripture says worthily, which was an adverb and changed the entire meaning of the verse.

It was very impressive, and I'm not sure I ever saw anyone who had any hope of beating Dad in such a debate. He'd taken advantage of his semi-retirement and bottomless allowance at the old house to really study up for several years, on top of all the study he had done his whole life. I told mom on the way down that I hoped he would make it out of this.

Then we got to the house. He was on a bed and was wasting away. He had no energy left in him but reached for my hand, and I put it in his for him, and he kissed it and said, "I love you," so faint but barely enough to hear just a little. My aunt said, "He tried to tell Clinton that he loved him," but he didn't just try because I know that I heard him.

I asked my aunt when he was going to eat. She said he couldn't. I asked if he had a feeding tube, and she said no, he didn't want one. He had a choice to live a week or to live for maybe a few extra days, and he chose to die.

I cannot describe how I felt when I realized what I had been missing the whole time. There would be no making it out of this, and the hospice nurses who had been visiting only visit people who are certain to not make it much longer.

I hadn't seen my aunt in a long time. I had always liked her, and my grandfather had spoken of her as one of his most trustworthy children, saying that he could count on her to never lie and to always pay him back if he gave her money. He could leave her alone in his house with all of his money, belongings, and prescription drugs, unlike my dad and his brother, for whom this was a big no-no.

I asked my aunt about a lot of things. I told her about how Dad had told me wild stories of my heroic grandfather beating him and beating his mother in front of him. Of how bad it was to hear her screaming and in terror all the time. Of him being an alcoholic.

The alcoholic part I had heard before. Years earlier, when comparing his earlier failings in life to my father's and others he knew, my grandfather had said, "But I never let my drinking get in the way of me taking care of my family."

My aunt told me that these wild stories were all true, and that my dad had had bad mental problems over the wrong things both his parents did to one another since he was 8 years old. She said that my grandfather let his kids go without food on many occasions over his drinking.

I thought to myself about how I'd like another five minutes with who had been one of the two greatest men I ever knew, five seconds to say I love and miss him, and the rest to tell him that if you beat the hell out of your kid's mom in front of him and live like hell for half his life, and then that kid grows up to be your worst nightmare, you got just about what you had coming, and he should take all the trash he talked about my dad back.

I asked her about whatever became of that old woman, Gettus. Dad was and had been living in squalor for a very long time, and I didn't quite get what had happened. As a child, after seeing the big diamond she wore and figuring out that she was where all the money came from, I had pictured her as being rich in some grand way. I also perceived her as very old, so I figured she had died.

She said that Gettus wasn't all that rich, but when I knew her, she had just barely shy of \$1 million, and that "Lenny went through it all." She had then gone to be taken care of by my aunt and Dad's recently deceased mother.

I believe after her personal funds were gone, they had arranged for the state to pay to take care of her, including a salary for her caregiver, my dad's mom. My aunt told me how cruel her mom would be to this poor lady. I couldn't believe what she was describing, and in my mind, this lady had to be 90 years old by now. I see no way in reality that she was much short of that.

My aunt told me how Dad had secretly videotaped his mother physically abusing this old woman. And she followed on without pause to explain Dad's motive— he blackmailed his mother with this video. The state will take your money away and put you away unless you pay me.

I could not believe that anyone could live like this. No one could be this way. No one could have such a warped, sadistic twilight zone from hell relationship with their own mother. Not even my dad. Not even after spending some portion of nearly every weekend from ages 11 to 16 hearing of my dad's awful misdeeds, which could fill a small book.

Looking back, my dad had spoiled me. I had been spoiled by him and every person in my family. My mother has always been a consistent martyr who doesn't seem to think about what life has to offer her more than five minutes a week. A true blessing, but not so mysterious because that's how she is to everyone, just much more pronounced when it comes to her children.

Then my paternal grandfather had put on his best game face and held up the best façade he could the whole time I knew him, and this took great effort for sure.

And then my dad was the best person he knew how to be to me, even though that wasn't much. He had to try very hard to be so different to me than everyone else.

I felt special in a way and a little ungrateful, and I'm not sure what it is about me that causes so many people to roll out their red carpet for me, even if their limitations mean that their red carpet is old, stained, and tattered and smells like piss.

I felt bad for about three seconds when he told me his mother died, which may have been three seconds more than he did, because without missing a beat he told me that "there was no need to sugarcoat it" that she "had lived in wickedness and died in wickedness" and that she was "burning in torment right now" and had left him here with no inheritance.

His brother, I believe, somehow got that, and it may have had something to do with Dad telling her she was going to go to hell while she was on her deathbed, and telling her at the height of her illness that her stomach cancer was God's punishment for her telling him he was full of shit when he gave her scriptural moral admonishments a year or so earlier.

So, my aunt and I talked in between me breaking down, catching up on what had been happening on that side of the family, which I hadn't seen any of in a very long time.

My uncle Glenn came by, and I was happy to see him. He had some private time with Dad, and I remember sitting on the couch and imagining what sentiments and good times he shared, and what loose ends and old grievances he might have put to rest.

I was so pounded with the sudden grief of what had happened that I couldn't think straight. I wavered on and off about whether I wanted to stay with Dad all day or go home.

On Saturday night, I decided to go home, and then at 6 am on Sunday morning, Mom came to my door to tell me my aunt called and said that he had died sometime after 5 am.

I didn't have much money, and I didn't know what to do. I wanted Dad to have a funeral. For all the bad I had said and felt about him over the then 28 years of living, for those few days, he was the greatest man I ever knew. He was worth more than everything I had, and I would have sold it all if need be.

My aunt went to his trailer, and they ended up finding a small life insurance policy that expired in two weeks. I was overjoyed. It was the best news of my life at that time.

The people I worked for at Sugar Top sent some flowers to the funeral home, and that was so kind.

I was at Dad's casket, and his wife and one of her sons came up beside me. He and his wife had been separated. Her son, who was probably around 17, broke down uncontrollably, and I felt it. I could sense his pain and how much my dad had meant to him. He said, "Dad taught me a lot" as he began to crumble. My dad let him call him dad even though he wasn't a biological child.

And right there in those five seconds, I learned more about what it means to be a moral human being than I had learned in my entire life. I learned more than anyone will ever learn in 1,000 years of attending a feel-good “God has blessings for you” style church which is so common today. It is not something that can be put into words, but it forever changed me, and it would forever change anyone who had lived my life.

I had never felt guilty for the times I felt like I had deserved better from my father. That he should have done more than cook drugs in the house and beat my mom in front of me when I was barely old enough to talk. That he was wrong for dodging the responsibility of being a father my whole life, leaving me and my mom to fend for ourselves, only to pop out of the woodwork at age 20 when all the responsibility was gone, wanting to spend every penny I had.

When this kid lived with my dad, he barely had food to eat. Split a can of \$1.29 spaghetti with a family of five, and Dad beat his mother just like he beat mine.

And in that moment, as I watched this pitiful boy break down, I realized that there are people for whom it never occurred that they might deserve anything at all.

I will never forget the look in his eyes and the humility and humbleness about this boy that I could sense. He was so pitiful, and at the same time, he was a much bigger person than I was at his age.

I too had ached for someone to call dad as a kid. Circumstances meant that I would have to ache for that and not have it for a long time.

Then I also ached for toys, which my collection swelled up pretty much every week. I ached for an Atari, then a Nintendo, then a Sega, then a Super Nintendo. I ached for a good portion of everything on offer at any store, and I rarely had to ache for long.

Later in my teens, I ached for expensive clothes like my dad bought me and that I bought with that \$600. Mom had good credit, and she spent next to nothing on herself. She wore often old or generic clothes and shoes that were often worn out, working 80 or 90 hours just about every week. I had those clothes. I had them all.

How in God’s name I never realized how much I had and how much I was asking for, I will never know.

My aunt and I have become much closer and talk on a regular basis. I admire her very much; she’s all my grandfather cracked her out to be.

We compare notes on facts about our family, like [my cousin Jerry](#) who I never met but that Dad had spoken of as being so mean. We share stories of my dad’s more exotic religious beliefs, which we both find hilarious.

Dad felt that he had a special connection with God. He also perceived God to be “vicious,” as he had described him to me. Dad had nothing against God’s vicious nature, but spoke of it sympathetically and also believed himself to be a benefactor.

He told me that Christopher Reeve's accident was the hand of God because “no man but Jesus can fly in the air, and he shouldn’t be glorifying himself to little kids like that.” Concerning men in his church who were former members of biker gangs, he said that

they were “of God,” but that their tattoos of “devils” all over their arms disturbed Dad while he was “trying to worship God,” and that he was going to have to tell them to do something about it “before God rips that arm off in a car wreck.”

One time there was an earthquake in some Muslim nation, and Dad dropped the news to me, “Did you hear about those 60,000 devil worshipers who got sucked into the ground? I’m hoping Osama bin Laden’s corpse gets found in there.”

The 2nd Iraq war was the result of Dad praying for Saddam Hussein to be killed. Not Dad and whoever else was praying for Saddam to die, just Dad.

My aunt told me that his landlord at some place kicked him out, and that Dad had issued a threat to him when he was evicted about how his landlord will “pay for it.” The very next day, his landlord had a heart attack and died, and Dad told my aunt that God killed his landlord for kicking him out.

God also gave his mother stomach cancer for insulting my dad, issued some punishment I can’t remember to his brother for offending him, and had put several people in jail for not listening to Dad when he “warned them about fornication.”

Dad now has the peace that his tortured soul was deprived of most of his life, and of which he deprived all the people he beat, kidnapped, threatened, robbed, defrauded, extorted, and tormented in other ways.

I got to pick out his tombstone. That was a great day when insurance was going to foot the bill, and I could pick out any one I wanted for this most special man. I wanted one for sure that said something about Christianity. That’s what Dad would have wanted.

(I was just a tad upset that my aunt had encouraged the preacher giving the eulogy to speak in grey terms that would sound good to everyone and be compatible with her “Kingdom Hall people” religion, as Dad called it, and also the conventional form of Baptism that Dad based his beliefs on. But my aunt had done so much, and I love her to death.

I let it slide that my dad would be standing up in his grave if he knew, because according to Dad— “I believe for sure that the people at the highest level of that church pray to Satan in secret.”

It’s not all about me, and it’s not all about Dad, although this poor man probably hadn’t gotten the point about the latter at any time between the moment he was born and the time I was sitting there in the funeral home three rows back from his casket.)

For his tombstone, it was a tie between a set of clasped hands saying something like “Precious Lord, take me home” and one with a carved-out picture of Jesus. Price wasn’t a consideration, and I believe they were both the same cost.

I am hit with regret to this day, 12 years later, that I picked the one with the clasped hands because Dad would have liked the Jesus one better.

Neither my dad nor Jesus is here anymore. I still learn things about being human and doing what is right from them both, even after they are gone.

