

WEB EXCLUSIVES

A Beautiful Day: The Story of a Son's Loss

BY KEVIN CROPP

It was a beautiful day. A perfect number of clouds lined the sky making us aware of just how blue that abyss can be. It was the middle of May and the weather was warming up. My father had the yard in fine shape. The grass was cropped short in a diagonal pattern. The concrete patio was lined with flower boxes full of tulips in bloom. The side of the house was covered with rose bushes, open to the spring sunshine, red in all their glory. Two bird feeders hung on the back porch and hummingbirds flew down and hovered. No leaves remained on the ground from the season of death when all had fallen from the southern oaks. My father had raked them away and prepared the yard for the next season when life would be in full bloom again.

In the center of the yard near my mother's chair was a flower bed of all different types and colors of flowers. Purple, red and orange buds were intertwined in a floral arrangement encircled by a rock wall. It was a creation of hers and I saw her looking at it with keen interest, remembering a day when she had been healthy enough to work in the yard.

It's such a nice day," my mother said.

The bath and the fresh air had given her so much more strength than she had in the confines of her room. She looked almost healthy again. She had the burgundy, velveteen wrap on her head. Her cheeks and eye sockets had regained much of their color. She was holding her head up straight and her legs were stretched out on the lawn chair. She was almost healthy.

I brought her a glass of water and sat down next to her.

"Has your father been working in the yard?" she asked. "It looks really nice."

"Yes ma'am. He usually does an hour or two of something every day when he gets home."

"Well, you certainly can tell," she said, and took in a big view.

“Mom, I’ll be right back. I want to get you something.” I had just remembered the pictures in the hallway.

I returned with the picture collages from the hallway and placed the one of her family in her lap. She looked at it for a long time and her eyes began to water. A smile crept across her face and the memories flooded in.

“It seems all I can do is remember,” she said and feigned a smile. “My life seems like a dream that someone is trying to pry away from me.”

She swallowed the emotions that would bring tears, replaced it with gratitude for being able to remember, and began to tell me her story.

There were times when I thought my mother’s plight with cancer seemed inhumane. But at other times, like this day, it seemed some value had been added to her life and to mine. She reached a point, as we all must, when something larger than life itself crept inside her and whispered, “It will be okay, Linda, this is the natural way of things.” That realization brought strength.

After telling her story she asked me to take her back inside. I carried her there, set her down easily, and tucked her into bed. I gave her a glass of water and a handful of pills. As I turned to leave she grabbed my hand and said my name in such a way as to warrant my full and undivided attention.

“Yes ma’am?”

“I love you son,” she said softly, and put her head down on the pillow. I leaned down and kissed her forehead.

“I love you too, Mom,” I said, and meant it with more heart than I ever knew I had.

That was an excerpt from my novel, *The Time Keeper*, which is based on my own account.

When experiencing the loss of a loved one, you can’t help but ask what do I do now? What do I say when no words can be spoken? For some people the answer is crippling. The notion of moving on with your life is insurmountable, beyond attempt, and shattering. Of course, to be human is to experience these feelings, but they should not alter our life forever.

My mother once said to me, “There’s good to be found in everything, you just have to know how to look at it.” She said those words the day we were sitting in the yard looking at pictures, talking and laughing. She made a believer out of me, because when I think about all the terrible things that went along with her illness, my mind always comes back to that beautiful day when life seemed worth living.

I often hear people say, “I wish I could just speak to them one more time,” in reference to someone who has passed away. I think to myself that they can, that we all can speak through our accomplishments. The import is that our achievements put a smile on the face of someone watching over us from above. We can remain bereaved forever, or make the most of our granted days, realizing that ultimately they are all a gift.

Kevin Cropp is the author of The Time Keeper, a novel about a mother and son coping with cancer and their troubled relationship. For more information, visit www.copperpresspublishers.com.

