

Dad...

This is a new song that I wrote for my father. He died of cancer 15 years ago, just as we were beginning to be friends. Thanks for the opportunity to share.

"A Man Ain't Supposed To Cry"

When I was young I always wanted to put my arms around you. There were many times when I tried to - but you didn't know just what to do.

'Cause you were always taught that a man ain't supposed to cry and you were always taught how to keep your feelings deep inside. You were always taught that a man ain't supposed to cry.

When I was young I was a girly boy. I was always playin with girly toys. Where that impulse came from I'll never know. You caught me one day in my Mamma's clothes. What else could you do but get mad? I was the only boy you ever had. How were you gonna teach me to be a man?

'Cause you were always taught that a man ain't supposed to cry and you were always taught how to keep your feelings deep inside. You were always taught that a man ain't supposed to cry.

I remember the last day I saw you. You were much to confused to respond to the love you knew I had for you that's why every day now I carry you as a sparkle in my eye when I see a man that looks like you. Laughter in my voice when I hear someone that sounds like you. Tears in my eyes when I see your smiling face in my mind. You were always taught that a man ain't supposed to cry. You were always taught how to keep your feelings deep inside. You were always taught that a man ain't supposed to cry.

- Yolanda

Your little boy never died.

I saw him when you played with me,
I saw him when you smiled.
I saw him when you laughed with me,
I saw him when you cried.

Your little boy never died, my dad;
For that, I'm always glad.
And now that you have died, my dad,
I find it rather sad.

- Anonymous, for RTF

My father, Harold Smith, was not always my best friend. When I was young and bullheaded, my father and I argued constantly, but now that I'm old and bullheaded, we talk almost every day and seldom disagree. Through the years, my polite British father has taught this angry young gay American the virtues of patience, negotiation and compromise without once ever telling me not to pursue the things I found important. My father has supported and shared my dreams and victories, and he has been there to prop me back up after my many defeats. And whenever I've been ready to pack it in, it's my Dad who always urges me on. I'd be nowhere without him.

- Andrew Smith
Chin Ho!

- it was typical for me not to see him in the morning - and I went to school.

I knew as I was walking home from school, I don't know how I knew, but I did. As I was walking home, I was passing all these businesses, thinking how I would have to get a job, thinking "Oh, if my dad died, I could get a job there, or there..."

I got home and figured he was tired from his trip, so he was in his bedroom asleep. I didn't go in. I got a phone call from an old friend of his from California. This man was almost completely deaf, and thought I was my father. We had a funny conversation, and I managed to tell him Dad was asleep. He said he'd call back. So I sat down, watched TV, made dinner. I figured this guy was going to be calling, so I should wake my dad up. That's when I found him.

I ran upstairs; the two men

who lived upstairs were nurses. I was screaming and crying. They called the police, who were terrible. They tried to be sensitive, but they were interrogating me about whether my father had any enemies, how he'd been feeling. They didn't tell me they had found a note until the end of their little interrogation. Finally, they told me they had this note, and wouldn't give it to me because it was evidence. I was 16 and they were cops - what did I know? So they took the note, and I didn't get to see it. Then the phone rang, and it was this guy... "Hello, Greg?" He couldn't understand me. Finally, I gave the phone to one of the guys from upstairs and left the house. The next day, friends came over and we started packing up the house and selling stuff. People were mobilized in the community; people died every day in that neighbourhood,

and it was old hat by then.

The note was at the medical examiner's office for a week. There are all sorts of things in it about why, how he was feeling about life and about me, and how it was in no way my fault.

The most important thing to him was his success as a businessman. Just before he died, he was exclusively designing for men who dressed as women, and he was very popular. But his clients were dying, and his business went bankrupt sometime in November. He looked for work. All he could get was cleaning a bathhouse; that was pretty humiliating to him, a man who had owned stores. He was 52, and just so beaten by this.

The note also said how much he loved me. He said part of the reason he was doing this, taking his life, was because he knew I was all grown up and could take care of myself.

He kept all of his struggles inside. That's why he committed suicide. He kept it all deep in there.

In college, a couple of years after he died, I felt disconnected. When I thought of him, the only images I had were of wasting syndrome or in the hospital. I didn't have any photographs of him, and didn't think there were any. I've since found a bunch in my mother's basement, but at the time, there were none in my reality. I was plagued by horrible images, finding his dead body and so on. I knew I needed a positive image of him, but I wasn't going to find one.

One day, I was sitting at my desk, feeling sad. There was a book I had packed up the day after my dad died; it ended up on my desk there in college. It was an art book he had bought me the year he made the wax sculpture.

I opened it - I hadn't opened it in all those years - and out like a bookmark fell this photograph of my brother and I when we were maybe eight and nine, sitting on my father's lap in front of the Christmas tree. We were all smiling and playing. It was the sweetest thing, and I knew at that moment, somehow, that my father was around. There have been many similar times when I just felt his presence. Whether it's his ghost cruising around or a deep subconscious part of myself, I don't care. A day doesn't go by that in some small way, I don't feel his presence affecting my life. I feel like I'm somehow channelling his love for me when I'm giving my love to someone else. I feel like he taught me how to love someone else. ▼