

Adult Loss of a Parent

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In today's society, in the cycle of human development, it is normal and natural to lose your parents when you yourself are an adult. The death of parents is the single most common form of bereavement for adults. Depending on their ages and on yours, death is usually more or less expected. In contrast to the death of a child, it is consistent with the laws of nature. In contrast to the death of a spouse, it usually does not deprive us of our primary sources of companionship and identity. And in contrast to the loss of a brother or sister, it is usually less threatening to us personally.

Nevertheless, the death of a parent is significant. Despite your expectations and those of society to the contrary, the loss of your parents has profound implications for you. Although you may be an "adult child," you are still the child of your parents, and this role will determine a number of your issues in whatever grief you experience over their deaths.

Factors Influencing Your Grief

Your response to the death of your parent will, of course, be influenced by a number of factors. Without question, the importance of the loss will be determined by the meaning of the relationship and the roles your parent played in your life at the time of death. Those of you whose relationships were negative, unsatisfactory, or highly ambivalent will have a different grief response from those who basically had a positive relationship with their parent. For illustration purposes, this chapter will examine the loss of the more-or-less ideal relationship with a parent. If your relationship departed from this, you can expect to have correspondingly different grief experiences.

One of the most critical factors influencing your grief will be your age and that of your parent. There is a major difference between losing your parent when you are in your 20s and your mother, for example, is middle-aged, and losing her when you are in your 70s and she is quite elderly. Your dependency on and need for her, the quality and stage of the parent-child relationship, her involvement in life (yours and hers), and your connection to her naturally changes over time and will influence your grief. So, too, will your sense of the psychological acceptability of her death at that time.

For example, in your 20s and 30s, you are experiencing transition and change in your life. You are often still struggling to separate from your parents and to be independent. At this stage, despite possible physical and financial separation, there is usually not complete psychic separation. You are still attempting to consolidate your own sense of identity. At the same time, you are building your own family and career, often while your parents are still actively enjoying theirs. You may be relying on your parents for support and advice. They may be helping you with the stresses of having your first child, or assisting you financially in purchasing your first house.

The death of a parent at this point can be particularly poignant. Not only is there regret that the parent is robbed of the many more years he or she could have had, but there is also the sense of your being robbed of a significant person who could help you and validate you in the important areas of development of the 20s and 30s.

In contrast to that developmental period, your years of the 40s and 50s are marked with relative stability. At this time, you give career and family responsibilities primary focus. Developmental concerns of mid-life are prominent as you confront your own aging-related issues — issues of meaning, identity, mortality, and reordered priorities. While it is true that these issues can precipitate crises, they also can lead to growth, rediscovered or newly identified parts of the self, and greater personal satisfaction. The middle years are often the most success-filled and enjoyable. Many of life's uncertainties have been resolved. There may be new freedom with increased financial income and children leaving home. Throughout all of this, there is often an ever-present concern about the aging of your parents and a continually sharpening awareness that their time is limited.

Throughout these years and in the decades thereafter, your parents may become increasingly dependent upon you. Role reversals or dependency shifts may occur, and you may find yourself caring for the ones who once cared for you. They may require increased time and assistance from you psychologically, socially, physically, or financially. This usually is not without some conflict, since, in addition to coping with your own mid-life concerns and your own aging, you still have continued responsibilities to family and career. To lose a parent at this time will present you with the necessity of reconciling these normal, but uncomfortable, feelings (see chapter 7 on grief after long-term illness, since these same issues apply). Your parent's death also will foreshadow your own as you contend with your own declining abilities and advancing age and as your expectations of your own future death are tied to your family history, in terms of longevity and type of death.

The age and life circumstances of your parent also will affect your grief. If your parent was enjoying life and feeling fulfilled, no matter what her age, her death may seem untimely. If your parent was senile, or in pain, or was waiting for death, it may seem a blessed relief when she finally dies. Again, this must be viewed from your own perspective. Age alone does not in and of itself make death "okay." One woman suddenly lost her 98 year-old, sound-of-mind, and relatively healthy mother. She was absolutely furious when friends told her she should be pleased that her mother had lived to such a ripe old age — she felt her mother should have had at least another five years, since her grandmother had been 103 when she died.

Another factor that is particularly important in this type of loss is whether this is your first or second parent to die. If it is the first parent, you may be inexperienced with death

and grief. It might even be the first time you have had to confront the fact that, most probably, you will someday be living without either parent. Also, you usually have to be concerned about the impact on your surviving parent. You may have increased responsibilities now for this parent, potential problems with siblings about the family division of labor and responsibilities, and new emotional issues or conflicts about the nature and extent of your duties and continuing relationship with your surviving parent.

For instance, you need to figure out what is appropriate and realistic for you to do to try to take away your parent's loneliness for his or her spouse. If you had a more positive relationship with your parent who died, you may have to struggle with feelings that the "wrong" one died, and the "wrong" one was left behind.

Regardless of age or circumstance, when your second parent dies, you already have had some practice. You already might have learned that your subconscious, childish belief about your parents' immortality has to be relinquished. However, the death of your second parent casts you in a totally new category — you are now an orphan. The many implications of this are discussed below, after examining the inappropriate expectations which both you and others may hold for yourself in this type of bereavement.

Inappropriate Expectations for Grieving

As adults, we often surprise ourselves with the intensity of our feelings of grief when our parent dies. We do not expect the loss to produce such serious effects. Some of us erroneously think that because our feelings of attachment to others — our spouse and our children — are so strong, we will not grieve much when our parent dies. Attachments to others may help us deal with our grief, but they do not make it unnecessary when we lose a parent.

Certainly you may regard your current relationships with your spouse and children as your primary emotional investments. Your feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and energies may be directed towards them. You may have decided that, if necessary to choose, they are the ones whom you must accord first priority over your parents. Nevertheless, unless your relationship with your parent is one from which you have already emotionally detached yourself (and this does happen in some cases, whether in addition to or following from geographical distance), the death of a parent will affect you to a greater or lesser extent depending on the factors surrounding it and you.

You may think that because you are an adult you should not be doing so badly or feeling so sad, that you should not feel so much "like a child." However, feeling regressed and childish is a normal response to loss, and it is to be expected here, no matter what your age. Because of society's attitude that it is expectable and acceptable for the old to die and for parents to pre-decease their children, you might think that something is wrong for you to feeling so distressed. You may think that you are handling your parent's death poorly because you are finding yourself actively grieving and focusing on "the old days" or on the sense of loss and feeling "robbed."

These are all natural responses to the death of a parent. Regardless of your age, your other attachments, or your other responsibilities, you still have lost your parent. It is no wonder that you may feel less than strong or immature. You have lost the person to whom you were a child. Even if you are among the most powerful people on earth, you

are still a child vis-à-vis your parent. Some childish feelings inevitably get resurrected, however, when your parent dies. You may find it easy to deny your grief and childish feelings because of the responsibilities and activities of daily living which occupy you. Society will help you do this because it does not define your parent's death as a major or disruptive loss. Yet the fact remains, especially when this is the death of your second parent, that this is a loss which must be grieved and which brings with it a number of implications for you.

There may be some feelings of guilt on your part if you feel that pressing responsibilities at home or work interfere with your grief process. You might remember how your parent always put you first, and you may be distressed that you are not putting your grief over your parent first now. Or you might be under-estimating the impact of the grief you feel. Consistent with society's attitude that this is not a "high grief loss," you may expect yourself to be a fully functioning adult in all areas of your life and not give yourself the required time or permission to grieve over the death of your parent.

In such an instance, you can set yourself up for problems, just as does any mourner who pays insufficient attention to the grief work that is required after a particular loss. And, just like that mourner, you can expect that most probably the reactions will emerge in some other, less healthy ways.

The Parent-Child Relationship and the Meaning of Its Loss

Our relationship to our parents is a relationship unlike any other. No one else knows us and our past in the same way; no one else can be as uniquely important. With the loss of a parent, we have to make some major adjustments in the way we view the world and ourselves.

Parents' Unique Role in Our Lives

For better or worse, parents are a part of their children. Whether we choose to be like them, whether we consciously decide to be the opposite of them, or whether we unknowingly pick up some of their good or bad traits — all of us have parts of our parents as parts of ourselves. This is the way that human beings develop.

Our parents helped us to form our images and sense of ourselves. They influenced what we think and feel about ourselves: how much we like ourselves; to what extent we think we are good, worthwhile, or competent people; and how much we value ourselves. Also, they helped to determine how we see the world and the others in it. By the ways they treated us, our parents (or those who acted in parental roles even if they were not our biological parents, such as adopted parents or the persons who raised us) gave us the self-concept through which we evaluate everything and everyone in the world. Our feelings, thoughts, hopes, desires, attitudes, values, and morals, which guide everything we do, have been profoundly influenced by our parents. These are not only the parents who do or did exist in real life, but the "parents" who exist in our hearts and in our minds. These are the parents we carry with us forever.

For most of us, when we lose our parents, we lose the figures who for a very long time, if not always, had been the most influential and powerful in our lives. While at the point in time at which they finally die their status might not be equal to that earlier period, the fact

that they once were such extraordinarily significant people in our lives (either positively or negatively) makes their deaths special.

For us, their children, parents play a number of roles. This continues throughout childhood and often beyond. Ideally they are protectors, providers, problem solvers, advisors, nurturers, and comforters. They are self-sufficient and in control of what happens to and for us. They can “fix” things so they are right for us. Their loss, even if it occurs long after they have ceased playing these roles for us and when we might resent it if they tried to, frequently stirs up for us feelings about losing a person who holds this type of valued role(s). For example, we may have long ago stopped needing them as protectors, but to varying degrees their deaths may bring up feelings of being vulnerable in the world, of being like a little child without her mother.

This can happen with regard to all the roles our parents play or did play for us, as well as with regard to the expectations attached to the role of parent itself. As noted in chapter 12 on parents who lose children, the social and personal expectations for parents are that they are all-loving, all-good, all-concerned, totally selfless, and motivated only by their children and their children’s welfare. They are to have perfect and unconditional love for their children. Although this is unrealistic, this is what we, as children, universally long for from our parents. Some of us learn to temper this with a little more realism; others hang onto this desire forever and judge parents and others negatively when they fail to live up to this expectation.

Some of your losses, therefore, stem from your recognition that with the death of your parent, no one will ever love you or be as concerned about you in quite the same way. In essence, this is true. The feelings of attachment for a child are different from any others. Losing the person from whom these feelings came will deprive you of someone who loves you in a very intense and unique way. The comment from a 50 year-old man who had just lost his second parent, his mother, describes it aptly: “No one ever loves you like your mother. I will never be loved that way again in my life.”

This man is absolutely correct — no one ever again will love him like his mother. And no one should! He will be loved as a spouse, a father, a sibling, an uncle, a friend, and all the other roles he has in his life, but unless he has another person who filled a maternal role for him, he will not be the recipient of that kind of love. Since that type of love is idealized not only by us as children, but by artists, poets, philosophers, and all others in society, we must expect to have some feelings of grief upon losing it.

Such a loss need not only occur at death, however. It also can occur, for example, as Alzheimer’s disease robs the personality of our parent and takes her from us long before she actually dies.

So with the death of your parent, you may feel the loss of the perfect and unconditional love that only a parent is supposed to be capable of supplying. You lose someone to validate you and your accomplishments in the way only a parent, to whom you have wanted to prove yourself, can. If you do not feel you have already done so, you also lose the opportunities to prove yourself once and for all. Our parents, besides being our caretakers, usually have been our primary providers of praise and the permission givers in our lives. Even when we mature enough to not require this from them, seldom does

recognition from others mean more. Just look at the people to whom works of art, scholarship, and charity have been dedicated. Parents are right up there.

Loss of Ties to the Past and Childhood

Unlike most other people in your life, your parent has usually always been there in some fashion. This is not to say that the relationship has always (or ever) been good or that you were never abandoned by your parent. Unhappily, these things happen. What it refers to is the coincidence of lives. For example, by definition, unless she died at your birth, your mother has been in existence from the time of your beginning until the time one of you dies. While others may have been born and died since then, until her death, she always existed somewhere in your life. This consistency obviously is destroyed with her death. For those of us for whom the relationship was more positive than negative, and for whom it was a present aspect in our lives, the removal of the longest consistent element in our lives brings many reactions.

Some of these reactions center around losing your connection to the past. Your parents interpret life to you, life in general, and the life of your family. They are roots back to your ancestors, both biologically and psychosocially. They help you to see events in the context of the family. They are the keepers of tradition. They help you make sense of your present in light of your past. They may remind you that this is not the first time you have felt this way, and then they tell you a story about yourself that you had long since forgotten which puts things into perspective for you.

Your parents go all the way back with you. They may be the only ones around who have known you all your life, the only ones who remember that you used to be a skinny, gawky kid who had a beloved puppy named Duchess. They may be the only ones around, besides yourself, who can remember what you looked like before you grew your beard and moustache. For some of us who have no brothers or sisters, gave up our maiden name at marriage, or have no children, our parents may be the only others with our same last name, with our same heritage, with the same knowledge of “the old days,” and with the same memories of co-history as we have. They are or were the primary interpreters of you. When they die, we lose all of this. Like a community or institution which loses its archives in a fire, we have been stripped of a form of documentation of our lives and our history. We also have lost the direct links to our past and to unremembered parts of ourselves.

Loss of Both Parents Brings Loss a Buffer Between You and Death

When both your parents have died, there is a buffer gone between you and death. A barrier has been removed. You are now the older generation. You may feel vulnerable because death seems closer. There is no longer a generation between you and it, no longer an insulating layer of people through which nature must pass before it is your turn to face mortality. Along with this, you may be dealing with the loss of constancy. Your parents have always been alive. Now these always-have-been-there elements in your life have been removed. It places you in a different relation to life than ever before.

With the weight of being the oldest generation, and with the awareness that you no longer have your parents to fall back on or to buffer you from old age and eventual death, you may think of yourself in a different way. For some of us, this is the first time we no

longer think of ourselves on some level as *children*. We perceive ourselves truly as adults because there are no longer any parents to be children to. Consequently, a more mature stance can be a result of the death of both our parents.

Becoming an Orphan

By the same token, the recognition that you are an orphan once your second parent dies is a profound realization. A “given” is taken away. Our very foundations can be shaken. And this makes sense, because our parents served as our foundation. Never before have we been in the world without at least one of these two people. Despite intellectual recognition to the contrary, you may feel that this is the first time they let you down, the first occasion they abandoned you. You may feel insecure, vulnerable, anxious. You are on your own with respect to not having parents for the first time in your life. Depending on the relationship lost, you have lost direction, guidance, and security.

The death of our second parent may mean you no longer can go “home” either physically or psychologically. For some, this is a major loss. “Home” had continued to be a place of comfort, a refuge where you could be yourself without the pressures of the world impinging. If the death of the second parent means losing the house, person, or environment that signaled “home,” it can be a major secondary loss for you which can cause feelings of rootlessness and insecurity.

This does not mean that you cannot function. It does not mean that you will fall apart. It does not mean that your grief will be overly intense or overly long in duration. These dimensions will be determined by the specific constellation of factors describing you, your parents, and their particular deaths. What it does mean is that you will have to contend with a new set of circumstances in and a new relationship with the world. You will have to re-define your sense of self to accommodate the fact that there are no parents to be a child to; no parents to act out certain roles with and for you; and no parents to embody anymore to any extent the fantasies about and the aspects and attributes of the universally wished-for perfect parent.

Loss of Future Opportunities

Depending upon the age of your parent and the circumstances of the death, you may be particularly disturbed by the fact that this death has robbed you of a very special friend. In many parent-child relationships, there is a gradual change in the quality of the association as the child becomes an adult.

The connection is now more reciprocal, with sharing of mutual interests. As the parents relinquish their care-taking duties as the child matures, there is usually less conflict and fewer power struggles. Many adults report how their parents have mellowed or, to their amazement, gotten so much smarter than they ever were before. While certainly some of this may be true, in many cases it reflects the normal developmental easing of tensions that can occur when the child feels secure enough in her own right that she does not require former amounts of approval, permission, and dependence.

With decreased parent-child conflict, with increased understanding of one another assisted by your having your own family and/or mature responsibilities, and with your parent treating you as an adult, the relationship may be the very best it has ever been.

Now that much of the normal difficulty between generations has been bridged, you may feel deep regret at losing your parent. You may wish that you could have had more of this, and feel a sense of violation that it was taken away at the time it was so pleasurable.

With the death of your parent, you lose opportunities also to atone or make up for unpleasantness in the past or to have further contact in the future. Along with this, you may feel grieved over the fact that you couldn't have helped your parent in the way you would have liked. You may recall how this person always would help you out, how she consistently took care of you first before herself, how he could always fix what was wrong. Now you are in a position where you would want to return the favors — to help her, to take care of them, to correct it so he doesn't have to die. Your sadness and frustration at not being able to make it "all better" for your parents, as they so often did for you, can be quite painful.

On the other hand, there is a reaction which some adults experience upon the loss of their parents which often is not addressed: the sense that "now it's over." It is not that you are unmoved by the death of your parents. Rather, the worry over their eventual deaths is now gone. You no longer have to face the uncomfortable thought that "one of these days I am going to lose my parents." It finally has happened, and you do not have to deal with the anticipatory anxiety anymore. Your fears about how you would react are quelled. You have already undergone the feared experience, and its potential occurrence can no longer frighten you.

As with other loved ones who die, when you grieve the deaths of your parents, you grieve not only for them but also for yourself, for what you have lost with their deaths. This may also specifically involve grieving over the fact that your parents will miss seeing you achieve and be successful. It often entails sadness at the fact that your parents will miss seeing their grandchildren grow up, along with regret that your children will not have future experiences with their grandparents. In cases where your parents were providing tangible and practical assistance, such as financial resources or baby-sitting services, their losses will be felt in these areas too.

If Your Relationship with Your Parent Was Negative

Despite personal and societal wishes to the contrary, not all parent-child relationships are primarily healthy and positive. In these cases, grief can be expected to be more complicated because of the ambivalence that is present. In some cases there is no grief, only relief.

When the death of a parent ends a relationship that is painful, when it offers you the chance to be free of conflicts and other negativities which the parent brought up for you, you may have more to celebrate than to grieve. You may have new freedom and new chances. You may be out from under a burdensome relationship. You may not have to contend anymore with the person who saw you as bad or as a failure.

Some of these negative holds your parents had on you can be perpetuated if you fail to detach yourself from them. For example, some of us fear growth and change if it is not sanctioned by our parents. Or, because of psychological concerns about what it would mean if we were to do better in our lives than our parents, some of us hold ourselves back

and sabotage our successes in life. Some of us feel guilty that we really did outlive the parents we may have cursed and wished dead for so long.

In these situations, if you cannot work through the self-defeating and unhealthy ways in which you continue to let your parents affect your life, it will be necessary for you to seek professional help. Sometimes this will be merely to help you see that the images and messages you have internalized about your deceased parents are frozen in your mind, and that, unlike normal processes, they do not change and develop over time.

You may need to be reminded that death has robbed both your parents and your internalized images of them of the opportunity for further growth. They may be inappropriate to current situations and to the age you are now. This is because we change constantly, but the images and messages are frozen at the time of death. It will be important for you to reevaluate them in this perspective and to decide whether to retain or change them for your greater benefit.

Sometimes the aging of our parents, and their illnesses and declining physical abilities, only serve to increase the conflicts that were there already. This, in and of itself, may increase the problems you may have with them and present you with more ambivalent feelings to contend with when they are gone. Adult children are frequently put in the position of caring for an ill or elderly parent. This means that they will be subject to the inordinate stresses, strains, and conflicts which are found in families whose loved ones are dying from a long-term illness (see chapter 7 for more on this). You understandably may have many feelings about the demands this can place upon you in all areas — psychologically, physically, socially, and financially. You and your family may experience psychological conflicts, emotional exhaustion, physical debilitation, social isolation, and family discord in caring for your ill or aging parent. After these types of death, along with the normal responses to loss, you may feel relief from the demands. However, you also may feel increased guilt and anger.

This is especially true if, against your wishes, you either had to take your parent into your home or had to institutionalize your parent. As with any terminal illness, when taking care of one who is aging, there will be conflicts about whose needs to meet, frustration with clashing roles and responsibilities, and the stress of balancing the incompatible demands of anticipatory grief. All of this will put you in a position that will very likely lead you to be exhausted and resentful at the time of death.

While this is quite normal, you may not be aware of it or may judge yourself very guilty as a result. Or, you might be one of the adult children who devote most of your time and resources to caring for your parents. You may even have not gotten married in order to be their caretaker. After their deaths, you may be forced to confront what will happen to you now that the purpose and focus of your life is gone. It can be a major period of readjustment.

Whether or not the negative feelings in your relationship with your parent comes from long-standing problems between the two of you or whether they are relatively recent and caused by the normal stresses of illness and aging, it will still be necessary to grieve the loss and to come to grips with what it means and what the implications are for you. This grief may be more or less intense depending on what the death of this parent in this fashion at this time means for you.

Social Support

Since many of the people in your life may not have seen you actively involved as the child of your parent, they may not be able to appreciate what this loss means to you. For example, unless your friends were aware of your type of involvement with your parent, they may be unable to see precisely what it was that you lost when your parent died. Especially in this mobile society, where it is highly likely that your friends never even saw your parents, might not even have remembered if they were alive, much less knew them to share more completely in your grief, you may greatly miss the support of others who had known both you and your parent for some time. Therefore, it is quite probable that this will not be the type of community-recognized or shared loss it might be, for example, if your spouse died.

Your spouse and children may or may not feel the loss. It depends on the type of relationship *they* had with your parent. For some children, the death of their grandparent is a non-event. They know that the death has occurred but cannot really feel much about it because of the lack of relationship with their grandparent. While they may be quite affected by their own parent's distress at the loss, they may have little to grieve for themselves. Do not expect your children to mourn those they never knew, despite what the loss means to you.

With your spouse, there is usually more knowledge of your parent, but again, depending on the relationship, there will be differing types of grief. For some, the death of a beloved in-law can be just as hard, if not worse, than the death of their own parent. It will depend on what the in-law meant to them. The death of your parent can be perceived as a blessing or a relief.

In any event, it is important for you to recognize that the death of your parent – unless that parent was an integral part of your own family of spouse and children – most probably will not be viewed by your spouse and children in either the same fashion or with the same importance as it is for you. You could expect to see more understanding and greater similarity of response (although family members' responses are always idiosyncratic, depending on the factors involved) if your parent had been more a part of their lives. Although your parent may have been the most influential person in your life, and for years was the closest person to you, an essential part of your existence, that parent may have been no more than a peripheral figure to the others who are so close to you now. It is strange that those who are the closest to us are not the closest to each other, but this is not uncommon in this day and age.

Changes in Family Relationships

The death of the first parent usually means some reorganization in your relationship with your surviving parent. Regardless of the quality of the relationship, it will need to be readjusted to reflect the fact that your parent is not one of two parents anymore, but your sole surviving parent. You will need to perceive and relate to this parent as an individual, who is no longer one-half of the parental unit.

For some of you, this may be the first time you have considered your parent as a distinct person outside of the parental role or the marital pair. This can give you the opportunity

to assess who and what he or she really is. This may mean you now can relate to your parent in a more positive fashion (for example, “I can see that she is vulnerable and no longer has the power over me she once did. Therefore, it’s a little easier to be sympathetic to her now.”), although sometimes it can be more negative (for example, “without Mom here to soften things, I can see just how miserable my father really is”).

One of the most frequent consequences of the death of a parent is a change in relationships with brothers and sisters. You may find that during the illness or aging of your parent, or after the death, you had different relationships with your siblings. These changes can be for the better or worse. They stem not only from reactions to the events during the illness and after the death but also from the role reorganizations and reassignments that occur after a death in any family (see chapter 8 for a discussion of this important process).

If one of you felt you had more than your fair share of the burden of your parent, or if you feel that your older sibling is now trying to act as if he or she is your parent, there is bound to be resentment and anger. The stress of a dying or dead parent or what to do about the surviving parent can put enormous strains on sibling relationships. Old conflicts, long-buried or still seething; sibling rivalries, new or old; and unresolved issues around power, control, and favoritism can erupt. Perhaps your parent kept the peace. Or perhaps you and your siblings kept the infighting to a minimum to protect your parent. When these reasons are gone, and replaced by concerns about money, estate disposition, and “who’s done more for whom,” many secondary losses can occur in addition to the loss of your parent. Unfortunately, the death of a parent has not infrequently provoked serious family estrangement.

However, all the changes need not be negative. Oftentimes siblings are able to work out their differences, if they have them, and to pull together for the surviving parent and the family. You may even end up being closer to a sibling than before. The shared loss of your parent may help put previous conflicts in perspective. You may recognize that the value of keeping together with your siblings, and of keeping in contact with those who shared your past at the earliest and most formative times of your life, is worth the effort to do so.

Ultimately, the death of your parent may surprise you with the reactions it stimulates. Despite social expectations to the contrary, the adult’s loss of a parent can have profound implications because of the significance of the role a parent plays.

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