



Josh Ewers: Discovering long-lost family brought perspective

April 07, 2022

[By Josh Ewers Main Street Nashville](#)



At the end of April, I'll reunite with my once undiscovered family for the first time in a long time. Lately, I've been reflecting on the story of how it was we all found each other.

My dad never knew his father. His mother, my grandma, was quite reserved and never talked about him. And it was just as well. Back then, Dad didn't feel particularly inclined to ask for one reason or another, aside from one or two questions to an aunt in his adolescence. Understandably, he'd filled in the many blanks with all the usual assumptions a kid might have about an absent patriarch.

Dad was a bright kid with a big heart who grew up poor in a tiny Ohio town called Woodsfield, where he lived without indoor plumbing and with ice on the walls in the winter in his early years. Meanwhile, his mom worked multiple jobs to support Dad and his younger half-brother. All along the way, his loving, wise and active grandparents filled in as many of the tender moments and life lessons as they could, largely raising him themselves.

By the time my dad was a young man, he was busy building a life for himself. He earned a microbiology degree and later started a family of his own.

When his grandmother, my great-grandmother, died in 2001, my dad grappled with losing the most beloved person in his life. Among many other emotions, it made him contemplative.

For the first time, he asked his mother about his father after the funeral. She gave him a name, leaving him undecided on whether he even wanted to look.

Over the next few years, he made several attempts to locate him, even signing up for a reality show aimed at reuniting families. But nothing concrete ever came up.

It wasn't until 2015 that I became curious enough to initiate a dedicated search of my own. I wanted my dad to feel some sense of closure and I was quite curious about my own lineage.

After a few cross-referencing Google searches turned up an unexpected photo, my breath left me.

Without warning, I was gazing into the eyes of an aged version of my dad, as if peering into his future. All the features were accounted for. It was unmistakable and uncanny. I was looking upon my grandpa's face for the first time.

My sister and I then set about figuring out how best to break the news to Dad. That would prove complicated, as the discovery had been bittersweet.

The photo was attached to an obituary, posted just weeks earlier. I couldn't help feeling like I'd missed the mark by inches.

There wasn't going to be any complicated face-to-face and hard talk, nor any exasperated, emotional embrace to be shared.

But the article made us aware of two half-sisters.

What's more, my own sister was floored to discover that after 27 years of never having ventured anywhere close to Northern California, she'd passed by his exit in Ukiah on her honeymoon just a few days after his death.

I guess we'd all missed the mark in our own ways.

My dad displayed an uncanny combination of strength and willing vulnerability to make that first phone call to his father's widow. Expecting all outcomes, he found our hypothesis, above all else, met with open arms and cautiously curious hearts. They too were taken aback by the obvious resemblance.

Through months of correspondence, my dad began piecing the timeline together alongside meaningful conversation with his newly open mother, who seemed vaguely relieved to have a long-held burden shared without judgment.

In 1961, the small-town Ohio farm girl left home for the first time to serve in the U.S. Army as a clerical specialist at The Presidio of San Francisco.

There, she met a young city boy from Los Angeles who was serving as a military police officer, doing so in hopes of one day serving in law enforcement. They developed a close bond fraternizing in the Bay Area, despite both knowing he had a girl back home. One thing led to another in a familiar tale.

Being a naturally reserved, somewhat naive and unmarried woman born to a stern father in a small town in an intolerant time, she grew fearful of the social implication. She reasoned to keep her pregnancy a secret from him, and moved home where their son was raised primarily by his grandparents to avoid the stigma.

My grandpa eventually married his girlfriend and started his own family out west, presumably never knowing about his son.

He'd named his first daughter Laura, after my grandma, a picture of whom he kept tucked away for years.

When we finally flew out to meet them all in 2017, we found the Golden Coast couldn't hold a candle to the warmth of our golden hosts. We were met with an understanding, reciprocal longing for connection and zest for life that still gets me misty-eyed.

Over the coming years, my dad and our family steadily built a beautiful relationship with his sisters and their families. Over time, we found dozens of little connections. It was everything from shared ticks to both men having ordered pot roast hash for breakfast every place they ever went.

During that first visit, I swam in the lake my grandpa had tended to his whole life, where his ashes had been scattered.

Last year, another memorial was held at that same lake.

We'd lost Aunt Laura in an unspeakable tragedy.

While my dad flew out to spend time with the family in the aftermath, this will be my first time seeing them all since her death. I intend to hug them all tightly.

Like the ocean, life can be unpredictable, wild and full of powerful challenges none of us can begin to understand while still beyond the distant horizon or obscured beneath mysterious depths.

But those same forces that seem to rip loved ones away from our grasp, leaving us lost and broken, also seem to have a way of gently washing us up on one another's shores when we let ourselves go.

There we might wait to be pulled from the sand by keen eye and quickening heart, like a glimmering silver pocket watch catching perfect morning light.



Real estate: How Realtors can shine bright during the festive season

Brittany Hall The holiday season might seem like a time to slow down, but for savvy Realtors, it's an opportunity...



Susan Steen: A little less talk and a lot more smiling

Steen "I never said she stole your money." -
- Language Nerds Words matter. I say that a lot. But something...



Cheryl Lewis: Merry Christmas to all

Lewis It has been quite a year, hasn't it? Before I write another word, I want to wish each of...

Load More