



FICTION

Long after her father died, after his things were placed in boxes and squirreled away in her attic, she decided it was time. She wasn't sure why she couldn't go through these things after the funeral or the years following. She supposed it was the feeling of finality, that she would never get the chance to hear the words she wanted to hear.

by CHRIS FABRY

HIS CLOTHES weren't salvageable. Goodwill® wouldn't take them because of their age and worn condition. But she couldn't get past the thought that he had lived in them and they had covered him, and it felt like another death to let go.

Then one day in the fall, she knew it was time. She felt it inside. She had to surrender to the truth that he was gone and what she had wished for, prayed for, would never come.

Two years before he had died, she told her siblings she would get him to tell all the things she wanted to hear. They had rolled their eyes at her, but she set up her phone in front of him and started the recording and asked question after question. But his heart seemed closed and locked as a cupboard.

She had given him another chance a few months later by placing a legal pad in front of him with these words written at the top: *I used to think ...*

It was just a phrase she thought might jog his mind. On her next visit, she found the pad on a bookshelf, her words gone. He had ripped off the page and tossed it.

Now looking through the boxes in the dusty attic, she found a few of his books she wanted to keep. His Bible with pictures of the family for

bookmarks. Notes in the margin. She found a picture of herself standing by him, side by side. She was maybe 10 or 11, and he was holding her hand, both of them with muted smiles, as if they were expected to. Why had he kept it? Maybe because he thought he should. It was something expected.

A flood of emotion washed over her, and she packed up the boxes and dragged them near the stairs. Finally, she gathered his clothes and opened a new box of plastic trash bags.

She had to surrender to the truth that he was gone and what she had wished for, prayed for, would never come.

As she folded his khakis, wondering why she would fold them if they were being thrown away, she felt a crinkle in a side pocket. She reached in and pulled out folded sheets of paper and held her breath as she opened them and saw her writing at the top of the first page.

Underneath her words was the familiar scrawl of her father.



I used to think success was getting to the place where you didn't wonder what success looked like. That there was a path you could take that led to some destination where you could make it and not worry anymore. Now I think success looks a lot like surrender.

I used to think if I forgave everybody for the bad things they did, I would be a worthy person. Now I think you can't forgive others until you've been forgiven yourself. You can't give what you don't have.

I used to think love was a destination. Now I think it's a process.

I used to think I could imitate others and copy the good things they did. If I could do that, I could achieve something worthwhile. But now I think the world doesn't need another person trying to be somebody else.

I used to think the point of life was finding happiness. Now I think happiness is something that finds you in the middle of your mess.

I used to think my daddy was the most amazing man I've ever known.

I used to think there would come a point where the pain and struggle and loss wouldn't hurt so much. Now I think hurting simply means you're alive. It's all there to help you grow if you'll let it.

I used to think the point of life was getting it to turn out like you'd planned. Follow the rules so you can bring about your own vision. The longer I live, the farther I get from what I envisioned. And the space between is there to show that my vision was never clear in the first place and that what I wanted was not what I needed.

I used to think God would give me things if I was good enough to earn them. Now I realize all is grace and every good thing is a gift.

I used to think the more I had, the happier I'd be. Now I think it's not how much you have. Being grateful for what you do have makes the difference.

I used to think I could earn love. I could do enough to get back from somebody else what I wanted. But love is not tit for tat. Love is more like emptying your pitcher every day for someone else who's thirsty. And in the process, you get filled. I don't understand that, but I believe it.

I used to think mistakes disqualified me. Now I think the mistakes work inside and show me who I am and make me able to live.

I used to think the Bible was there to help me find answers to all my questions. Now I think it's there to help me ask the best questions.

I used to think that the point of the Christian life was to figure out God and what He was doing and why ... and then fit all the puzzle pieces together so I could make sense of what He was doing. Now I've surrendered that desire to fit everything into an equation I can understand.

I used to think God wanted to use my abilities. Now I believe He just wanted my availability.

I used to see people as interruptions to my perfectly planned life. Now I see they were divine appointments, and I regret not making people more important than what I was doing at the time.

I used to think when the rain came, the best thing was to get through it as fast as I could. Now I see it was there to help me learn to splash in the puddles like my children. I wish I had splashed more.

I used to think prayer was for getting God to see what I wanted. Now I think it was for God to get me to see what I couldn't.

I used to think if you were a Christian you wouldn't be angry or frustrated and that feelings were bad. Now I know the feelings were a gift. They were there because I'm human.

I used to think the Christian life was about sinning less. Now I think the point was to let God peel the layers back so I could confess more and see how much forgiveness I truly need.

I used to think I was a failure as a husband and father because I could never find the words for the people I loved. But now I think it's OK I never found the words because there's a pitcher being poured out even as I write this.

The words blurred, and she held the pages to her chest. And as a final act of surrender, a final act of release, she turned the last page over and wrote this:

I used to think my daddy was the most amazing man I've ever known. And with all his faults and struggles, all his inability to express the things inside, now I know he was. I love you, Daddy. ☺

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