

When Life Calls, Wisdom Goes to Work By a Wisdom Years Alumni

The collective work of strangers at a Victories weekend helped one man confirm his beliefs and faith – and pay it forward to his daughter in a time of tragedy.

In my mid-fifties, my divorce challenged me in ways I'd never imagined or known. Much of what I'd assumed about who I was felt scrambled. Pain from my past was holding me back, and finding meaning and happiness in my future seemed elusive.

A trusted therapist suggested I consider attending a Victories program. The Wisdom Years program might help me better understand my challenges and barriers to finding more meaning and happiness. Based on his recommendation and with some hesitation, I attended a Wisdom Years Weekend.

Beliefs, Hopes, Fears and Faith

As a key part of the weekend, each man was asked to confront his mortality, sharing his beliefs, hopes and fears of death. This “ask” was uncomfortable for me, and I suspect for others in the group. My thoughts on death were alive and well, but largely unexpressed, living a solitary existence in my mind. Having never shared such intimate thoughts, I was uncertain if my ideas, beliefs and faith were “good enough.”

Men who were strangers just hours earlier shared deeply before the group. I realized my questions and fears were not unique, shared by most, if not all. There was no “good enough” answer. As each man shared, what had been uncomfortable became comforting.

I was particularly moved by the share of a gentleman with health challenges. He bravely shared his beliefs, not just about death, but about life. He shared how he lived his life focused on others. While acknowledging the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of the time, cause and place of death, he chose to focus on bringing as much love, care and meaning to those closest to him in whatever time he might have. This was his conversation with death. His sharing helped crystalize and confirm my own beliefs and faith.

Little did I know the impact his share would have on me in very short order.

When Life Calls – How Will I Answer?

Just eight months after the Victories weekend, I learned that at age 58, through a corporate reorganization, my career as I'd known it for nineteen years was over. I called my twenty-five year old daughter to share the news and to reassure her things would be fine.

My daughter was at the Denver airport, unexpectedly flying to be by her mother's side in intensive care. Unbeknownst to me, my ex-wife had been battling serious health issues for over two years.

Death was at the door. Life was calling. In tears, she asked if I would come if she needed me. I reassured her “of course.” Less than 10 hours later at 3 in the morning, my phone rang. Her mother had passed.

Nothing in my experience had prepared me for this call. Intuitively, I reached deep within me, recalling my beliefs and faith and, somehow, the share of a gentleman I had met during the Victories weekend. In that moment, I was in my own discussion with death. Death had come unexpectedly with no warning. Like the gentleman at Victories, the best I could do was to embrace the lives of those I love and to bring meaning to my daughter in her time of tragedy and grief.

Finding Victories

As my daughter spoke to me from her mother’s bedside, I reassured her:

“Death is a part of life none of us will avoid; it will not be denied. It comes on its own terms and in its own time. Like your mother, we will not have that choice. All we can do is live our lives in a way that brings the most meaning, joy and love to ourselves and those we love most dearly. That’s the example your mother gave all of us in her love for you.

Energy is not created nor destroyed, it is only transformed. While your mother has passed, her life’s energy continues on in you and all who knew and loved her. She is there with you right now, looking over you, comforting you and smiling at you in this very moment.”

Over the next two weeks, my daughter and I planned a local memorial service and flew across the country for another family memorial service. It was the most traumatic two weeks of my life.

As we waited in the airport to fly home – her to Denver, me to Chicago, she hugged me and shared with tears:

“Dad, thank you for being here with me; I could not have done this without you and your love. Nobody should be asked to plan their ex-wife’s funeral, but there you were, and here you are. Of all the emotions and feelings of the past weeks, I’ll always remember and hold close what you told me when I called that night. Energy is not created nor destroyed, only transformed. Mom’s spirit was with me then, is with me now and will be forever. There was great wisdom and comfort in your words. Thank you, dad, I love you.”

What’s Your Victory?

My Victories experience helped me through one of the most emotional and meaningful experiences of my life. The sharing of all the men at the Wisdom Years Weekend, but particularly one man, proved to be transformational for me – and my daughter. I was given a gift that I was able to pay forward.

I share my experience in the hope that others will better understand the power of the Victories experience and the impact a Victories weekend might have on their lives.