

Loving Truly

It is difficult for a grown child when a cherished parent goes into decline. By the time he had passed away, my father was a totally different person than the dad I had grown up with. As I think about his later days I realize now that prior to his death he was probably suffering from some form of dementia. Now my mother has changed into someone I can no longer relate to as I once did. While this is painful it is also a lesson in love.

I had thought my father would always be the same witty, kind, engaging person he was while I was growing up and for many years afterward. Yet in his last years he grew withdrawn, timid, silent and unexpressive. This disappointed me terribly; in my heart I became very angry with him. In the years since his death, I have had to work hard to forgive him. I believe I have done so.

Now I am working on the same issue with my mother. She is still alive, yet not at all the person she used to be. I feel sad not to be able to share my life with her as I would like to. I seldom telephone her because when I do she will not know who I am, and she will forget that I have called as soon as our conversation is over. My lively, charming mother, always ready with a story to relate can't really tell me anything because her memory is gone.

We make our first valentines for our parents. No matter how difficult things may grow between us, or what conflicts may arise later in our lives, they are the first people we love. When I can make peace with the changes that have so radically altered her from the way she used to be, I will love her as truly ever I did when I was small. It hurts so much that I cannot do this as I wish I could. When the day comes that I can, I will be so happy.

The lesson I am learning from this experience is that just as I must accept my parents in their changed state, so I must also accept my struggle to love them. If I cannot forgive myself for my imperfections, how can I forgive them for theirs? As I struggle with my small dilemma I comfort myself with the thought that I do not need to be perfect to love myself. I can love myself or anyone else despite my imperfections or theirs. Love does not have to be perfect to be true and neither I nor anyone else has to be perfect to be loved.