

## Everyone grieves in different ways

The one thing I've learned about grief is that there is no road map.

"It is completely unpredictable," said a friend who had lost a brother. "You won't feel bad when you think you should, and you'll cry when you least expect to. All you can do is go where it takes you."

She was right. Father's Day is one of the days I expected would be difficult. Trying to ignore all those department-store displays of "Gifts for the Man in Your Life." No card to buy. No phone call to make.

But it wasn't hard last year, and I don't think it will be this year. Father's Day falls smack in the middle of baseball season, and all it takes is the sound of a game on TV to make me smile at memories of the world's biggest sports fan.

I am the only member of my family who is not passionate about sports. I was a fair-weather fan when I lived in Boston during the Celtics' succession of NBA championships. But I completely missed the gene that made two parents, three siblings and four nieces and nephews the most avid Pittsburgh fans east of the Mississippi.

Although I know absolutely nothing about any sports team in any city today, I can easily reel off the names of the Pirate baseball players from my childhood — Willie Stargell, Steve Blass, Don Clendenon, Bill Mazerowski and, of course, the Great One, Roberto Clemente.

I didn't have to share the family's fervor in order to feel the anticipation that drifted through our house when the Bucs were about to take center stage. Dad's exasperation when the players didn't live up to his expectations mingled with the raspy voice of announcer Bob Prince to form the familiar and reassuring soundtrack of our summer afternoons.

I think part of the reason I've achieved a level of comfort with my father's absence is due to an image planted by



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my 9-year-old nephew during preparations for my father's funeral.

"At least Grandpa's in good company," Johnny remarked. "He can watch the Steelers with Walter Payton and Payne Stewart."

In order to be consoled by this statement, you would have to know that Payne Stewart was a pro golfer who had just died in a plane crash, and that Payton was a member of the Chicago Bears who recently had lost his battle with cancer.

As we said goodbye to my dad in the middle of football season, Johnny imagined that heaven was a place where a person could continue rooting for his favorite teams. The only difference was that he would be sitting in front of a celestial TV with deceased athletes instead of in his favorite chair with his family.

It's been a year and a half now, and the twists and turns of the grieving process still hold surprises. I didn't cry on the anniversary of my father's death; but hearing the Irish Tenors sing *Toora Loora Looral* brings tears every time. My friend Sheila was right — the path is different for everyone — and you just have to go where it takes you.

I'm pretty sure I won't feel sad on June 17, thanks to Johnny's impression of the afterlife. The Pirates are playing Cleveland at 2 o'clock, and I have a clear picture of how my father will spend that afternoon.

So instead of sending a card or making a phone call, I think I'll just tune into the game. It will be my way of saying: "Hi Dad. Happy Father's Day. Who's winning?"

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