

The heels of my shoes sink into the grass, which is saturated from sprinklers that did their job before our arrival. *Why aren't I wearing flat shoes—not only to avoid the wet turf, but to be more comfortable?* I hate these black shoes and vow to trash them as soon as possible.

The 400,000 small white crosses covering 620 acres of carefully manicured lawns make quite an impression. It is my first time attending a military burial at Arlington Cemetery. Pomp and ceremony take on a new meaning. There are even horses. They are not as big as Clydesdales, but close. I am sure that underneath all that hair, the heat is most uncomfortable. One horse breaks the silence with his gentle neighing, which sounds like an

intermittently working circulating fan. Six Navy men take a step forward and fire their guns as the Blue Angel jets fly overhead. That is a surprise. I know those planes show up at football games or parades, but funerals? I jump out of my skin as someone suddenly taps me on my right shoulder. The priest opens his mouth, but I do not hear any sound coming out. It all takes place in a corner of my mind that is not in the moment, except for the wet grass and giant horses. There is that surreal feeling of knowing that it is happening, but not feeling like I am a participant. I am an observer. I feel like I am standing in the shadows, but there is no shade. No, there is not even a chair for me. The other four daughters and son sit in seats of honor for our father, the Admiral.

I found my father and lost him on that miserable muggy day in Washington, DC. As I viewed the acres of white crosses, I do not remember thinking of the thousands of soldiers who were dead and buried there. I was too self-absorbed to acknowledge their presence. These men died serving their country. What about their souls? What about their afterlife?

I do believe in a Higher Power, whom I call God, but Heaven or Hell are not in my vocabulary. My spiritual journey tells me that these men did not die in vain. Their lives, just like my father's, touch all of us—the survivors. I remember what my father told me. “You only have to die once.” Maybe our bodies do get buried, and our souls pass on to the universe to further influence the lives and destinies of

others. My father's legacy touched so many. This funeral cannot be the end. While I do not believe in reincarnation, I know the "spirit" is mystical and transcends. My spiritual experience tells me that this funeral is not an event, but it is a process that continues beyond my father's grave. The family secret will be revealed, and others will be affected. This memorial service is definitely a new beginning in my life.

My one sister, Lynn, knows the truth. Of course, Chris, my husband, is aware of the circumstances leading up to this moment. No one understands how I feel or what made me show up at this memorial service. There were no tears, but lots of sadness. In fact, I held back all my emotions, which I learned to do at an

incredibly young age. “Don’t smile! Keep your lips perfectly horizontal across your face.” My facial appearance is kind of a smirk, but a little more mysterious than that. I guess some people would call it the deadpan look.

I talk to no one, but there is a great deal of resentment. I am still thinking to myself: “Are you my father?” I am trying to make sense out of the events that led to this overwhelming sense of loss. Grief is where love and pain converge. “What brought me to this place in time? Who am I that I question everything and everybody?” This self-appraisal might help explain my future actions and reactions.

Most people would describe me as having an outgoing personality (the look helped with the performance), somewhat eccentric at times, a