

My father died at 52 when I was 23 years old. He had been ill for about a year. Everyone in the family denied that he was as sick as he was, and we only talked about the future when we'd be back to doing the things we both loved – skiing, reading books, traveling. He'd remind me that he wanted to rent an RV and drive across the country. It was his fantasy. The only reason we hadn't done this was that my mother turned her nose up at the thought of a cramped bathroom. We'd laugh and assure her that she'd get used to it. She'd usually come back with some retort like, "Not in this lifetime."

My dad was the eternal optimist, except in one area. He and I talked about my career goal. I confessed I wanted to get a graduate degree in English literature. He asked me, "And how are you going to make a living at that?" I didn't have a good answer and felt disappointed that he had so little faith in me, especially when he was forced into a career not of his own choosing. He took over the family paint business, and carried a heavy bag of relatives on his back. I asked him, "If you had your druthers, what would you have done, Daddy?"

"Well, I wanted to be a banker, but instead....you know the rest." And of course I did. Day in and day out, he drove to his factory in Hoboken where he manufactured and sold lead paint to his customers. It was a lucrative profession, but it certainly wasn't fulfilling in the way that banking would have been to him. His favorite magazine was the *U.S. News and World Report*, and he kept a close eye on the stock market.

Before he died I enrolled in a program in international relations (he approved of that) and worked in mortgage banking for a number of years. I am sure he would have been proud of me – a banker, after all. Many years later, I established a ghostwriting company that outsources work to seven writers and has published 25 books for our clients in a variety of professional fields.

My fantasy is that Dad would have been proud of me and perhaps astonished that I had turned my passion into a real business. At best, he and I could share the challenges and rewards of running a business that I truly love using the skill that I was most proud of. And at worst, I could have read him some of the books we have written, just as I read to him during the final, miserable months of his life when he could no longer see, but still had a voracious appetite for a good book, however far afield it was from paint – in fact better that it wasn't about paint.