

CAT: Hey, everyone. A little announcement before we jump in. If you are just now joining us, welcome! We are so excited that you're here. We'd love for you to go back and start at the Prologue, and then jump in to episode one. That way you can get caught up on the story so far. We'll see you here when you get back.

JAN: It's the finale.

CAT: We're here.

JAN: And I'm scared.

CAT: Why... why now, why are you scared?

JAN: Cause I I I am good at throwing myself off of ledges and carefully scaling dark scary caves. I'm not as good at wrapping things up in a way that isn't tying them in a bow. I struggle with endings almost always in my own work, and I don't like other people's endings either to be fair.

CAT: Yeah, yeah there's a lot of pressure wrapped up in this finale.

JAN: Cause you can only do it once!

CAT: Mhmm

JAN: And it'll be the end of something that matters,

CAT: Yeah

JAN: a lot to me.

So the only thing I know what to do, the only thing I know to do is to um, take what I've learned so far from this journey, from the last four years which is; to try to do this thing imperfectly, and, and just try to honor what has been with this final scene, instead of trying to do it perfect later.

To be authentic and honest about where I am so that (fail safe), even if it is imperfect, um, and not what I want it to be or what everyone else wants it to be, it's at least going to mean something, because honest, imperfect stories mean something.

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: And something I learned very early on in this project, which is that in order to figure out where I'm going next, I have to take inventory of where I've been.

So here's where Jan character's been so far as I see it:

Our Jan character started from a beautiful pretend, or a lie: she is fine, everything is fine, she has plenty of love. She doesn't have a dad but that's fine she's totally forgiven him she just has to find the right words to forgive him perfectly.

We have an Inciting Incident which is Her Father's Death - She feels pain, a searing hole opens up inside her, she thus realizes that he matters and he has mattered this whole time.

She then realizes that she wants/needs to understand her story - and the adventure is off!

Ooh here we go - a series of adventures.

She gets all these new skills and abilities, like asking herself hard questions and not flinching away from them, and asking other people sometimes inappropriate questions and not flinching away from them.

She explores new places: The pit of grief, where she learns how to validate her own mourning. She discovers all these new kinds of angers: angers at his friends, and then anger at herself, and then anger at her father.

She finally stops running from her own Daddy Issues that have been chasing her this whole time.

She reckons with her Dad Character by looking at him and discovers some facets to him that she might even start to love.

She gets completely high out of her mind and discovers (with absolutely no pretending required) that she DOES have a beautiful life filled with great love -- AND it includes authentic regular pain and sadness.

She sits in a booth with her friend and realizes that all these adventures haven't been leading her to triumph and haven't been leading her to answers and haven't been leading to a happy ending, but she might have found tremendous redemption. Quite a turn.

CAT: Hmm

JAN: And now I wonder:

What is the ending to this particular adventure?

How do you know when you've found your last scene?

What's the last experience we need to have with our Jan Character to finish this thing authentically, and understand who she is now, what's happened to her, and where she's landing?

Welcome back to Untitled Dad Project. Chapter 8: FINALE.

JAN: Okay! Finale-ing with authenticity and integrity.

CAT: We can do it.

JAN: Let's start with the things I DO know.

I know what I want to happen in the final scene with our Jan character. I want it to be her throwing her own funeral for her Dad.

It's gonna be on the exact same lake where that first funeral was, but a little bit further down from the sailing club.

I know this has to be the final scene because:

The first funeral scene was the first real moment where Jan Character was faced with her new horrifying reality.

So this time she'll go back to that same lake, but have her own funeral on her own terms, with her own script, with a new ability to honor herself and her father and her loss at the same time -- nothing existing less than the other.

Also, it's just like delightfully full-circle.

The other thing I know about the finale: it is where we need to finally reckon with two concepts that have come up a ton: Closure and Narrative Resolution.

Closure is the thing that I have insisted on like a mad woman,

CAT: Yes all the time,

JAN: since the very beginning.

CAT: constantly.

JAN: Like for instance here's Past Jan:

JANIELLE: Like to start trying to figure out my own story only to figure out that the story is even bigger and that I'll never, ever, ever find any closure ever is like - kind of obviously one version of this.

And I don't like it.

Nope.

I want the closure part.

JAN: So here's where I'm at with closure *now*:

I think it's a myth.

CAT: Really??

JAN: I don't think it's real. I think some things don't close.

Like I'll think about my dad for the rest of my life.

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: He's never gonna stop mattering. And this loss will never stop mattering. It will never close.

CAT: Okay, so - your Dad's death, your dad character. You're not gonna put him back in the closet and close him. You've actually done an opening of the door.

JAN: Yes. I'm also going so far as to say I don't think closure exists for anybody else, but you alls can fight me about that if you want.

CAT: Yes

JAN: But like these things don't - some things don't close.  
They- they don't end.  
And that's thrilling to me.

CAT: That's great. Is closure the same thing as narrative resolution?

JAN: No.

CAT: Cause it- cause that's what I had been thinking -

JAN: No, I think they're different things now.

CAT: Huh, okay. Okay. Okay. That's new information.

JAN: Yes. It is. Surprise! I don't think the closure is the resolution. I feel resolved now, and nothing feels closed.

CAT: Hm.

JAN: And in finally taking inventory of all of that pain, looking more closely at it, I can now see all this beauty that I wouldn't have taken inventory of had I not take an inventory of the pain.  
All of that feels like resolution. It feels like a kind of a release.

CAT: Yeah

JAN: Nothing has closed, but everything has shifted.  
And maybe this is a semantics issue - but I don't think that's closure.

CAT: I I think you're right. I think you're right. It's just

JAN: I'm right. Am I?

CAT: You are right.

JAN: Feels good.

JAN: Now as for how to meaningfully embody the resolution inside this funeral scene - I called in the big guns for help. The current reigning technical expert at burying my Dad, Reverend Yoder. Initially I just wanted help figuring out how to throw my own funeral for my Dad, but I quickly realized there was something else I really wanted too -

YODER: Hello!

JAN: Hello? Oh hey! Hello!

YODER: Hey!

JAN: Um, as it turns out, uh like several years later after we talked last, finally ready to plan my own funeral.

YODER: Yes.

JAN: Uh, because my dad finally feels like, like my deceased loved one.

YODER: Yeah.

JAN: Um, and you talked so meaningfully about the process of guiding families through the funeral proceedings and the planning as such a, um, sort of a meaningful ceremonial time and so I kind of... I want some of that stuff. I wanna experience that.

YODER: Yeah.

JAN: So to give me that legitimate family member experience, Father Yoder starts by asking me just basic questions about the person I lost just like he'd ask any bereaved family member.

CAT: Cause that's what you are!

JAN: That's what I am! A legitimate, bereaved family member.

YODER: All right, so what was your dad's full name?

JAN: Claude Frederick Tears III.

YODER: How did- how did he go by?

JAN: He went by Rick.

YODER: When was his date of birth?

JAN: Oh. I don't know that one. I think it's sometime in February. I'd have to look on his, um, his program, his funeral program.

YODER: I I I think at this point if we were having this conversation actually, I would- I would say that's okay, we can just find it later.

JAN: Okay, thank you.

JAN: I didn't actually know the answers to all of these questions, but it was really lovely, like a piece of purely administrative performance art.

Next on our legitimate family funereal experience, Father Yoder guides me through the process of selecting some liturgy from the Bible to read. There are several passages that are traditionally read at funerals, all of them really beautiful and united by this hope of a resurrection, some of them have really beautiful heaven imagery.

All of them are gorgeous, but not exactly the point of this funeral.

JAN: Are there any passages that have to do with enduring pain sort of next to joy or um, like release?

YODER: Hm. The ones that come most readily to mind are some of the Psalms, um, which, you know, speak out of a place of, of real suffering and uh sometimes loss.

JAN: The Lament Psalms.

YODER: Yeah. The Lament Psalms.

JAN: NOT Lamentations. Who would confuse those?

But he guides me to one of his favorite Lament Psalms, Psalm 46.

YODER: "God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear..."

JAN: But these Lament Psalms, while honest about pain and fear, always end with an upswing of hope and confidence -- which is kind of an integral part of how they're structured, and what

makes them truly beauty. But that makes me feel suspicious of including it in the finale because it kind of feels related to that like: "But you know - we're gonna hope for a triumph after all." Which is what I've tried to like, it's like a weed or a vine that creeps up that I've tried to whack down whenever I can because that's not where the honesty have lived for me.

Because even though, confusingly, I have found a tremendous beauty and a capacity for connection and growth and redemption on the other side of suffering that I refused to force a redemption or meaning out of -- That redemption isn't triumph.

But it is still beautiful!

Which still feels like the whole miracle of my story.

JAN: Even in refusing to try to turn things into a miracle, they might still have like beauty and goodness, um, inside them. It just all feels like a trick, Father Yoder. It feels like a beautiful, maybe divine, uh trick.

YODER: That's a really beautiful way of putting that. I can't think of a better way of putting- but I like the distinction between redemption and triumph. I think that's right.

JAN: And I think of a passage that might fit this story, from a song that I heard at a church service I went to a month of so before my Dad's death -

JAN: They were playing, um "It is well with my soul."

YODER: Mhm.

JAN: And that was playing, and for some reason I was, I started thinking about my dad and I started, um drafting an email to him in earnest in the notes section of my phone, but I didn't get much farther than "Dad/Rick,"

YODER: Oh wow.

JAN: But I started trying to actualize the email...

JAN: It is Well With My Soul was written by a man after the sinking of the Lusitania, when he lost his daughters, so it's connected to death and loss, and also the sea, and also the loss of a father and daughter connection, albeit a very different one which feels right. And the last line is "Even so: it is well with my soul."

JAN: even so, it as well with his soul, it was something about some "even so"-ness, some, some... And yet in tandem, there is still wellness and beauty, and and-

YODER: Yeah. I think that's really beautiful and that, that hymn is, um, it's very powerful. It feels like a kind of a Psalm, because a lot of the Psalms, bring together just that kind of combination of, recognition of the depth of sorrow and pain. Uh, and yet this hopefulness in the midst of that. That that's not the end of the story.

JAN: We then discuss more music, (song selection is apparently very important for funerals), and another song comes to mind that came up in my conversation with Charley. He and my dad heard it at a funeral of their sailing friend -

CHARLEY: And they played the Navy Hymn. Which is appropriate for an ocean sailor and stuff. I'd not ever heard it before, and he's in tears.

And I said what is that hymn? And he said that's the Navy Hymn.

Um, in fact it's supposedly the thing that the band was playing on the Titanic when they went down.

YODER:

It sounds like that, that hymn, the, the navy hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" would be a good one. And you've mentioned the hymn, uh, "It is Well With My Soul."

JAN: I like those, because him as like a strong, the word isn't bawdy, but like ribaldly sung, but powerful, um, song about crying out as you're lost at sea. It feels just so, um, the little bit that I know about him, it feels like it's him, which is nice.

That feels like it's a way to honor him.

And then the "it is well with my soul," which is like, and what do I do after the shipwreck, um, after I've lost my father to the sea, now what?

Even so it is well with my soul, um, I don't know.

It feels like a way to honor him and then honor me in conversation.

JAN: And then, some parting advice from Father Yoder.

YODER: I think honesty, is key. Um, I mean, I think that so often around death we want to say things that we don't know to be true, because they're comforting, uh and I think it's better just to speak honestly about what we know, what we don't know.

And it's, and it is just honoring to the person who's died to tell the truth. There's nothing honoring about obscuring the truth.

JAN: And I think of something that I'm struggling to be truthful with here at the end, in the resolution. Which is forgiveness.

Forgiveness is this thread that's been woven throughout this adventure, from like the email I never sent, to like questions like "is this something that's waiting for you at the end?" And here

now that I'm at the end I'm thinking, how beautiful would it be? For forgiveness to be part of the resolution. Like that would be technically gorgeous, right? Like, first you throw a glass of water into another man's face, and then you find some sort of "I forgive you" at the end. Stunning. But if I'm honest about where I really am and what it is that feels like it's resolving here at this resolution: forgiveness feels irrelevant.

Like not good, not bad. Just not relevant.

Like some stories have a makeover scene, and it's great. This story just like doesn't have a makeover scene. Some stories have Jazz music. And it's fantastic. This story just like doesn't have Jazz music. It just doesn't feel like the point of this resolution is forgiveness at all.

Which is challenging, because well then what do I do with that thread?

JAN: But all of it seems not the point to me right now.

YODER: Uh huh.

JAN: It seems like the point is um acknowledging my dad, and loving him, and being angry with him, and that to me like fills my heart with so much like joy and release. Like just-- so I do have a question. I have a question. Is that maybe forgiveness, even though I'm not calling it that?

Which is like a feeling of release that is still tied to a sense that he owed me, and he didn't give me the thing he owed me, and I'm angry about that - Also, even still, I re-- I am releasing him and I have a capacity to love him?

CAT: Before Reverend Yoder says anything, I absolutely think it is.

JAN: So your vote is that I have forgiven my dad.

CAT: Yes.

JAN: Okay.

YODER: I think it, it might be part of it. I mean I I think that um,

JAN: Here's my question: What's forgiveness? Like what is it really? Cause I might be doing it.

YODER: Yeah, and at the center of forgiveness, I think, is just not holding what someone has done against them - which doesn't mean that you pretend that it didn't happen or pretend that they're like some perfect person, but that you don't let that thing determine your relationship with them.

JAN: Oh no. I think that means I'm forgiving him.

YODER: It might be.

JAN: Oh wow. Cause that's how I feel. I feel like, no, he owes me. There's invoices here that are unpaid, and they're made out to him. And I, it's been so freeing to feel angry about that.

YODER: Yeah.

JAN: And even still, I'm not letting that keep me from discovering this other thing, which is a love for him.

YODER: Yeah. I mean that sounds like at least that you're on their way to forgiveness. I mean, I guess maybe the question is in relation to not letting your anger against him, like bind you somehow, I guess. I'm not particularly happy with that phrase, but, um, it could be that, you know, you get stuck in that anger and that that, somehow, you don't find release from that anger. And so maybe that kind of full journey towards forgiveness is even releasing that anger towards your father.

JAN: Mm. Yeah. It feels less like I have a grudge that I'm nursing bitterly. It feels more like I have, have this, like what feels like a wonderfully freeing realization that I deserved a good dad.

YODER: Yeah.

JAN: And I didn't get one.

YODER: Yeah.

JAN: And that I'm allowed to be upset about it. Feels like, has felt so lovely. It's been so nice.

Um, uh, so this is like, yeah, maybe I need to sit in my anger, or maybe I need to like live in this anger for a little bit longer, and then maybe it'll start to change.

The thing I've learned, um, which I think is obvious that wasn't obvious to me, is that if you feel a feeling fully instead of hiding it away in the back closet of where you put the feelings you aren't allowed to feel, when you let yourself feel a feeling, then you let yourself feel new things about that feeling.

YODER: Mmm. Yes.

JAN: So I'm going to feel this anger for a little longer, if you don't mind, and then we'll see what comes after that.

YODER: No, I think that sounds right and healthy.

I mean, to bring it back to the psalms, like that's what the psalms are, are these like authentic human feelings before God. Um, I think what you, what you said is a kind of lovely way of expressing that, that kind of honesty before God.

JAN: So I'm left with a really clear mission for this final scene.

The Jan Character we saw at the beginning of this, who began her journey saying "I didn't think I was lying, I thought I was pretending" will end her journey saying "Here is how I honor myself and honor my Dad and honor all of you and honor my story, by being honest about every bit of it."

Which is actually a lot harder language-wise because there are a lot of words I could use to honor my dad that aren't necessarily true. So the center of that Venn Diagram of honoring someone and also being honest is really slim and narrow.

Which means that not only will my story be more regular than I thought, and have less triumph and miracles than I thought, but it will have shorter, more simple, semantically uninteresting declarative sentences. But it will be honest, and because it is honest it will be mine.

CAT: Up next: an authentic story-telling, an honest funeral, and our last scene with Jan Character. But first: a break.

JAN: Welcome everybody. I want to tell you a story, it's the story of my Dad character, and it's my story. After that, a funeral.

On a day in January, a man and a woman have a child.

She's a girl.

The woman welcomes her and becomes her mother.

The man isn't there but somehow he is still her father. Isn't that weird when you think about it? The girl is born with a lot of questions. The delivery nurse says she's very alert. She opens her mouth to cry, her mother comforts her and loves her. The girl swallows back the questions and swallows back the cry.

She lives a life of great love. She is her mother's miracle. She is the beginning of her mother's happy ending. Or at least she decides to be. She develops a talent for happiness and an arsenal for tools of being okay.

Meanwhile the man isn't sure what to do. This girl's birth didn't happen the way he would've picked. He can't figure out how to do it right, being a father, he can't do it perfectly, so he doesn't do it all. Even still, his life is different. There's a nagging something. A something that makes him show up for the occasional recital.

A something that compels him to buy a birthday card, his hand holding a pen hovering with indecision, eventually signing it Dad/Rick - to appease that nagging something.

That nagging something.  
You know that thing you were supposed to do but didn't?  
The words you didn't say, the promise you didn't keep, the apology you never offered.  
The responsibility you totally forgot about and now you can't say anything because it's been so long and the longer time goes on the worse it would be to admit it, the thing that thinking about it right now fills you with a hot wave of shame from your belly to your cheeks.

It's not really shame though. This feeling. Shame is easy. It's dark, it's simple. It hates you. It's trying to kill you.

This thing is something close to shame, but it's born from a love that you were meant to give, a responsibility you were meant to meet. A care you were meant to extend, that unexpressed twists up inside your belly and rots gnawing at you on the rare occasions you find yourself still and quiet enough to feel it.

Washing dishes, sitting in your parked car with the radio off, watching a man fumble with the impossibly small buttons on his little girl's sweater.

If you hold this shame under a microscope, you'll see it's the same genetic makeup as love. This shame wants to want so badly to be love, if only you'd let it out. If only you'd share it. Instead you shove it back down and there it remains, an amorphous nagging shame adjacent thing.

So yes, you know the feeling.

The man tames that feeling eventually no more bursts or birthday cards. Just an occasional pang, a Google search from afar.

He could be braver and surrender that shame into love, but he isn't and he doesn't.

Instead he sails. This he can do right at this. At this he is perfect.  
On the lake he has control. He sails and he sails. He masters winds. He is magnificent. He laughs a big hearty laugh.

Meanwhile, the girl grows and finds things that make her feel magnificent too.  
She too likes to do things right and perfectly and don't forget happily. She too laughs, the same laugh as his, though she doesn't know it.  
Suddenly she gets the man's email address.  
She types, Dear Dad, Dear Rick, Dear Dad Slash Rick, She can't put the words together right so she doesn't put them together at all.  
She can't offer forgiveness perfectly, so she doesn't offer anything at all.

Her carefully crafted happiness, gives way to that feeling, that nagging shame adjacent feeling is hers now. Something she's supposed to offer - a care she's meant to extend, a word she needs to say, it twists up inside her now, annoyed.

That shame thing wants to be love.

That day in January comes round again. The girl celebrates her birth in her home surrounded by people, and the man dies in his apartment alone.

He has a last thought.

He has last words.

We don't know what they were.

In one moment, whatever happens to you when you die happens to him.

His death is not a lesson. It is not a plot twist.

It is a real thing that happened to a real man who no longer has a belly to feel things in.

The girl is notified.

In one moment whatever happens that makes a man feel like your father finally happens to her.

The nagging feeling in her belly becomes a rock.

Then turns into a pit, then swallows her whole.

Her talent for happiness stops working. Everything is broken.

And in the quiet, she hears some questions.

Who was he? Why did he abandon me? Why didn't he acknowledge me?

And the Big One: Why don't I have a legitimate story?

No one has very good answers to these questions, but she keeps asking.

For four years she holds people hostage asking.

When that doesn't work, she finds more new people to keep asking.

She invents more new games so she can continue asking.

She slowly develops a new talent, a talent for asking honest questions, and she starts to notice different questions buried inside the ones she's been asking.

Inside "who was he?" is the question "who am I?" Inside "why did he abandon me?" is "do I deserve to be abandoned?" She brushes away "why didn't he acknowledged me?" and finds "do I deserve to be acknowledged?"

Am I something to be ashamed of?

And in prying open the Big One "Why don't I have a legitimate story?" She finds the question that's been inside every question, every game, every word: am I legitimate? Do I deserve to be here legitimately?

This is a much less fun talent. The asking honest questions.

They hurt when they come out. They've been buried so far down in her esophagus, but it hurts good. And in asking them something incredible happens.

She cries, she cries the cry she swallowed back at birth.

She cries hugely, loudly, inconveniently, at bars, over brunch, during interviews, into microphones.

She asks people to listen to her cry.

She asks people to bear witness to her cry.

She refuses to abandon her cry.

She refuses to illegitimize her cry.

She decides to decide her cry is worthy.

Her mother still loves her as she cries, her friends still love her as she cries.

Some people are repelled by it, but others unswallow their own cries and then they all cry together.

She doesn't do any of it right.

She doesn't do any of it perfectly.

Unlike her father, but maybe because of her father, she grows braver than him and lets people in.

She imperfectly lets people in.

She lets maybe too many people in.

She untwists that feeling in her belly and releases it out into the world and it comes out as pain, then remorse, then honesty, then anger, then rage. And then love.

Just a little. A tiny bit of love for the man who was also her father. For the Dad and the Rick.

A small love, but a real love, a love that is so grateful to finally be out of a belly and in the air where it can stretch and maybe even grow.

None of this is triumphant. The music never swells.

No bow is ever tied, but it is time for something to resolve.

So she reaches for her talent for happiness and finds it's no longer broken, but is instead obsolete, an iPod Nano.

She realizes the strangest thing of all.

There are far greater miracles than happy endings.

A certain kind of credits roll, but everything continues, and then she gives her father a gift.

No, not forgiveness because it was never about forgiveness for the two of them. Not really.

It was about acknowledgement. She gives him the gift that he never gave her.

She stands in front of her friends and family.

She stands in front of anyone who will listen and says:

I am Rick Tears' daughter, he was my father,

the two of us our shame, our love, my birth and his death, it matters.

It's mattered this whole time.

That was a story. It's not as good of a story as it could be, as I want it to be, but it's mine, and it's true - for now.

I was recently given some tools in the form of words that I want to offer you before we move on.

The first is a term: disenfranchised grief. It's a grief that's not socially sanctioned or acknowledged or legitimized.

The loss of a pet.

The loss of someone no one else knew you had.

The loss of a childhood home.

The loss of someone who is still living but they aren't who they were anymore.

The loss you should be over by now.

The loss of anything that for some reason there just aren't any ready words for - maybe if we take a moment, one of yours will come to mind.

Recently someone offered me some words to consider for mine.

They come from the four things that matter most by Arya Bayok based on things that we humans just seem to keep saying to each other across cultures, but I added two and I've turned it into: Six Things That Can Be Said.

Thank you. I've decided I'm going to thank my dad for being a part of bringing me into this world because I am really, really happy to be here.

Please forgive me. I wish so badly I'd sent him the email I'd been drafting in my mind, I feel remorse that I didn't say an imperfect: hi.

I forgive you. Which I don't know if I feel yet. I'll say it if it feels authentic, but I'm just not worried about it.

And my addition, another thing that we do say to each other, fuck you. I'm so angry with my dad. I never got to tell him how mad I am that he didn't try harder to just be my dad. I never got to slam my door in his face and say, I hate you and throw myself on a bed and cry because he didn't understand me.

The next is I love you. I want to let him know that I love him now, a little. Which I think is only because of the anger, the fuck you that I feel, it's an anger that feels a lot more like love than it does hate.

And then goodbye and fare you well. Now that I finally feel like I have a real dad, I want to let him go.

I'm going to take a minute. I'm going to say each of those things to my dad on my own, no microphones for the first time in four years.

And I want to give you the opportunity to say any of those things to whoever or whatever it is that you might've lost. Maybe you can only authentically say one of them, a genuine, I love you, a heartfelt fuck you. If you don't want to swear, you can say, I'm angry at you. Maybe you want to say all of them.

Maybe you can say none of them, and just want to say hi.

Whatever you need. I think it's real. I think it's legitimate and I think it's worthy.

And after that we're going to have a funeral.

I'm wearing my organic Mascara, aren't I? Is it all over my face?

CARSON: No, it's not yet.

JAN: Okay. Thank you for coming to this funeral, honoring my father Rick Tears. We're going to begin with a song that apparently once made my dad cry at a funeral he attended for some sailors that he really loved. It's called Eternal Father Strong to Save. It's the Navy Hymn. I don't know if you've noticed. My Dad was a sailor. I thought we could listen together and we could just try to honor whatever it is that he really loved and responded to when he heard it.

*[Navy Hymn]*

JAN: And now a eulogy.

Rick Tears was my father.

Others knew him better, but I know him a little and I love him a little.

Here's what I do know:

My Dad was a sailor.

He sailed on this lake, and he was incredible.

He did not try as hard as he could have to read me my favorite strawberry shortcake book this one time.

He did not try as hard as he should have to be the dad that I deserved.

He had a wonderful laugh and a giant smile.

He was loved and really special to the people who knew him.

He was a difficult, entertaining man. He might have loved me. I wish he would have told me.

He liked to do things right and perfectly or he wouldn't do them at all.

He liked zapps potato chips.

He was intense, intelligent and on more than one occasion, thoughtful.

He could have been braver with his love.

He was my dad.  
He was a man who mattered.  
He mattered to the people who knew him in his presence, and he mattered to me in his absence.  
His death mattered.  
And I thank you for joining me today in honor of his loss.  
Um I'd like to ask you to join me in singing the following hymn.  
It's on the back of your program and it's called It is Well With My Soul.  
It was written by a man who lost his four daughters in a shipwreck, and the first verse of these lyrics came to him as he sailed over the waters where his daughters were lost.  
Hayley's going to sing it for us because she has a beautiful voice and we'll all croak along a capella.

*[It Is Well With My Soul]*

JAN:  
Thank you for singing that with me.  
We uh scattered my father's ashes out here on a boat with a reverend who was very concerned about us being downwind.  
As a symbol of the fact that his eternal resting place is already in this lake and as a symbol of this release, I'm going to release a lantern on the water. Uh, please take a lantern of your own and consider if there's anything that you want to release in regards to the grief that you're carrying, if not uh release the lantern in solidarity with me.  
And after that, let's hug and say things to acknowledge each other before we go.  
It's okay to go off script.  
This is kind of weird.  
But I've written a few things down there that mean a lot to me. If you're somebody who would appreciate guidance.

CAT: So Jan's going to be down at the water with a lighter to light your lantern, but if you want to come up and make a line, I'll hand them to you and you can walk down and meet her.

CAT: Up next, we have our final debrief. But first, a break.

CAT: Alright, so the morning after the funeral we debriefed.

CAT: Okay, so you've done the event.

JAN: Yeah.

CAT: You wrote your story.

JAN: I did.

CAT: And you shared it with a group of people out loud.

JAN: I did.

CAT: How- can you give me a before and after...

JAN: We had some realizations in our debrief but I've had like a billion more since then and so I think past us the morning after, and current us a few weeks after can tag team

CAT: Great.

JAN: this conclusion. Okay so first, first thing coming off of the funeral, I think two things are true at once.

One, I don't think that The Story that I spent uh four years working on, and then like 48 hours writing was very good.

And two, I don't care, and I think that's fine. And I was surprisingly chill about that.

JAN: ....the story I felt like I wrote wasn't very good. Like it wasn't as concise as it could have been and it didn't like tie in as many of the different like disparate like useful, interesting, meaningful elements that have been in the past four years.  
Like it didn't tie them in together...

JAN: Yeah, I don't think it was particularly dazzling. Right? You weren't dazzled, were you?

CAT: No, it was- it was just true.

JAN: Yeah! Like I didn't have an amazing emotional breakthrough. The story isn't the breakthrough!

JAN: Sharing the story, it wasn't the cli - it was the denouement!

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: It was the- yeah this is falling action babe! Like-

CAT: Yeah that's a good way- Yeah, it wasn't, it wasn't the climax it was the reso-

JAN: No!

CAT: Like, or quote unquote resolution. It was the...

JAN: It was the after resolution. It was the walking off into the sunset.

It literally, it was standing in front of my friends in front of a sunset and just like...

JAN: It's not the what it's the how, is what I've been thinking about since the funeral. It's not what the story was, it's how the story was a thing that I could just spend 48 hours jotting down, and it was honest and I could just take it for granted. I just had a story to read.

The story wasn't the thing! You could have, if it was a film, you could have just like panned over and seen me standing with a story and heard the first couple words and then kind of faded out. Soft-focus on the actual words of the story I was saying.

And instead just zoom over and seeing Carson over there being so supportive, like holding the water bottles, and with the sound equipment, making sure everything was being recorded.

And the faces of the people in attendance, like Taylor Anne who came and was so thrilled to be there, and all these people who love me. My mom, who's just so open and ready to receive this. Like, it's not the story!

The only new things, the only new ground that was broken in the sharing of the story was that moment that you've pointed out to me, when I came in and I said "I am Rick Torn's daughter" in front of family and friends. Like that was breaking emotional ground and that was actually quite moving to say that in front of people publicly. And then, um the receiving line at the very end, that was breaking new ground and was important. We hadn't really figured out how the receiving line was gonna work. Or how I was gonna receive words from people that I really wanted to.

CAT: No, but it sort of practically worked out as we were passing out the lanterns and you were lighting them, that it became a receiving line.

JAN: Yeah, I would light each person's lantern, and um, and they would say something to me, like "I'm so sorry for your loss" or "thank you for sharing with me" or "I love you", all these things I had given them as lines if they needed them. And then I would hug them and stand with them and give them space as they released their lantern. And we would both sit there and give them space to release whatever they needed to release with their lantern. So it became this sort of like transmission of a power to release. Or even just an acknowledgement that didn't have words.

CAT: What's funny is, it reminds me of a thing that um, Alexandra Hernandez said.

ALEXANDRA: And then one day, you're gonna share this story and it's just gonna be a story that you share. Because you want somebody else to hold it rather than you having to hold it.

JAN: Yeah, that's exactly what it was. The story itself otherwise was meaningfully, blessedly, wonderfully underwhelming.

CAT: Yeah, and that makes a lot of sense because by the time you can tell the story, say it out loud in front of people, you've already got it.

JAN: Yeah. The journey was getting my story.

CAT: Mhm.

JAN: Which as past us realized does suspiciously sound like some foreshadowing we got early on --

JANL Oh, do you know what it is? It's Goddamn Robert McKee.

CAT: Oh no.

JAN: It, it is. It's, and when you finally, in that crisis moment, get the thing that you want, you find that, what was it?

ROBERT: The character doesn't get what the character wants. Only to discover that they really now understand in a way they never understood before, and THAT is what they wanted.

JAN: I thought I wanted a story, and what I really wanted was the feeling that you get inside a story. Which is

I want to know what's happened to me.

I want to know why it matters.

I want to be legitimized. And I want to matter to myself as much as my favorite protagonists matter to me.

And I thought I wanted answers but I really wanted to just understand why the questions I will carry with me for the rest of my life about my Dad, matter. And are important.

And I wanted to ask someone else to hold it with me.

CAT: Yeah, I'm hearing what you're saying is, you thought you wanted a story for Jan Character. But really you wanted to be Jan Character.

JAN: I wanted an excuse and permission.

CAT: Yes.

JAN: To go be somebody who can behave badly and do whatever the hell they need to do to feel real, and exist and take up space, and matter for a little bit.

Yeah, that's what I wanted. And that's what I've gotten.

And that's why I think I felt so resolved as I stood up there to share my story.

The words weren't even the thing but I have them now.

I get to be one of the people who has a kind of grief that isn't disenfranchised or illegitimized. I've got a grief with uh, lines, I've got a script and it's mine. No one handed it to me, I made it.

JAN: Also in our debrief, we realized the real final scene of this story. Which wasn't actually the funeral. What happened at the end of the funeral is I release the lanterns one by one with each of the people who attended, and they release something as well with their lantern like we said. And we- we watched them kind of float out but the lanterns kind of hugged the shore of the lake, like they didn't really go anywhere. So it's like oh damn, we released them but they like keep trying to like lap back up on the shore. We released them but they keep coming back! And then eventually they started kind of picking up speed as they floated away, and they were beautiful and we all stayed to watch. It was gorgeous. And the cicadas are like, going nuts, and the ice cream truck is going by, and it's just beautiful and we're all sitting there. And Ryan's there with his kayak um to retrieve them, but I was like I don't want you to retrieve them in front of all the people who just released them. You know, we just let go of a lot.

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: And I don't you to just kind of go snatch it back and bring it back to shore.

So we waited til everyone left. Well by the time everyone left, the wind all of a sudden picked up and the lanterns that, you know, stayed close to shore were all of sudden like - whoosh! Gaining speed and forming like a little armada on the water, and they were heading directly towards the dock of the sailing club where my dad sailed, where the first funeral was.

JAN: And I did have a moment where I was like, oh, the end could be, we just light that thing on fire. Like that could be a version. That could be a lovely little, um,

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: poetic, full circle, is I burn the place down.

CAT: Oh my gosh

JAN: And this ended up actually being the perfect actual final scene for our Jan Character. Cause what happened after this was, and we have none of this recorded, of course.

CAT: Of course not. Yeah.

JAN: Ryan got into his kayak to race over to my Dad's old sailing club. Just, just going as fast as he can to chase after all these lanterns.

And this woman sails by on a giant boat with a lot of people, and really bitterly goes "Well what idiot didn't think this through, look at all these lanterns, how are they gonna go get them?"

And I shouted out, and I said "Uh, that was me actually, that's my group, they were for my Dad's memorial service, he sailed on this lake. So we released these lanterns, and someone's in a kayak to go grab them, and it's under control".

She then she like, "Oh, I'm, uh, sorry for your loss."

So vindicated!

CAT: Yeah!

JAN: And I was like, "Thank you." Not like, "Oh well you know I really didn't know him" or "it's this whole thing" or like "I have this podcast because four years ago the father I never know blah blah blah." It was just like, "Yes, thank you. I lost my dad. I got these lanterns under control. Thank you."

And then Ryan couldn't get to them fast enough, so all of these lanterns - with open flames, like candles that we lit - are floating under a wood dock, with a ton of people's most valuable, expensive possessions on top, which are these boats.

So I run over to the sailing club, the scene of my former like humiliating trauma, and I did not wanna go there, there's a reason I didn't ask to have the funeral there. And I had to run up, and um, I saw someone exiting the locked gate and I stopped them and said "Hi! I'm so sorry, do you sail here?" And they said yes, and I said "Awesome. I released lanterns for my father's memorial service, he was a sailor and he sailed in this lake, he actually sailed at this sailing club and uh the lanterns are making their way over here, I need to grab them. Would you mind letting me in?" And he said "Oh your dad sailed here?" And I said "Yeah. He was a really amazing sailor." And the guy was like, "Oh, I'm so sorry for your loss." And I said "Thank you."

And then I had to walk back into the place I that had been dreading because I had a responsibility. And I had a realization about it.

JAN: You know, I was looking at the dock that I told Taylor Ann about that I had to run back up after, um, after bursting into tears. And I said, I think I had to like run like half a mile up this narrow dock

CAT: You did say that.

JAN: to go to the port-a-potties. And when I was there trying to pick up the lanterns after my funeral, I looked and I was like,

Oh, it's like 20 feet, maybe 30 feet.  
It felt like a half mile.  
But I looked back on it and I was like, this was really short. Not at all how I remembered it.

CAT: But isn't that great?

JAN: It's great.

CAT: Like isn't that so validating of past you who felt the stretch of having to walk past all of those people and then also how validating of present you that like - that's 30 feet and I can tell the people that I need to walk on this dock because my father sailed here and we just memorialized him.

JAN: And I got to pick up these damn lanterns.

CAT: Yeah.

J: Yeah, it was great.

JAN: This bonus scene, that I hadn't planned on, and I didn't script, and I had no control of but I got to live felt like God's Poetry, and that it was the perfect way to tie up all these loose ends.

And I picked up all the lanterns and battled all the spiders, and I had friends by my side, and Ryan in his kayak, just limboing underneath these really low wooden beams. And I just had that feeling that I had been waiting for, and it's the feeling that you get at the end of a good story which is the "of course":

Of course Jan has a story to tell.

And of course the story wasn't the point, but she had to think it was the point this whole time, and devise an elaborate narrative game.

And of course Rick Tears was her Father, and of course she's going to mourn him, he was her Dad.

And of course she tells people at the lake that he was her Dad, and that he sailed here and that he's dead.

And of course she doesn't just recklessly release things onto the water - because that wouldn't be a release, that would be abandoning them. And she doesn't abandon things, she cleans up her messes.

And of course the dock isn't as long as she thought it was.

And of course she is legitimate.

And of course Jan is worthy.

All of that was happening around me, and I felt it: "Ah, of course!"  
Of course.  
Of course.

This Jan Character (who is me) has taught me tremendously what it is to be a human being.

And I want to kill her.

CAT: Hm. No more disassociating.

JAN: Yeah, I don't know how. But I want that to be our last activation.  
Like no more Past Jan talking about something, and Current Jan talking about something in conversation with each other, or like Jan the Character vs Jan the Writer. I want to kill all of us.

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: And just become me. And I want to reassociate. I got the of course feeling. I just wanna be a person now. And I don't know how to do that.

CAT: There's two paths I see forward.

JAN: Okay.

CAT: We can do something symbolically.

JAN: Okay, like what?

CAT: There's one symbol, we can do it right now. You read back all of the "of courses" you wrote,

JAN: Mhm.

CAT: And say "me".

JAN: Ooh okay.

CAT: Um, because that is a way to say "I got the of course". It wasn't Jan Character.

JAN: No it was me.

CAT: It was me.

JAN: And I'm me. I was picturing like, making Jan Character like, the puppet, and burning her.

CAT: We could do that too.

JAN: But that's so gruesome. I don't want to burn her. I love her!

CAT: Yeah, well I think like, the term integration -

JAN: How do I close a book? Like how could I, how could I- how do I take the podcast, and then like, and then like close it, like, and then-

CAT: I'm gonna - I'm gonna-

JAN: And then in the end, and it's me and it's like it was me the whole time, narrating this for you.

CAT: Sure, sure. But here's what I'm saying, is like, we're never gonna close the book, we just turned a page. That's the- that's the thing.

JAN: But- but uh close a book on the podcast though. Like, I'm gonna stop recording.

CAT: Yeah but we're not, we're not done yet.

JAN: We have to edit all this.

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: Okay. Ah. But like what's a metaphor for like -

CAT: Say the of course with your, with me.

JAN: Okay.

CAT: I think that is a good symbolic practice.

JAN: Okay.

CAT: But I - I'm gonna argue. I don't think you're separate from Jan Character.

JAN: What if - is -

CAT: Oh my god.

JAN: No, like- like is there like a word that all of the Jans of this whole podcast have said that we could like say at once so like they become like a gong and reintegrate into one? You know,

like if you're watching like a supernatural show and you see like the multiple clones and they're like "whooo" back into the one shape?

CAT: I also wondered if we could take the text from the prologue, and you say it- or the trailer, and you say it as you.

JAN: Like... what?

CAT: So in the trailer, "Hi I'm Janielle and this is my"- "Jan never knew the story of"-

JAN: Yeah "Jan never knew the story of her dad"-

CAT: "I never knew the story of why my dad wasn't in my life."

JAN: Hm.

CAT: "I do know how to grieve, and I know how to create. I turned the grieving process into the creative process."

JAN: That's cool. Okay. Where's the text for the trailer?

CAT: Oh that's a good question.

JAN: Okay. This already feels so dumb. So it's - Okay . So it's - Okay, so we took the trailer, which was the most bifurcated disassociated me, and now I am redoing the trailer as the most integrated me. Not using Jan Character, just being me. Okay.

CAT: You can do it.

JAN: It's just so silly which is maybe the point.

CAT: Yeah.

"Okay, alright, alright, gonna get my... grieving on. I'm Janielle and..."

JAN: I'm Janielle and this is Untitled Dad Project.

"Hello!"

"Hi Jeanne? Hi I'm Janielle it's nice to meet you."

"Janielle, nice to meet you, nice to meet you."

That's me. Our main character. Let's call her me.

Here is my story so far. Growing up, I never knew why my dad wasn't in my life.

But I was pretty okay.

"I- I asked my mom when I was young, I said 'what do I tell my friends when they ask why I only have a mommy and not a mommy and a daddy?' And she said 'just tell them it's not your story to tell.'"

But then I decided to take action. I decided to reach out to my dad and started drafting an email.

"What I wanted to say in an email was just that, you had a part in bringing me to the world, um, and I don't resent you."

And then, six months later, he died. Before I could send him anything.

"Uh, he was declared dead on my birthday."

"Hm."

"And then I found out, uh through the course of his friends reaching out to me,"

"Mhm."

"Uh, that none of them knew I existed."

I now know what to do when the plot changes.

I now know what to do with my dad character.

And I now know how to grieve.

I also know how to create.

"What if your father's going to be of more help and service to you now than he ever was?"

So I turned the grieving process into the creative process.

Over the last ten episodes, we figured out what it took to give me a really good story.

"The key is that you ask the right questions. And that you don't settle for easy answers."

Because I have a meaningful arc.

I made something beautiful out of an ordinary, senseless loss.

I still think we owe it to ourselves to tell our own stories. And I did whatever it took to tell mine.

"Number One Dad. Did we send that to him?"

"Why not have an interview with a cat?"

"Yeah, I- I see a lot of him in you."

"You have to find a- a way to create this father, I suppose."

"My dad smoked pot?!"

"Yeah sure, I guess I- that's fair to say, I'm an expert in burying your father."

"What is the inciting incident? You have a lot of choices."

"It was one of the worst days of my life."  
"Maybe this is the way you get to know your dad now."  
"And none of it is melodrama. It's just human."

Not all of us got a meaningful resolution. Some of had to write it our damn selves.

So that's what I did.

Thank you for joining me on Untitled Dad Project, produced by Spoke Media. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

JAN: A reintegrated Jan -

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: Of course.

CAT: Of course.

JAN: Of course.

JAN: Untitled Dad Project is co-hosted by me, Janielle "Jan" Kastner and Carson "Cat" McCain.

CAT: Please think of someone who would love UDP and share the Prologue with them. We're done, but the podcast isn't. So make sure to leave us a review on Apple Podcasts, that way people can find this piece and go on this journey too.

JAN: And we'd love to hear what it's been like for you listening to this whole thing, start to finish. Hit us up @untitleddadproject on insta, or email [untitleddadproject@spokemedia.io](mailto:untitleddadproject@spokemedia.io). We think your story matters.

CAT: Next week an Epilogue because, of course, we believe in full circles.

JAN: Untitled Dad Project is a Spoke media production.

CAT: We're produced by me, Carson McCain, with Associate Producer Kelly Kolff, social media Jenna Hannum, and our "sweet baby intern" Lauren Floyd. This episode was mixed by the incomparable Evan Arnett, our head of post production is the ultimate fixer: Will Short.

JAN: Thank you to Reverend Yoder in this episode for again bearing witness to my story and for always yes-anding any kind of performance art I throw at him.

CAT: Thank you to death educator Jean Denney for being so generous with her time and insights.

JAN: Thanks to all those who helped with the funeral: Recording help from Preston Gray (our podcast's husband), Ryan Glenn who kayaked through a dock full of spiders to retrieve lanterns with me, Hayley Whited who sang beautifully a capella so we could croak.

CAT: Thank you to Rat Rios, who of course composed all the music you heard today especially for us - including her covers of It Is Well and Eternal Father Strong to Save. Your talent and thoughtfulness made this project better at every turn.

JAN: Thank you to everyone who I interviewed over the past four years, and didn't end up including in these episodes. I remember every single conversation. Thank you for being with me and seeing me, and helping me heal.

CAT: And an extra special thank you to every single person at Spoke Media who sat in a room and listened to 4 episodes at a time to help us figure out what the arc of this thing was.

JAN: Thanks to our executive producers Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds, for making sure we never walked alone.

CAT: Thanks to Jenny and Wendy, who put the "pro" in mental health professionals.

JAN: Thanks to my Mom, for loving me no matter what. And thank you to my Dad, Rick Tears. I love you a little.

CAT: And thank you for listening.

JAN: It means the world.

