

Sean Swain:

thoughts on his father's death

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One of my earliest memories, I couldn't have been older than 3 years old... It was in the kitchen of my parents' home in Des Moines, Iowa. My dad was holding me while my mom was on the phone and I was trying to reach out to grab the ceramic Pillsbury Doughboy cookie jar... I lost my dad on March 24th due to complications after heart surgery. He had been waiting to get scheduled since before Thanksgiving, but he wasn't a priority. He didn't matter to the people who make life and death decisions.

He should have. He was a really extraordinary guy. I know I'm biased because he was my dad, but even so, he was an exceptional human being. He was kind and generous and gentle, and he really loved life. He and my mom were together for something like 55 years. This has really devastated her. My dad wanted to be cremated, so my mom has his ashes in an ornate walnut box that he would have liked, because he loved to do woodworking. He made canes after he retired.

I'm an only child so my mom's alone now and it's hard on her, because she's *really* alone. She's in her seventies and can't risk getting COVID-19. She's constantly injuring herself doing yard work and other nonsense she has no business doing. She needs me home. I've been meaning to share this for some time, to help maybe work through this loss, but it's been hard to reduce to words. There's the pain of missing him, but there's more.

I think of all that he went through and the sacrifices that he made for my mom and me. He worked at Ford for thirty years. He hated it - factory work. Another of my earliest memories: my mom and I were in the car dropping my dad off

at the Ford plant. He had on a denim jacket and carried one of those old black metal lunch boxes, the kind that was rounded at the top to hold the thermos. He was in his twenties then, shaggy hair and beard.

Beyond this loss and grief, I feel this sense of injustice for him. The day he died, the world kept spinning. There was no pause, no moment of reflection. Traffic kept moving on the highways. Everyone kept shopping. The stock market closed slightly up for the day. Apart from my mom and me, and a handful of close friends and family, it was as if he had never existed, as if he never happened.

Somewhere at the Ford plant at Romeo Plank Road in Michigan, an assembly line worker stood right where my dad did for decades, and that worker performed the same job my dad used to do. He or she has probably never even heard of Paul Swain.

So, beyond the grief it was hard for me to wrestle with this sense that the world moves on like that. In fact it doesn't even blink. Not just for my dad, but for all of us. It makes it feel sometimes like all the struggle and the sorrow and the misery and even the joy - that none of it counts. It's there and gone like ashes in the strong breeze - and then so are we.

I share this now because it feels like the world over we're in an era of loss. With COVID-19 raging and the fascists on the march, with knees on our necks and guns pressed in our backs, it feels like everything is for nothing sometimes. It feels like doom and gloom. But maybe that *is* the point. Maybe these cumulative losses, this intolerable meaninglessness, this sense

of the hopeless, it all confronts us (and it confronts *all* of us) and it awaits our collective response.

For me, personally, I never met George Floyd. I didn't know him, but I knew Paul Swain. I remember when he was young in that denim jacket, facing the daily small injustices, the humiliations and the reductions. The thousands of spectacular and terrible atrocities we witness are also accompanied by hundreds of millions of mundane ones that we all experience.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that, as I navigate the loss of my dad, it's important for me to think about how this collective struggle against the current dystopia is to stop the brutality like we saw in the street in Minneapolis for 9 minutes. But it's also to stop the slow-roasted brutality of which we are all victims.

I don't just want to end police or prisons. I want to end factories and sweat shops and wage slavery and nation-states and chemical warfare and all the components of this emisserating shit-society in which we live. And shop. And work. And die.

I want to struggle and win because all of our lives, and all of our deaths should matter. Until we have that kind of a world, we owe it to those we love and to those we've lost to fight for them and for ourselves. This is Paul Swain's son. If you're listening, you are the resistance.