



Celebrity Interviews

Basetsana Kumalo's Lessons in Love

It took losing her father for businesswoman and TV personality, Basetsana Kumalo to realise his greatest gift – constant, unwavering love.

Ever since I can remember, my biggest fear has been losing a family member. When I was a child, I would break into a cold sweat just thinking about not having my parents or my siblings in my life. My fear was partly driven by the fact that we are a very close-knit family.

Ironically, I'm not afraid of dying. Having been brought up in a Christian household, I believe the philosophy, "To be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

My father died in 2003, three weeks after suffering a severe stroke. While he was in hospital, I tried desperately to reach him in his comatose state. During his second week in ICU, there seemed to be a glimmer of hope, when he started responding to our voices. But our joy was short-lived – the doctor told us he wouldn't make it. I felt numb, gripped by the paralysing fear that I was going to lose my father.

He and I were very close. I was his little girl and he was my hero. We talked on the phone every day, and I had come to rely on him for his strength and guidance. The days leading up

to my father's death were like torture. My fear intensified and I was unable to sleep or eat. The last time I saw him was the day before he died. I remember it clearly because, as I was leaving, I turned around and said, "See you soon, Papa." I don't know why I did this – I had never looked back on my previous visits. He died at 3 A.M. the next day – the same time he had woken up to pray for each of his children.

His death hit me hard. My family and I went for counselling to get to grips with our loss. At my first session, I was so angry, I could barely speak. About a month after his funeral, a mole started growing on my right cheek, just below my eye. The mole resembled the one my father had on his face, in the same place. It made me realise that my father was still with me, but not in the conventional way. He was the wall that held me up, and without his constant encouragement, I was suddenly forced to grow up and this scared me.

I came to realise that I was paralysed by the fear of losing love. I grew up in a household where love was abundant. For my siblings and me, it was the foundation of who we were and the backbone of our success. I had been afraid to face the world without my father's love, and the knowledge that someone was looking out for me.

I've lost many friends, but their deaths never affected me in the same way. I attribute that to the driving force my father was in my life. Through my loss, I learnt one of the most valuable lessons – to be grateful for love and being loved.

<http://www.oprahmag.co.za/view/1059/basetsana-kumalos-lessons-in-love>