

## **“FORGETTING DAD” - FAQ – May 2009**

“Forgetting Dad” tends to leave viewers full of questions. Here are some of the most frequently asked ones. To leave a comment about the film, please go to the [blog section](#). Scroll down and click on the “comments” link at the bottom.

### **Q: How did you get the idea to make “Forgetting Dad”?**

A: When you’re a filmmaker and something like this happens in your family, it’s hard not to make a film about it. I instinctively began filming my father from the start, not knowing at the time that I would one day make a film out of everything I was collecting. It wasn’t until 2000 - ten years after his amnesia began - that I decided I was going to make the film. At the time, I wanted to make a film about my father’s miraculous recovery from the debilitating effects his amnesia had had on him. I filmed with him and his new wife Tracy for a while, but then they backed out on me without any real explanation other than some vague excuses about wanting to maintain their privacy. Sometime thereafter I re-directed the camera at my family and at myself and changed the focus of the film to the effects my father’s amnesia has had on my family. In the end, I think this made for a better film, even if the road to making it wasn’t exactly easy.

### **Q: How is your relationship to your father today? Has he seen the film?**

A: My father completely broke off our relationship six months after Justin and I went to visit him. I’ve made numerous attempts to contact him by phone, email and snailmail, but he refuses to answer. He didn’t even react to the news of the birth of my daughter Elisabeth a year ago. The ball is in his court. If he asks to see the film, I’d be willing to show it to him, but I’m not going to go out of my way to make it happen. I’m sure it will find its way to him at some point once it’s out on DVD.

### **Q: How’s Justin?**

A: Justin was doing really well when we last filmed with him and was emotionally much more stable than I was when we took our trip to Oregon together. Since then, he’s been on one rollercoaster ride after another. When I saw him last month (April 2009), he was living with his mom and my step-brother Steve. He got laid off from his job as a sous chef at a fabulous French restaurant (Plouf) in San Francisco when he broke his hand. He loves the film, and says it has really helped him a lot.

### **Q: Do you think your dad’s amnesia is real?**

A: Hard to say. If there’s one thing I’ve learned through making this film it’s that amnesia is not a black & white issue. While most doctors I spoke to about my father were skeptical, some were quick to point out how little is actually known about the human brain despite modern imaging. What I am certain of is that something changed inside my father’s brain. The process may have started even before his car accident and the accident merely accelerated everything. Or maybe the accident did indeed cause some physical damage to his brain that the imaging back then (1990-91) could not detect. From what I hear from other family members, my father is in quite poor health. He had a heart attack and quadruple bypass operation, and since then, he has been having a lot of problems with his brain stem. At least that’s what he and his wife Tracy are telling everyone. We

still do not have any access to his doctors or to his medical records.

**Q: What's the deal with the handwriting thing? Did you ever show the letters to a handwriting analyst?**

A: Who knows? This scene blew us all out of the water at the time. My mother simply opened up the letter and read it completely unrehearsed. She hadn't read it since my father sent it to her in 1991, and we were all stumped at the end when we all turned to ourselves to ask, "How'd he write this?" Everyone in my family (as well as audiences) reacted very strongly to this scene. It's an a-ha moment which really raises everyone's suspicions in the film. After watching the film for the first time, Justin pointed out this scene and said, "Your mom is so clear about everything. Why didn't we get it back then?"

For a while, I toyed with the idea of showing the letters to a handwriting analyst, but decided against it. It was one of those things where the loyal son in me didn't want to know anymore because I figured anything a handwriting expert would tell me would not be very flattering for my father.

**Q: How do you explain your father's sudden aging?**

A: He had a heart attack and quadruple bypass surgery four months before Justin and I went to see him. His recovery was not going well. I'm sure this all accelerated the physical decay which had clearly begun to take hold of him in the year or two before this. My sisters are quite certain that the pressure of keeping everything about his amnesia under wraps has also played a major role in his rapid aging. Beginning in his early-20s, my father had problems with high blood pressure and high cholesterol. He's the only person I know of in my family to have such problems. His younger sister Pam had open heart surgery in high school, but I'm not quite sure what the problem was. She's perfectly fine now, however. Because this question of my father's rapid aging keeps coming up, I'm beginning to wish we'd tried harder to fit in the story about my father's having a heart attack. It was one of those details we couldn't figure out how to put into the film without opening another can of worms.

**Q: So who is this Tracy woman?**

A: That's what we'd all like to know. She comes from a wealthy Midwest family and appears to live off of her trust fund. She got her MBA and had a high-powered marketing job for a major corporation, but turned her back on it all and drove out to California to find herself. When my father met her, she was spending most of her time writing poetry and playing her guitar, as well as tending to the flowers on her balcony, which caught my father's eye.

You might say the two of them are way out there, but at least they have each other. I don't wish loneliness upon either of them. It would simply be nice if they were not so secretive about their lives and were more willing to talk about my father's amnesia. But because Tracy never knew the Old Richard, she certainly is not interested in having this strange person return and take over New Richard's body.

**Q: Has making the film given you closure?**

A: Yes and no. It's been a long, painful process, and I'm very thankful my family and

colleagues didn't abandon me along the way. My anger about the situation and at my father for breaking off our relationship is subsiding. At the moment, I feel more sorry for him than anything else. Maybe my father has good reasons for his silence, and part of me still wants to know what these might be although some of the possible reasons certainly came to the surface while making the film. Surely he wants to maintain the peace and quiet he found when he moved to that small town in Oregon, and sees me as the disturber of the peace. Curiously enough, I can remember a conversation we had about eight years ago. He told me how his therapist once told him that someone close to him would one day come at him with full force and demand answers. At the time, I thought he was talking about Justin. Now I think he (and his therapist, whom I met on several occasions) was talking about me. When I kept pushing for answers even after he refused to be filmed anymore, I never imagined he would completely cut off our relationship. I just hope one day he chooses to talk openly to us children rather than taking his secret with him to the grave.

**Q: How did your family react to the film?**

A: Very positively. I traveled to California last month (May 2009) to show it to them personally. It was a very emotional experience, as was to be expected. I didn't want to simply send them DVDs and leave them alone with the film because I knew it would raise a lot of other issues. It was hard for me to watch my sisters watching the film, and seeing what it was stirring up inside them. Even brief moments like the shot of our father leading Anne down the aisle at her wedding really stirred her up.

All along, I felt like I was making the film not only for myself, but largely for my family, so I was happy and relieved that everyone felt well represented. It was amazing how my step-mother Loretta responded so positively to the scene with my mother. Afterwards, she said she wished she had spoken to my mother before she married my father. Justin thought the scene with my mother made everything clear, and wondered why we didn't get it either. The film seemed to confirm the suspicions he, Loretta and my step-sister Lora have that my father's amnesia is a ruse. The stories they told me after watching the film only added fuel to the fire.

**Q: Was it difficult to get your family to participate in the film?**

A: Not at all. My father's amnesia was this thing that was on everyone's mind, but no one knew how to talk about it until I came along with my camera and started asking questions. Most everyone was very happy to share with me. It was only a bit difficult with Loretta in the beginning because our relationship had never been very good. Now I'm very happy to have gotten to know her better through making the film, and am glad that she's part of my big crazy family. Clearly she went through hell with my father, and the film appears to accurately portray some of what she went through.

**Q: How close were you and your father after he and your mother got divorced?**

A: I'd like to think that we were fairly close, but looking back on that period now, I have to admit that we weren't as close as I thought. I was twelve at the time of the divorce. My father married Loretta shortly thereafter and took on her two kids Steve and Lora, who are about my age. We all became teenagers and were off doing our own thing. My father tried to make us one big happy family, but it just didn't work. Still, I visited him often on

weekends and during summer break, and he came to just about every track meet I had, even when it meant driving all the way across Los Angeles to do so. I have to give him a lot of credit for that – he was really there for me when it counted time and time again.

Once I was in college, I saw him rarely. He did, however, bring me my very first computer, which he configured himself. It was one of those old IBM things with two floppy drives and no hard drive and a tiny amber screen – kind of primitive, but it did the job.

**Q: Do you regret having made the film?**

A: No. It was something I felt very strongly that I had to do in order to be able to put the story aside and move forward with my life. I have to admit, however, that the great a-ha moment, the great feeling of closure I was hoping for, hasn't happened yet. Maybe it is yet to come or maybe it will never happen. Maybe it's a slow process that is already happening, but I haven't yet noticed it. Showing the film to audiences and talking about it with people who begin telling me their own family stories has been helpful, however. I – perhaps naively – never anticipated that moving forward with the film would cost me my relationship with my father (at least for now). It's something that saddens me a lot. Yet at the same time, I was beginning to feel like my relationship to him was based on some kind of lie and that it was very one-sided. Surely it will never be what I want it to be, and sooner or later I'm going to have to accept this fact.

**Q: “Forgetting Dad” is such a personal story. How do you feel about showing it in public?**

A: It was difficult at first. The premiere in Amsterdam and the first few festivals after that were really emotional, and I had difficulties fighting back the tears on stage. Standing there in front of hundreds of people who were clearly moved by my family's story was terrifying, yet oddly satisfying at the same time. All along, my crew and I were aiming to tell a story that would interest not only my family, but those outside it as well. We wanted to tell a universal story, and we seem to have succeeded at that.

**Q: Why did you feel like you had to tell such a personal story?**

A: I'm fully aware that personal stories can quickly become narcissistical. That's why in structuring the film, Matt and I tried very hard to select stories which were very specific to my family and the odd situation we are in, yet which have a universal quality to them that outsiders can relate to. I was hopeful that showing my family's struggles to come to terms with my father's amnesia would both move and somehow comfort others going through some kind of family trauma or another. At the same time, we were very aware that the bizarre case of my father's amnesia had some thriller elements which could hook the audience. One of our biggest challenges was figuring out how to interweave the personal and thriller elements while remaining true to the facts of what happened (at least what happened to the best of my knowledge).

**Q: Where can the film be seen?**

A: It's touring around film festivals worldwide and will hopefully have a theatrical release in some countries. It will be shown on German television ZDF in 2010. Sign up for our [mailing list](#) to stay informed. And if you have any suggestions about where the

film can be shown, please let us know. [Jan Rofekamp](#) from [Films Transit International, Inc.](#) is handling world sales and can be contacted about all distribution matters. You can also join the [“Forgetting Dad Film Fan Group”](#) on Facebook. And you can contact the German production company [Hoferichter & Jacobs](#). Also, if you like the film, please rate it or write a review on [imdb](#) or write something on our [film blog](#). Thanks!