

The Sins of My Father

Synopsis

The Sins of My Father is biographical drama of growing up with an absentee, alcoholic, mentally ill father, yet at the core of the narrative is me as a 37-year-old father myself thrust into a spiritual journey of discovery sparked by my father's death, he having left the clues behind to help me understand the afflicted man I barely knew: an impulsive, risk-seeking Vietnam Veteran, with a superficial demeanor, tormented by a borderline personality, laced with histrionics, narcissism, and passive-aggressiveness, who used alcohol to appease feeling misunderstood and relied on inappropriate humor and demonstrative actions to cope with his fear of intimacy.

Sins is a survival story, but it is also a story of discovery. Even though my father couldn't be the dad I needed in life, buried in the basement of his hoarded home, the stench of petrified dog shit and urine competing with the lingering odor of my father's corpse, I discover a rusted filing cabinet, and the files inside become a pivotal gift. Through these files, I uncovered my father's truth, which leads to empathy and forgiveness, and ultimately transforms and heals me.

Sins is structured in three parts, the linear journey sparked by the news of my father's death, arriving in Michigan to handle his affairs, and culminating as I delve into his "life" files. This linear narrative coincides with my internal journey: emotional baggage carried for four decades, highlighted through flashback vignettes of memorable moments with my father.

Act One begins with the news of my father's death, sparking my apprehensive departure from Los Angeles to Niles, Michigan. Flashbacks include meeting my father in a run down motel room on my 18th birthday to his claim of \$20,000 of "blood money" in a Swiss bank account; the humiliation of a three car pile up outside my grade school the only time he picked me up; the horror of him gifting his used dentures to my college sweetheart, who was a hygienist in training.

Act Two encompasses the following week as my wife and I arrive in Niles to sort out my father's affairs, plan his memorial, and clear out his hoarded house. Flashbacks contain farcical Vietnam stories; getting drunk with my father and passing out atop a 260 foot sand dune; being stranded at the American Legion when he refused to hand over his car keys; and this shameful arrival to a Christmas Eve party in a mud-stained Santa suit with a fifth of whiskey on his breath.

Act Three begins six months later, when I open my father's "life" files. I experience agony and delight reading letters he wrote me, yet never sent; I find compassion perusing through his self-destructive relationship files; I'm grateful to learn of his three stints in rehab; I empathize when studying his discharge report, which clarifies various mental illnesses; I even discover I have a sister! These files allow me to understand and forgive the sins of my father.

The Sins of My Father captures the pain and joy that lies at the heart of every family, but it's the personal journey I take toward understanding and forgiveness that helps me transcend.