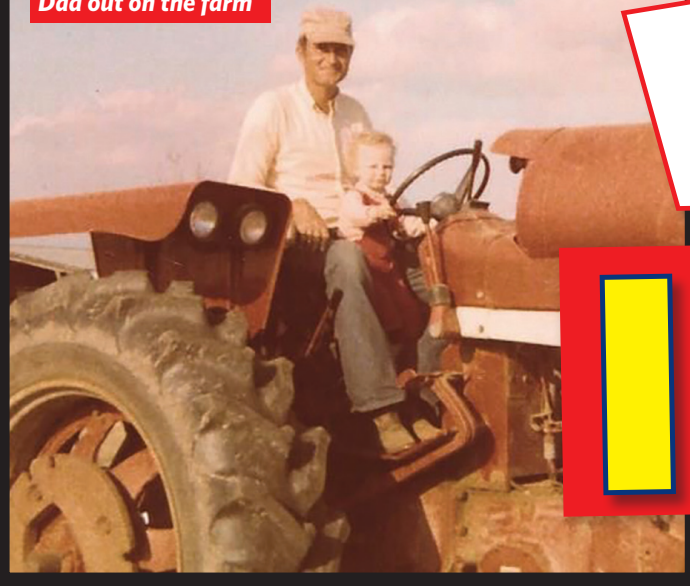


Mum always helped Dad out on the farm



WHAT HAVE I DONE?

Theo Boyd, 51, lost her mum in a tragic accident - then history repeated itself

Opening the fridge, I took out a tray of chocolate-covered strawberries and started piling them up onto a crystal plate. Arranging them artfully, I snapped a pic to send to my mum Sue and sister Hannah. They look great, Mum quickly text back.

I'd always been close to my family, sending messages back and forth with Mum and Hannah several times a day.

Mum, 74, and my dad Joe lived on a farm two hours away from my home in Texas - but I

saw them a few times a month, and spoke to Mum every day.

Dad had taken over the family farm

from my grandparents, and when he and Mum married she helped out, too.

Although they were retired, they still kept a hand in.

Married nearly 50 years, they were both still very much in love - you never saw one without the other.

That day, back in July 2019, I'd been messaging Mum about all sorts of silly things as I got ready to go to a fundraising event that evening with my then-husband - I was taking the strawberries along as my contribution to the buffet.

As I went to get dressed for the party, I tried on a fancy dress outfit I'd bought for an assembly at the school where I worked as an English teacher and sent her a snap.

When she didn't reply straight away, it was odd - but assuming she was busy, I carried on getting ready.

As I went downstairs to grab my bag, the landline rang.

'Is that Mr and Mrs Boyd's daughter?' a voice said.

'Yes,' I said, confused. 'You need to come to your parents' farm,' the voice replied.

'There's been an accident there.'

I felt as though I was underwater.

At first, I thought

something must have happened to Dad - at 75, his health was declining.

The person on the phone couldn't tell me anything more.

Grabbing the keys, we jumped straight in the car and I drove there as fast as I could.

I spoke to Hannah on the way, and tried texting Mum - but there was still no answer.

Please let Dad be OK, I prayed silently.

But as we drove and there was still no word from Mum, it dawned on me - something might have happened to her.

Eventually we pulled into the farm, and I was blinded by all the flashing lights that lit up the fields. My heart was racing.

Then I heard screaming, and realised it was Dad in the back of an ambulance - but before I could get to him, their neighbour approached me.

'I'm so sorry,' he said. 'There was a terrible accident...your mum is dead.'

I just stared at him, confused and in shock.

'What do you mean?' I quizzed.

'It appears as though your mum was crushed to death by a tractor,' he told me gently.

Falling to my knees, it felt as though the world had stopped turning. Hannah arrived a few minutes after me, too, and together we found out what had happened.

A paramedic explained that Dad had been in his 'Big Red' International Harvester 1468 tractor, when his foot had accidentally slipped off the clutch. Mum had been Dad's number one farmhand - she'd gone to hand him a battery box

at the same time as he turned the tractor on, and as she reached up to give it to him, his foot slipped.

He'd thought the tractor was in neutral, but it was in drive.

Mum had been killed instantly - her body had been completely crushed.

It was a lot to take in, and the paramedic comforted me as I sat in a heap on the floor.

'Your dad is OK, he's in that ambulance,' he said, pointing. 'You should go and see him.'

Pulling myself to my feet, I could hear him crying and screaming hysterically as I made my way over to him.

'What have I done?' he sobbed. 'I've killed the love of my life.'

He was completely inconsolable, blaming himself for the freak accident.

I tried to comfort him as I struggled to get my head around what had happened.

He wasn't in a good place. I stayed with him that night as he screamed and cried all night long.

'I'm sorry I killed your mother,' he sobbed over and over, as I felt his agonising pain like a knife in the heart.

'It was an accident,' I told him, tears in my eyes. 'You're not to blame.'

Hannah and I tried to come to terms with losing Mum as we planned her funeral, which took place five days later on 3 August. Over 500 people came to pay their respects.

Mr Fine, funeral director at Marshall & Marshall and a family friend, had spent 13 hours reconstructing Mum's body ahead of the funeral. The



OUR LOVELY MUM

whole thing was a blur - we were all just going through the motions.

Dad wouldn't talk about that day, and I took six weeks off work so I could stay with him.

I put my life on hold, but I couldn't leave Dad when he needed me most - Hannah had two boys at home, but with my daughter grown up and away at college, it made sense for me to stay with him.

Dad became a shell of himself. He'd always been a kind, funny, charismatic man, who adored his jobs as a preacher and a farmer.

He met Mum when she was 25 and he was 26 - she fell in love with him the second she laid eyes on him.

They were a match made in heaven, tying the knot in 1970. They'd been six months short of their 50th wedding anniversary when Mum passed away.

It was a huge loss for our whole family - but staying strong for Dad and sorting out all the admin, I wasn't able to grieve for Mum.

My marriage also broke down due to the

pressure of everything.

I felt like I was losing everything - and the one person I'd usually talk to about it wasn't here anymore.

Dad went to Mum's grave every day, just sitting and talking to her. A few weeks after her funeral, I persuaded him to see a counsellor.

It seemed to help - as the months passed, I started to see glimpses of his happy old self.

As he seemed to be coping OK, I moved back home and went back to work - but I still spoke to him every night and visited a few times a week.

I was determined to get my old dad back - I knew it was what Mum would have wanted. But in February 2020,

Dad's counsellor passed away, and that set him back.

Then the pandemic hit, and he was more alone than ever.

So I decided to move back to Whitney, Texas, to be closer to Dad again.

Over time, his health deteriorated and he became increasingly immobile.

'I'm tired of living,' he told me on the phone one night. I just wanted to take his pain away, but there was nothing I could do.

All I could do was try my best to be there for him.

So on Father's Day in 2022, I decided to pop round to surprise him with breakfast. Finding the door unlocked, I shouted up the stairs. 'Happy Father's Day!' I sang out. 'I've got breakfast!'

But when there was no reply, I knocked on his bedroom door and popped my head round. What I saw made my stomach drop.

Dad was in bed - lying in a pool of his own blood. He wasn't breathing. Dialling 911, I rang Hannah straight after.

'It's Daddy,' I cried, panicked. 'He's dead.'

'Go back in and look for a gun,' she told me.

We had been worried Dad might do something stupid one day - he'd been so grief-stricken.

And going back into the bedroom, I saw his handgun by his side.

In the end, Dad just couldn't live his life



I'm learning to live with my grief

We tried our best to help Dad

without Mum. I watched as paramedics came and took his body away.

I felt like I was reliving Mum's death all over again.

A lot of that time is a blur - I'd barely processed losing Mum, and now Dad was gone.

Hannah rushed round, and while we both understood why Dad had done it, it didn't make the loss any easier.

We held Dad's funeral six days later, and I don't remember a lot of that time.

I think it was only then, not needing to be strong for Dad anymore, that I properly started grieving Mum as well.

The pain was unbearable - but it brought some closure for Hannah and me, and I knew Dad was finally at peace.

We never, ever blamed him for Mum's death - I can only hope he knew that.

My parents now rest together at Peoria Cemetery, Texas, reunited at last.

Journalling became my solace, helping me navigate the grieving process.

I've even written a book - *My Grief Is Not Like Yours: Learning to Live After Unimaginable Loss, a Daughter's Story*. It's been a cathartic process - it really helped me and I hope it helps others, too.

I'm working on my second book now.

I miss my parents every day - but their memory empowers me to live life to the fullest.

Buy Theo's book on Amazon

If you've been affected by Theo's story, please seek guidance by visiting: sueryder.org



Mum and Dad were soulmates