

LIFE UNDER THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Empty Chairs



Kevin Holten

What is one of the most difficult things to deal with in life? It's empty chairs.

As I've mentioned before, in a relatively short time my 42-year-old uncle suddenly died of a brain aneurysm. Then my grandfather died of cancer. And a year later my dad was in an explosion. It was a very impactful time in my young life.

Back then, our family tradition was to go to my grandparents' house on Christmas Eve. It was the greatest night of the year. Wonderful food, great presents and great fun. Until there was one empty chair. Then another. And almost one more, except my dad somehow survived.

When I look back now, and if I'm honest, I remember thinking about the following: "If I love people, I'll eventually lose them. If I get too close, I'll get hurt." And if you think that way, the empty chairs will become more than sadness. They'll become fearsome.

When our pastor asked each of us to create a banner for confirmation as a statement about our relationship

with God, Jane Larson's banner was "A Bridge Over Troubled Water". That was very nice. My banner was divided in half. Life on one side, death on the other.

And instead of showing death first, the crucifixion, followed by the beauty of the resurrection. Mine was life first, followed by death. At the time, I had things a little backwards.

But that's one of the amazing things about



life. Things change. And my career reflects that.

When you look at my life now you see me talking to strangers at airport gates, on airplanes, in grocery store lines, at the car rental counter, at doctor's offices, everywhere.

In my role as an interviewer for television, I form relationships, maintain friendships, sit with people while they cry, and preserve their stories.

I've interviewed hundreds, maybe thousands of people for our television episodes. Ironically, despite my fear of empty chairs, I've spent my entire life pulling up more chairs to the table.

And I've told people a thousand times that I don't care who it is,

everyone is a good story one way or another. And everyone is valuable.

So, even if empty chairs can teach us the wrong lesson; not to get too attached. I've come to realize that the answer to empty chairs isn't fewer relationships. It's more.

Every empty chair in my life represents someone who mattered. And every chair awaits someone else who matters.

Fact is, we're all going to leave a chair empty someday. And if we're lucky, someone will notice, someone will remember and our lives will have mattered enough that someone will

miss us when we're gone.

It's one of life's great paradoxes, that the very thing that causes us pain later is often what gave us joy in the first place.

So now, what I've learned is that empty chairs aren't evidence that we have loved someone too much. It's evidence that we were fortunate enough to love at all.

That's where hope is. Not pretending the loss doesn't hurt. Not pretending death doesn't exist. But recognizing that pain is the price of having had someone wonderful sitting in that chair in the first place.

And if you have but an ounce of faith, you know that chair may be empty here, but it won't be empty forever.

PARKER'S PERSPECTIVE

The value of sports extends beyond the field



Gaylon Wm. Parker

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Perhaps one common refrain or thread in these pieces I put together each week is what I consider the value of what young people learn from sports. There are so-many different and disparate aspects to their benefits, that it's no-wonder Americans nearly INSIST their children at least try them out while they're young.

Back when I was growing up, my Dad kept my sister and I heavily involved to keep us busy, teach us the value of bouncing back up after a loss or dealing with defeat itself, and developing the discipline required to rise to a level of excellence. Mom was certainly along for the ride and encouraged us to similar ends, and anytime my grandparents or cousins were in town they invariably were sitting in the bleachers or in lawn-chairs right beside my parents.

Sure, the better we got at athletics led to a certain sense of pride, but they never let us get too prideful. It wasn't like they were taking us down a peg, but instead pointing out that we always could get better (another lesson). Truth-be-told, my parents and grandparents were a wellspring of fables that taught morals which coached and drilled us in an endless seminar to make us better people.

Among those tutori-

als, we learned to accept when somebody was simply better than we were and how to work harder to succeed the next time around. There wasn't room for foul or dirty play, either, and we got checked anytime my folks even **THOUGHT** we'd done something untoward.

In the end, it became noticeable that people who feel envy seem to never be comfortable with themselves based on what they haven't earned. Earning things leads to confidence, and that can descend into arrogance, if left unattended or unaddressed, but they deserve the comfort of their own accomplishments and feelings on their own behalf.

When one closes in on 60, it's somewhat easy to rely upon that experience and some level of success, but the groundwork and sidewalks have been laid to make the path easier by my benefactors. The trouble pops up when people fight their own efforts; they want the world to conform to their own whims instead of harkening back to the truth they seen day-in and day-out, because some lesson from their grandparents or parents finally sunk in and they let go of themselves.

The advice that should trend like water to its own level is: You only matter as long as you raise the tide of the vessel you're riding in, while dumping water overboard in the event it's sinking. Today, the trouble is that some people don't feel inclined to bail out the boat.

Look, you bought the ticket or were given the billet, so you accepted the ride. You have ZERO idea how it was gonna go, but here you are. It's not your fault the whole situation went pear-shaped and the leak was sprung, but - buddy - you're gon-

na have to find your way to shore somehow ... or you're gonna die.

Life is a "light-on-or-light-off" situation, and it's wiser to not expect somebody to flip the switch; and your hands can reach out to make all that happen. Yes, it's easier when others ensure the darkness leaves, but perhaps you have a lighter in your pocket and know how to make a fire of your own (and which is more satisfying?).

For me - even when I don't know why the boat is sinking and the lights went out - it's gratifying to find my way based on what I learned. That's better than zero. Others, they wish for a hand-up while having two of their own, while demanding somebody reach down based on THEIR risk.

But what shines through in sports - for me - is the intrinsic value of teamwork, self-discipline and effort while knowing we played our part. Even the athlete who scored 2 points in a 65-64 winning basketball game was crucial to the success. It's routinely up to the team-leaders or coaches to point this out, and it brings a smile to my face when I see their classmates in the stands celebrating like mad the kid who scored that out-of-nowhere bucket or swatted that game-winning hit.

There's plenty of credit to go-round in all endeavors, and a fair amount of blame (if one wants to shove it in one direction or the other), but there's always another contest on the way.

See what I mean? It might seem overindulgent to read all this from box-scores, but there it is, and I'm happy to have had so-many people who made it all clear and helped turn on the light FOR me. Otherwise, the message might have been harder to receive and translate.



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ABBREVIATED NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT, AMEND, AND REPEAL ADMINISTRATIVE RULES RELATING TO THE NORTH DAKOTA REAL ESTATE COMMISSION

TAKE NOTICE that the North Dakota Real Estate Commission will hold a public hearing to address proposed changes to the N.D. Admin. Code at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 9, 2026, at 1120 College Dr. #204, Bismarck, ND 58501. A copy of the proposed rules may be obtained by writing the North Dakota Real Estate Commission, 1120 College Dr. #204, Bismarck, ND 58501 or calling 701-328-9749. Also, written comments may be submitted to the North Dakota Real Estate Commission, 1120 College Dr. #204, Bismarck, ND 58501 until July 20, 2026. If you plan to attend the public hearing and will need special facilities or assistance relating to a disability, please contact the North Dakota Real Estate Commission at the above telephone number or address at least three days prior to the public hearing. Dated this 4th day of June, 2026.
Jeanne Prom, Executive Director