

**MSNBC Reports Gator-Guzzling Python Comes to Messy End**  
**By Peg Daniels**

I reach to touch my dad—why, I don't know—then curb the impulse, thinking that my touching him would convey to my mother that I feel affection for him, and that would be a lie. What I feel is a bunching of the muscles in my solar plexus, as if a fist—the old fist of his words and attitudes—has punched me and, too late, always too late, I'm trying to protect my core.

The urge comes again and, to cover up whatever my true motives might be, I feel for his pulse. I expect him to feel cool, but he is hot, his pulse flicking against my finger like a snake's tongue. *Is he dying or not?*

His body agitates on the hospital bed. "He's waking up!" I yell. "I'm here!" I cry. It's important he knows I'm here, I'm thinking, though I feel like a fraud for feeling this way. I haven't welcomed his presence since I was a small child, a presence I found engulfing. Am I only putting on a show for the others? Am I trying to prove to Mom and the hospice nurse that I care? To pretend to *him* that I care, to give him that comfort?

Ten years ago, though I'd moved out of my parents' home nearly twenty years earlier, Dad hissed at me that his chronic stomach troubles were due to me.

Once consumed, I apparently don't digest well.

By being here, by crying out, I'm seeking forgiveness for the hurts I caused him, done knowingly yet uncontrollably—paybacks for the hurts he caused me. How many of his were done knowingly? Unknowingly? Just his way of being? Yet, I can't forgive him.

These notions bunch my guts further.

His head flails, he gasps for breath, his eyes startle open, the pupils large black dots in eyes blue like mine. “Dad!” I plead. “Can you hear me?”

No sign of recognition; the eyes opening are only an autonomic response. He is gone.

Will I work things out on my own?

In Florida, where I now sit beside my dad’s body, a thirteen-foot Burmese python and a six-foot alligator fight. The python has a squeeze hold, the alligator’s heart slows, and the python swallows the alligator whole. The alligator awakes and attempts to claw its way out.

Both die, only the alligator’s tail sticking out of a hole in the python’s belly.