

October 21, 2015



Fred G. "Bear" Ware, Jr  
February 20, 1947- January 2, 2006  
*Sago Mine Accident*

*By: Peggy Cohen*

January 2, 2006 was a very sad day in my life. I lost my father in the Sago Mine Accident. This tragedy took a toll on my family. My father was a very loving person who loved spending time with his family especially his grandkids. I had just moved back to WV in August 2005 so that I could be close to my dad and my boys could be close with their grandpa. The tragic day of waiting for the news we dreaded was coming. Deep down you hope that you're going to get the news that they are found. However, that is not how our story ends. That morning we received a call from a fellow firefighter my husband works with asking what mines my dad worked at. When my husband told him he said there has been a huge explosion you better get your wife over there now. We hurriedly jumped into our car and a 10 minute drive felt like an eternity. As we approached the mines traffic was being stopped by the Upshur County y Sheriff's Department whom knew me and told me I can't let you down there, they are briefing the families

at the Sago Baptist Church. I looked over the hill and seen my dad's truck parked in the parking lot. My husband and I drove to the church with our two boys. They wanted to know what happened. We pulled in to the drive way of my dad's house which ironically is located directly across from the church. We parked in the driveway and walked over to the church. I was immediately surrounded by church members (as I grew up in this church). When the mine representative came in to brief the families he would not tell us what crew was in the mines and unaccounted for. He stated if we questioned whether our family member was confirmed missing we would have to ask him. They had us line up outside of one of the Sunday school classrooms. I went in to the room and said my father's name he said yes he is one of the confirmed missing. The day was very long and continued to drag as we await for any news about our loved ones. I continued to go back and forth from my dad's house to the church for briefings. Then we received the false information that the miners had been found and were being transported to the local hospital for treatment. We all began to praise God and sing. Our loved ones were found! I couldn't wait to see my father and my boys get to be with their grandpa. Then we got called back to the church for another briefing and to see the CEO, Ben Hatfield walk into the church surrounded by WV State Police I knew something was very wrong. That is when we were told there was a miscommunication and that there was only one survivor and the remainder of the miners had not made it. How your emotions go from one extreme to the other. Everyone was yelling, and crying hysterically as the WV State Police hurriedly escorted the CEO out of the church. That started a series of events that would change my life forever. I had to the following day go identify my father's body. He looked peaceful lying there very cherry red with minimal scratches on his body. I just hugged him and cried. I couldn't believe it. I never got the opportunity to tell him how much I loved him or tell him goodbye. Our boys would never get to

spend another day with their grandfather and be close to him. Then picking out clothes and casket for a funeral that should never be. My father was healthy this just wasn't right. How do you have closure in a situation like this? Our oldest son just cried and wanted his grandpa. Our youngest son repeatedly would say if only grandpa wasn't a miner he would still be with us. The funeral was hard. Our youngest wouldn't come in to the church. Our oldest child (he was 12 years old) came to church for funeral. He just looked at his grandpa and touched him and cried. I wouldn't move from my dad's casket. We buried my father beside his parents.

So how has this changed my life? I fought hard along with some of the other families to make sure other families didn't have to go through this pain and suffering. We managed to help get the Miner's Act passed under President Bush. The explosion was investigated by MSHA and an independent investigation was conducted with Davitt McAteer who was appointed by Governor Joe Manchin. We had public hearings in Buckhannon where we received copies of all the depositions of the ICG Company employees that were deposed. I read each and every one of them so I could be prepared for the public hearings. I knew as a family member that I was going to be able to question these individuals and coal officials of the mines. I was going to be loaded with questions and wanted answers to so many of things. After doing the first day of questioning the second day the other family members decided to ask me to remain on the stage to question the coal officials the next day. As I was walking up on stage the officials from the mines said you are questioning us again today. I said proudly "Yes I am!" There were some fines assessed but they were slashed. Really my father is no longer here with us and the coal officials get a slap on the wrist and sent on their way. How is that fair?? I was so angry that my father and the other 11 miner's lives weren't worth nothing.

Our boys no longer have a grandpa that they were looking forward to sharing special moments with. Both of our boys did sports and loved hunting and fishing and were looking forward to doing those things with their grandpa. Most of all they loved riding four wheelers. My father didn't get to see me graduate with my Bachelor's Degree in nursing school. Especially since he had been there for my LPN and Associate Degree Nursing graduation. This was one more accomplishment I wanted my father to be part of that he wasn't able to be part of. He hasn't got to see his grandson graduate high school and the wonderful young man he has grown in to. My son can't call his grandpa when he needs to talk or he just wants to tell him something. I can't call my father anytime. We visit his grave site frequently. Father's Day I don't get to buy my father a card or celebrate with him. He is in heaven and I know we have our own special guardian angel but it is very hard when you want to share a moment and then you know you can't. My heart still aches for my father every day. There was no closure and it doesn't get any easier as everyone says it will with time. A part of your heart is gone when you lose a family member in a tragedy. It makes it even worse when the tragedy could have been prevented with safety measures. I will not ever be able to share another Thanksgiving, Christmas, Birthday, or Father's Day with my father again until we meet again in heaven. Our boys didn't get the opportunity to do things that I know my father would have loved to taught them and do with them. I miss all the practical jokes my father was always playing on us. He was such a practical joker. I am (after 9 years) able to talk about this. My family and I live in my dad's house that he lived in when the accident happened. It helps me feel closer to him. It's ironic that our oldest child is 22 years old and our youngest is now 12 years old and they still refer to the house as grandpa's house. We have many pictures of my father hanging throughout our house. I guess you will always have an empty hole like a piece of you is missing. The emptiness of not having a

father anymore is an awful feeling especially when taken so young and tragically from you. Our boys frequently say “What would grandpa do or how would grandpa do it”. We talk about grandpa frequently. They will frequently say “I wish grandpa was here to show this too or I bet grandpa would like this”. It’s just so hard when you can’t share those things. My father will never be forgotten in our lives. We can only look forward to meeting him again on the other side!

Peggy Cohen

Daughter of Fred G. Ware, Jr.