

A close-up portrait of an elderly man with a mustache and a dark cap, looking directly at the camera. The background is blurred, showing other people in a crowd.

Nigel Joel Russo

- A story of steadfast devotion -

My story is for anyone who feels alone.

Good news! With God, you never are.

Let's Start from the Beginning

My name is Nigel Joel Russo and I was born on March 30, 1950 in Dallas, Texas. My parents, Anthony Russo and Elena Beatrice Russo raised me with my sister, Arianna.

The relationship the four of us had was complex. Most, if not all, of my negative memories growing up were within the household. My parents would argue and my father abused my mother physically and emotionally. He also denied being my and my sister's father on multiple occasions. Sure there were some nice times, but sadly there were too many bad times.

Considering how bad things were with my dad, I wish I could say that I found solace with my mom, but I didn't. We weren't close either. I knew that I could count on her and given that she was the one I watched growing up, she has definitely had the biggest impact on my life. We just didn't understand each other at the time.

One thing she did when I was younger that I couldn't quite understand at the time was introduce me to the Lord.

She made sure Jesus was a part of my foundation early on by sending me to church. I only wish she *took* me to church. That made me sad, but I'm glad she goes to church now at her old age.

Lucky for both of us, we've gotten much closer since the COVID-19 pandemic. We FaceTime (yes, believe it or not, we know how to use FaceTime at our age) every day and talk about a lot more now that I have the wisdom and maturity to understand it.

I also mentioned my sister, Arianna. We weren't close growing up, and we still aren't that close. I think the main reason is because we are so opposite of each other. But just like my mom, I can depend on her and she can depend on me.

Mom and Dad





Arianna

My Upbringing

Aside from the drama at home, my childhood was pretty carefree. I remember being able to run around in the neighborhood as long as I was home when the street lights came on. That was all the freedom I needed.

One memory in particular that stands out is going trick or treating with my friends. Our neighborhood went all out for Halloween and as usual, I was trying to use the holiday as an excuse to avoid going home. As a group of us were going from house to house, my dad jumped out from behind some bushes and scared the DAYLIGHTS out of us! On one hand, it was hilarious. We laughed for what felt like forever. But on the other hand, it was sad because I rarely remember laughing that hard with my dad growing up.

Fast forwarding to my teenage years, I would say I survived (not lived) them. The problems with my father continued, which was a difficult situation to both accept and bear.

One night, my sister was hospitalized for meningitis and he didn't come home.

I had hoped he was gone forever but the next day, as my mom and I were leaving to go to the hospital, he came home. Wishing your father never comes back is a very hard and negative feeling to digest, but the feeling of horror when you do see that he has come home is even worse.

On top of the troubles at home, I also wasn't active in extracurricular activities in school, which probably contributed to my not being a very outgoing person. As I mentioned before, I had friends in the neighborhood but they were my only outlet. Two in particular are worth mentioning.

There was my friend, Christian, who I am still friends with to this day. And I also had a very good friend named Sofia Harris. She was a cheerleader and a really nice girl. I thought I was in love with her because of how well we clicked, but we never dated because I wasn't about to make that kind of move! I was socially awkward, plus, she was unfortunately dating someone else.

When Christian and Sofia were out participating in sports and activities with their families, I was at home.

I didn't even try to socialize and that indifference became part of my reputation. Little did the other kids know, I desperately wanted to fit in.

I went so far as to participate in the popular (or embarrassing, depending on who you ask) trend of getting a mop-top like The Beatles. Don't judge me! It was cool then and again, I wanted to fit-in.

To summarize my upbringing, it was difficult, but I learned from my childhood experiences. If I could do things all over again, I would be more strategic about being away from home. I would get more involved with friends outside of the neighborhood and develop better social skills and relationships.

My Career & Aspirations

When it was time for me to go to college, I chose The University of Texas at Austin where I originally wanted to study Sociology. I didn't like it, so I switched to Accounting. I do not recall what exactly made me choose that major, but I think part of it may have been my strong abilities in math.

As excited as I was to move away and be on my own, one of the memories that stands out most from my time at UT Austin was the first weekend I was able to come home. I was so very happy for a few reasons: (1) I got to ride with Christian and his brother, (2) UT Austin was playing in Waco, and (3) I didn't tell my mom I was coming home so it was nice to surprise her.

Fast forward, I finished my degree but not in Accounting. As I mentioned, I liked math, but I didn't get into the program. I was so upset that I just switched my major to Computer Science on a whim.

I spent my whole working life as a Computer Project Analyst for the State of Texas. It was definitely a big contrast from Accounting, but I grew to love the problem solving aspect of the job.

When there was an issue with an application, it was exciting to be able to research, find the cause, and develop a solution.

Surprisingly, what I found to be most frustrating about the job was having to learn new technology. I know that's strange considering I was in the technology field, but that feeling typically dissolved after the beginning stages. Once I got a handle on the general concept, I did much better at learning it.

So as you can likely see, my journey to choosing a career path was more like a winding road. There were certainly aspects of the job that I liked. I just wish I had thought long-term about a career and setting career goals at the time. I'm not naturally a big-picture person, so I wish I had taken the time to think about what else I could do for a living.

My default was to think about what I wanted to do instead of what God wanted me to do. I typically pursued things on my own accord but needed to ask God what He needed me to pursue instead.

Love, Marriage & Children

In 1985, I met my ex wife. She was a homebody like me and we enjoyed watching movies on television. One night, I took her to the park and surprised her with an engagement ring. It was a pretty calm event and so was the “wedding”. I put the word wedding in quotation marks because we eloped and the couple that conducted our pre-marital counseling sessions performed our ceremony.

Since it wasn't a planned wedding, those we love didn't get to attend. However, we got married and that evening, we went to the movies with a few other couples we knew to see "Why Did I get Married?"

At its best, our marriage was filled with bonding time over tv shows and movies and traveling to see family. But unfortunately, the good times didn't last because the marriage ended in divorce.

We were non-traditional and lived in different cities. She came to Austin one day (as she usually did), but this time she said she didn't want to be my wife anymore. I was blindsided.

I suspect a big part of it was that she was seeing someone else because throughout the divorce process, I saw more and more signs of infidelity.

What pains me most is that we didn't have any children. It was probably for the best, but I would have loved to be a dad. We married “late” and children were surprisingly never discussed, so the decision was ultimately made for me.

I won't pretend like I wasn't hurt by the way things unfolded. There was definitely a grieving period at this death (divorce). But life was not over because thankfully, God had already laid the foundation for healing through my church.

The ministry's main message is that God's love is unconditional. That let me know that whatever happens in life, God loves me and that will never change. My house was built on God's love for me, and when the storm came, I was not shaken.

I learned that people aren't my source for anything, especially not happiness.



Our Wedding Car

Grief & Forgiveness

In 1992, my favorite aunt had a stroke and died of complications. We stayed with her whenever we went to Waco, so I was incredibly sad about her passing. Many years later, in 2014, my father died. He also had a stroke and later got cancer.

My mother and father separated years prior and he moved to Waco. We went to visit him in the hospital and as we were traveling back home, we received notification that he passed. We had to immediately make plans to return to Waco and once there, we had to make the funeral arrangements.

Our relationship was rocky but looking back on it, and if I ever had the chance, I would tell my father that I forgave him. That's what God will do for you. He will give you peace about any situation and any person if you let Him work on your heart.

I think that fact was shown with both the passing of my aunt and my father, because I felt more sadness than pain in those instances. While I do believe we can and should grieve when death occurs, I also believe that God does not intend for us to grieve indefinitely.

It took time, but I now know that I can take any loss to God and he will comfort, sustain, and fulfill me.

That's the advice I would leave to others, not only in matters of death, but throughout all aspects of life as well... Follow after God in everything.



My Favorite Aunt

Epilogue

If I had to redo life through this point, there is a lot I would do differently. I would still go to UT Austin, but I'd be more engaged in the entire college experience. I'd have children and ultimately seek God and His guidance sooner.

But despite the things I'd do differently, coming across my church's teachings has changed me. It is the first church I found that teaches (as opposed to preaches) the Word of God in a simple way. I can only hope that one day when I've departed from this world, people will have seen those teachings in me and subsequently classified me as a Jesus freak! I want to be remembered as someone who always pointed people to Him.

Quick Facts

Race

- White

Ethnicity

- Italian

Sex | Gender

- Male | Man

Sexual Orientation

- Heterosexual

Native Language

- English

Religion and Beliefs

- Christianity

Medical Background

- I had scoliosis, but I managed fine despite having surgery at a young age.

Historical Events

- President Barack Obama's election in 2008 stands out the most. I remember watching the inauguration with my family.

Never Forget:

- John 3:16 - God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes on Him will not perish but have everlasting life.



A LIFE TO SHARE