When I was younger it never crossed my mind that I might reach a point in life when I would stop believing in eternity. Now I wish I could reform my thoughts... un-invent them... make these new ones go away.

I never thought much about it till I lost someone whom I really love, but I now understand why we want to believe in heaven. The thought of never seeing my father again is so deeply sobering it makes me want to break down into a mess on the floor. Each morning this week I have awakened far too early. Waking this early is a lonely time. I have to be quiet or I will wake up everyone else in my house. It is in these quiet early hours that the thoughts of my father’s death become almost unbearable.

When I was a little boy I loved Christmas time and thoughts of Santa Claus. I can remember Christmas Eve, going to my grandparents’ house... particularly my father’s parents’ side... my dad’s brothers and all their kids were there... me and my sisters were the youngest of the kids, all the other kids seemed almost like adults... It was so much fun... and we had the best food... lots of relish trays with tasty sweet and dill pickles, deviled eggs, olives, meats, wonderful side dishes, salads... ahh... those early years were magical. And after a wonderful evening of food and gifts with family... the most exciting time of all... the most important time... it was time to drive home and go to bed! It was quite a big deal as we always stayed at Grandma and Pappy’s till after dark and Santa was already in the sky delivering presents! I remember being in the back seat of the car as we raced through the night headed for our house. Sometimes, if I looked hard enough into the sky, I could get glimpses of the sleigh... maybe Rudolph’s nose blinking just a bit... ah, yes... there he is!!!
At the house, once safe inside, we’d hurriedly prepare for bed, kiss mom and dad good night, then try in vain to shut our eyes and sleep. It was such a difficult thing to do on such an important evening, sleep. After briefly drifting off into a light slumber, my sister and I would usually wake back up around 2 or 3 in the morning, creep down the hallway to peek at the tree, and there would be our gifts! Santa had come. He’d eaten the cookies we laid out for him, drank the milk, and stuffed our stockings with comics and candies!!! Oh what a wonderful time!

After I learned that Santa did not exist, I still wanted to believe in him. I wanted to undo my knowledge.... Forget what I had learned.... Go back to the way it was before.... He had seemed so real ... I could hear him bumping around on our roof and down the chimney, sometimes I even saw him in the sky... but no, it was just in my mind... I wanted to believe it so much that it seemed real... and after all, my parents, grandparents and well, just about everyone else around me, perpetuated the hoax... what’s Santa going to bring you for Christmas? You better be good.. Santa is watching!

I never could un-invent my non-belief in Santa and at some point, it was ok... yes the magic was gone, but eventually it didn’t bother me anymore... time to grow up... move on.

The problem with believing in heaven, for me, was that I sort of always had this excuse when life didn’t go how I wanted it to go.....*well that will all be taken care of... in the next life.* And when someone died, there was the promise of seeing them again. (*Gee, I wish I’d spent more time with Pappy... asked him more questions... just talked to him more, listened more... but at least I will get to see him again someday, in heaven.. then we’ll be together again... then I can hug him and tell him I love him.*)
If it's any consolation, (it isn't) as far as losing my dad goes, I do know that I spent a lot of time with him. Was it enough time? No... I have to admit, it wasn't.

There towards the end, when he was really sick, I would go up and help him try to walk around the house... get some exercise... anything I could think of to try and help him get stronger. I remember sitting down on the floor and putting his house shoes on him then helping him up. We'd put our arms around each other and walk through the living room, into the dining room, kitchen, then 'squeeze' through the hallway and back into the living room again.... We could do about 3 laps before he got too tired and had to sit down. Other things I won't talk about... harder things... It seemed like such a burden. Now I wish I could relive it, just to be with him again.... but he was hurting and he had to let go.

So I suppose I will continue to awaken at 2 or 3 in the morning sometimes and find my mind thinking of him again and again, wishing I could believe, wishing to find hope, wishing and hoping to someday hug him, hold him and tell him that I love him.

The only time we (for sure) have with anyone is right now.... remember that... and live life that way. If I buy into some teaching that promises an afterlife where I will someday get to see the people I love again, then I might just get lazy and let an opportunity to live and love slip by.

The only ones who know for sure what happens when you die, are gone ... or maybe they don't know anything. Dear Santa, all I want for Christmas is eternity. Yes.. I've been a good boy.