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Loving Fathers Model Similar Characteristics

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"I believe that what we become depends on what our fathers teach us at odd moments, when they aren't trying to teach us." - Umberto Eco

In the month of June we celebrate Father's Day. Every father has stories of times that were meaningful to him. And there are lots of stories good and bad about dads. We hear a lot these days about the fathers who are not always doing things that are in the best interest of their children. Sadly though, we are not as likely to hear of fathers who choose to try to do their best.

My father is one of those who chose to make every day of his life about giving to or sacrificing for others. Some of the most memorable, tender moments of my own relationship with him may serve as illustrations of four important characteristics of a loving father. These four characteristics of a good father are sacrifice, patience, understanding, and presence.

Sacrifice: Being a symbol of integrity means modeling what you want your children to be. But it requires personal discipline and sacrifice. When I was a small child my family was what was fittingly called middle class, meaning we had what we needed but there were few extras. In the sixties things were different, the basics and the budget were what mattered, the frills did not. I was about five years old and my family was in the store and we came across a beautiful white fur (faux) coat, which I immediately wanted. My mother had already bought me a perfectly wonderful winter coat and the rule was one coat for the year. My father was with us that day and he bought me the coat and then proceeded to carry cheese sandwiches for his lunch for the next two weeks in order to make up for the budget deficit. Several years later he and my mother raised a second family, when my niece and nephews came to live with them. And he never begrudged or regretted any sacrifice he ever made for me or for them.

Patience: A few weeks after my sixteenth birthday, I was in a single car accident on a gravel road. Now I will not say that I was necessarily any different than any other teenager with a new license. I did not always drive the safest, but at this particular time I was going the speed limit and following the rules of responsible driving. Suddenly, I slid on loose gravel and ran into a tree. I was terrified to go home and I had to walk to due to the car actually being caught on a huge rock. When I reached my house, my father met me at the door. When I told him what

happened his response was “It’s okay, I had a wreck once, too.” He made sure all were safe and unhurt, then proceeded to get the car brought home.

Understanding: A few years ago *The Daily Times* did a piece on the people who matter and my father was one of sixteen chosen for that edition. He is an attorney who works with juveniles as a court appointed attorney giving a “voice to the voiceless”. His name was submitted by the mother of one of his thousands of “kids” he has advocated for over the years. My father has been in the unique position to teach responsibility to many children. He has taught not only his own children, but numerous others by example by keeping his commitments, by putting family first and by enduring hard times. Fathers may teach responsibility with chores, school work or other aspects of children’s lives. Helping children learn to be responsible in their youth and later as adults is among his most critical roles.

Presence: My father is a man of principle and living consistently with those principles has been an important element of his life. One of those principles is the belief that fathers can give children things that money can buy, but nothing substitutes for time and attention. There is a difference between quality time and quantity of time. I have many fond memories of time with my father, working on his car, going to the drag races, and watching Sunday afternoon football. He was at all my piano recitals--almost seven years of them, and at all my majorette performances, too numerous to count. He worked concessions for the high school and paid for hundreds of fundraising items. He has been ever present in my life.

Sacrifice, patience, understanding and presence are passed down from generation to generation by the examples parents set for their children. The values my grandmother taught my father were in turn passed on to me and have become a constant in my life. I continue to witness these characteristics in my father as he cares for his aging mother in her declining health, showing her the same love and grace with which he raised me. I am confident that one day I will do the same for him.

In honor of my father, I just want to say “Thank you.” for all you have done. A lifetime of caring and love has mattered to me and so many others. Thank you for the lessons you taught me, the sacrifices made, the priceless gift of emotional presence, and the values instilled not only in me, but in all the lives you have touched.