



## Memories of Our Fathers

“The thing I loved most about my dad was his laugh. He loved to tease all six of us kids. He especially loved to tease us as teenagers, any grumpiness made him laugh really hard. He also loved classical music and would blast his records early on weekend mornings and then let out a loud ‘YaaaawwwP!’ at the top of his lungs and say, ‘When I’m up, everybody’s up!’ and then laugh at us for grumbling. After I had moved away from home, we would call each other to laugh about our mistakes or our latest revelations about the universe.

When I called to tell him that his first grandchild was on the way, he knew even before he picked up the phone laughing. My dad died unexpectedly soon after that conversation so he never got to meet his grandson, who graduated from college recently. I wish my dad could have been there. But in a way, he was, because when my son laughs, he sounds just like my dad.’

*Maria Westerhoff, Birth To Three parent educator/Parent HelpLine staffer*

“When I was in junior high, a local news crew filmed a segment at my school. Later that night, I waited with anticipation to watch the local news. While having dinner with my parents, the segment was aired. I rushed to turn up the volume and watched with my parents. There was a shot of me walking down the hall, alone, with my hands in the pockets of my winter coat. My father turned to me and said, ‘Is that all you do at school, walk down the halls with your hands in your pockets?’

The next day, the vice principal suggested I run for class president. Remembering my father’s comment from the night before, I said yes. I lost that year. But I went on to be sophomore class president and then student body president in high school. That was the year I was invited by Joan Lunden to travel to New York City and appear on ABC’s ‘Good Morning America’ to represent student body presidents across America on a national issue of the day. A long way to go for a shy kid who, just three years earlier, was caught walking around the halls with his hands in his pockets.”

*Casey Woodard*

“Because my Dad grew up in a fatherless home and had no role model to follow, he always seemed uncomfortable showing affection to my brother and me. What he did do was try to find ways to connect with us, and one of these efforts provided a lasting

memory for me. When I was about three, Dad took me to a meeting of his stamp club. I know that sounds trivial, but I vividly recall being in a room of gentlemen who shared a common interest and who treated me like I was pretty special. While I never pursued their love of stamps, the experience of spending this time with my Dad left a lasting impression on me. My Dad's no longer with us so now I am especially grateful for all the time we spent just being together.”

*Fran Curtis, Birth To Three board member, long-time volunteer*

“Dad is my hero and always has been. He always had time to listen to me and all my stories, and then he would share stories of his own with me. I know what it was like to grow up in the Depression because he told me all about how it was for him, about going fishing so that there would be some meat to eat for supper, or getting up early in the morning to deliver milk from the family's cows to the people in the little town of Snoqualmie, Washington – and that his family continued to do this even when the families couldn't pay for the milk because ‘it was good food for their little children.’

He told me about commanding troops in WWII and how he escaped very narrowly with his life more than once – and how important it is that we never forget how awful war can be.

I grew up in Corvallis and I saw my father give of himself to others in the community in many ways, and he embarrassed me more than once with his joking reference to his expertise with teens, since his job was officially Wildlife Management Specialist in the Oregon State Extension Service. To this day, Dad still takes time to help the younger generation; recently, he drove over and spent the morning speaking with middle school students about being a teenager in the 1920's.

When we were young, Dad took each one of the three of us kids out fishing, hiking, and camping many, many times. One of our special places was the Mt. Jefferson wilderness area, with privacy and quiet that were unsurpassed. After the death of his wife of nearly 70 years this past winter, Dad has found some solace out on the waters of nearby lakes, and he just caught another big bass this past weekend.



He is a joy to be around, and at 95 he provides an active, positive role model that is unsurpassed. ‘Here's wishing you happiness for no special reason,’ he tells people, and his

lifelong belief is expressed in the philosophy, ‘Work for the best, and cope with the rest.’ His lessons will ‘teach’ me all the days of my life!”

*Dianne Reinmuth, Birth To Three parent educator*

“My parents were married for 39 years until my dad died from pancreatic cancer. During his terminal illness, it was my turn to support my dad in every sense of the word. The last few weeks of his life, his daughters and wife took on the parenting role. We helped him to bath, eat, relax. The entire dying process was a profound, terribly painful and loving tribute from his children and spouse. We could never have made it through such a difficult period without the strength and love our father always showered us with.”

*Tristyne Huffman, former Birth To Three board member*

“A few days after I was born in 1963, my father left for the March on Washington where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. Throughout my life, my parents have been active volunteers for causes, like the civil rights movement, that they firmly believed in. I have tried to follow in their footsteps.”

*Mark Eddy, former Birth To Three board member*

“My dad was very strong, yet he had a gentle kindness that he brought with him to every part of his day to day life. From the time I was very small, through my rebellious teen years and even as an adult, I could talk with him about anything, bring any problem to him, and know that he would listen, try to see from my point of view, and help me sort it out. I always knew he loved me unconditionally, and he expected the best from me and my brother....that we would do our part to help make the world a little better.

When he passed away, people who knew him as a community leader, teacher and therapist, shared stories of how he made a difference in their lives. His humor was corny, he couldn't fix anything but loved to try, and he had a terrible sense of direction! I couldn't have had a better dad.”

*Minalee Saks, co-founder and executive director, Birth To Three*

“My father started out as a coal miner and ended up as a factory worker mainly because he didn't have more than a third grade education. He was an alcoholic and my mother not only stayed with him through it all, but she also was on his side even when he was wrong because she was raised to go along with her husband's wishes. Divorce was out of the question. It did turn out all right, though, because he actually apologized on his deathbed to my mother for everything he did to her.

Sometimes lessons are learned in a backward way and give us the strength to get through life. The negativity I experienced, even more than my father's alcoholism, gave me a positive direction for my life.”

*Tim Chuey*

“My dad was an award-winning dairy farmer who valued learning, his family and living a life of integrity.

I saw his integrity in action when he led one side in a contentious disagreement that eventually involved most of the community. He successfully led meetings full of angry people because they trusted him even when they disagreed with him. He did what was right even when it was financially difficult or, as eventually happened, his side lost. My daughter wrote about him years after he died, saying in part, ‘I still recognize him as a leader because he stood up for what he believed in and what was right even when the times were hard’.”

*Marilyn Milne, Birth To Three communications director*

“My dad was an exceptionally warm and loving man. I never saw him angry. I saw him frustrated, and maybe even a little bit disappointed occasionally, but the most obvious and common feeling I received from him was unconditional love. No matter what I did or said, his love and acceptance was apparent.

Being one of five girls, it would be easy for any one of us to think that he loved another more than I. Not so. Each of us feels that we were equally loved at all times by our father. His ability to love all of his children equally has been the most profound example of positive parenting that I have had in my life.”

*Sue Prichard, former board president, Birth To Three*

“My father served his country during World War II and finished his education with the help of the military by earning his GED. Although he didn’t have the opportunity to receive a formal education, he has always loved books. I still remember those Saturday mornings when we would go to the local Goodwill to browse for classics and first editions. On some of those Saturdays we found treasures, first editions with gold leaf and beautiful illustrations. Most often we found dusty and faded tomes that were valuable only as great reads.

I would curl up for hours Saturday afternoons with a Nancy Drew mystery or a classic like Treasure Island or Black Beauty. I developed not only a love of reading from those excursions with my father, but also a love of books that I have passed on to my own children. To this day the thought of a trip to a bookstore, especially Powell’s in Portland, fills us all with glee.”

*Debi Farr*

“When I was around 8 years old, I got into a bad sleep habit. If I couldn't go right to sleep, I would get all upset about it, and this made it more difficult to sleep. So one night my Dad came into my room and said it didn't matter if I couldn't sleep and that he often stayed up all night and went to work the next day. So to prove this to me, he said he would sit up with me all night, and he did. This worked and solved all my sleep problems from then on.”

*Bruce E. Smith, emeritus board member, Birth To Three*

“When I was little, you were ‘it’. You were my everything and still are. I know you and I weren’t that close but when we were together, nothing could take us away from each other; we were inseparable.

Dad, I miss you more than words can explain. I love you with all my heart and when you passed away...I thought to myself, ‘Oh, the pain’....It’s like Batman without Robin, like having no best friend. My life is different without you. You are always in my heart. Rest in peace. I love you, Daddy.”

*Nakkia Stenberg, granddaughter of Birth To Three staffer Connie Rose*

“As a native Oregonian, I grew up doing lots of camping. At times, our family would get a campsite that had been left in shambles. My dad used to say, ‘We have no control over how we find a campsite, but we do have a say in how we leave it.’

I think that's important when it comes to understanding families and legacies. Some of us, frankly, inherit less-than-honorable legacies from our parents. We can't, unfortunately, go back and unring that bell. But we can aspire to start new legacies. To live in the now and the future instead of being embittered by the past.

In short, to leave a worthy campsite for those who follow.”

*Bob Welch*

My farther was a very simple and understanding man. He was very accepting of others and I very rarely saw him show anger toward anyone. He also was very respectful and courteous to my mother and all other women. He was not one to preach but one who taught by example. I was always proud of him as a person even when I disagreed with him. I feel that I learned my self-control and acceptance of others from his example. He also taught me that you don't need to spank your children to get them to behave, you just need to reason with them. I only hope I've been as good an example to my children.

*Joseph Calbreath*

“My dad is an astronomer. Well, a Celestial Mechanic technically, but that makes it sound as if he gets under the hood of stars with a wrench. During my childhood he worked at the US Naval Observatory and looked every inch the nerdy eccentric scientist from a comic book. His astronomer’s hours, helped by genetics, caused him to have snowy white skin as well as hair that resembled a dollop of Cool Whip carefully piled above his forehead.

Of course those “astronomically” important hours often meant that my three brothers and I would miss him on an ordinary day...so we looked forward to unordinary days – or nights. These were literally nights when the stars aligned, the earth eclipsed the moon or a meteor shower pelted a galaxy far, far away...it was then that we saw our father’s eyes alight when he would allow us to accompany him to the great domed observatory.

I never lost that dizzying feeling as the roof turned and slid open to reveal the star-studded skies. Together we would ride a chairlift to the eyepiece of the enormous telescope and he would explain a double star, super nova or craters on our own luminous moon.

It was then that our father seemed to cast off his Clark Kent alter ego and to step into the role of superhero.”

*Constance Van Flandern*

*Footnote: I sent this memory to my dad after writing it in 2009. When he read it, he called and we both cried. It was wonderful to share my feelings with him. Two weeks later, my dad was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer. He lived for only two months after that. I was so grateful to have had the chance to share with him how much I loved him before he even knew he was ill, and that connection helped me through my grief and loss.*