

Mom and Dad

A Tribute to my Parents

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and

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by Viqui Dill
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To my mother and father

Lately I have been wishing that I could remember more about both of you. Memories that used to be so fresh and reliable seem to be slipping away. And I am left with only sketchy recollections, diluted by time. The purpose of this tribute is to record some of my best childhood memories, before these recollections become too pale.

I think about the values that you taught me. You were skilled teachers, using the best teaching methods possible. I think about the lessons you passed on just by being yourselves, leading the lives you had been given.

I like to take these memories out and try to revisit them without the burden of teenage rebellion, peer pressure and hormones.

I remember mom, with her encouragement and humor.

I remember dad, the visionary, the hero.

Dad, the Superhero

I don't know who it was that put a chain drive mechanism on a tricycle, but the Patterson family, our neighbors on Longridge Road in Charleston, West Virginia, bought the trike and gave it to their girls to ride. That chain drive enabled the rider to develop unbelievable speed; the rider who could not balance well enough to ride even a bike with training wheels was wheeling up and down the street at high speed on a tricycle. It seemed to me that trike could go faster than a car on that West Virginia road.

The roads in West Virginia are many things. But no one would describe them as flat, straight, side-walked or wide-shouldered. In short, these were not good roads for kids on wheels. But there we were: my sister, Debby, and I, skating, running, and tricycling up and down the street. Fortunately, these were the days before working moms and two-car families. So we small-wheelers had the roads to ourselves most of the time.

One Saturday afternoon, Janie Patterson let me ride her chain driven tricycle. Janie was not frequently given to sharing, so I felt supremely honored.

I don't remember much of the beginning or middle of the ride, but I remember vividly the end. I rode that trike off the road with no shoulder, off the road that was not flat, off the road and over the side and tumbled into the woods. I lay there, face in the dark dirt. Wondering what would happen next.

I did not have to wonder for long. Within the time it took me to realize what had happened and scream my well-practiced, little-girl scream, my dad appeared from nowhere. He scooped me up

in his arms and carried me back home, where mom worked her boo-boo magic.

There must have been other events like this one that I've long since forgotten, events that taught me that people are good, adults can be trusted, loving means caring. These were lessons that shaped my view of the Father God.

I'll never know how he knew so well where I was, what I was doing, or how much I needed his rescue. I'll forever believe that he was a super hero. Coming out of nowhere, at just the right time, just when I needed him most.

Dad, the Man of Vision

Dad had a way of talking about the future. He had a way of spending time with you, making you feel that you were the most important part of the world at that very moment. His actions and his manner communicated that you had great value. He saw not only your present usefulness, but your future value as well.

I remember dad as always having a bunch of projects going. He liked to build big structures, using stones, brick and concrete. We moved a lot. With every new house, dad saw a fresh opportunity to make a permanent structure. He built stone walls to hold back hills. He built brick walls to define flower beds. We always had the best sand pile in the neighborhood. Sometimes dad's mortar hardened with plastic dinosaur heads sticking out of the walls.

Once, when he was finishing a wrought iron fence on top of one of his famous walls, dad let me hang around and help him with his work. He told me I had an important job to do. He gave me a small clean paint brush. He gave me an old coffee can filled with clear turpentine and told me it was primer. I had no idea what primer was but dad said the word with a very serious face. He gave me clear instructions to use the brush and "primer" to make the fence ready for the next coat of paint. This was an important job, I could tell just by the look in dad's eyes. That look said that I was up to the job.

I felt like a skilled craftsman as I concentrated on my solemn duty. My dad trusts me. I can do this. I have value. Somewhere inside me, a sleeping artist/engineer began to awaken. Dad had set the alarm clock.

Dad had a way of talking about the future as though good things were already happening. "If" was not in his vocabulary. Dad always said "when."

It seemed like at least once a year, we would visit dad's Alma Mater, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, VPI it was called back then. Dad would walk around the grounds of the school, pointing out the academic buildings, saying "Viqui, here's McBryde Hall, where you'll take Math." As we pass the quads, dad would point to the dormitory buildings, whispering "That's Eggleston. It was a men's dorm when I slept there but now it's a women's dorm where you'll sleep."

Again, I found myself believing, sharing the vision. I can do this. I'm already here. These were lessons that shaped my view of myself.

Mom, the Tolerant

In order to have an understanding of mom, at least the tolerant mom that I remember, you must first get an understanding of exactly how much there was to tolerate. You have to understand dad to understand mom.

Dad, ever the engineer, had a desire to do things bigger and stronger. This works great if you're planning to build a wall or hang Christmas lights. This can create problems if you're trying to plant a vegetable garden.

Dad's garden plots got larger and larger every year. The idea was to till a larger area but plant the same amount of seedlings, so that the rows would be better spaced, more widely spaced, and easier to work.

But that big plot of freshly tilled earth was too much for my dad's engineering brain to resist. After all that talk about not overplanting, my dad could not resist the temptation to plant more, more, more stuff in the garden.

Not only was the garden itself larger and more densely planted every year, but the vegetables themselves got larger and larger. Most of his vegetables looked like they had been grown near Three Mile Island.

The zucchini were as large as those self-lighting logs you can buy at Christmas. The yellow squash were the size of trumpets. The tomatoes busted their own skins and became food for the birds and deer.

Dad would bring the big produce into the kitchen, like the great buffalo hunter, presenting the prize tatonka to his squaw for skinning. Mom would smile, cook it for hours, and serve it to us with a proud statement about how the meal came fresh from dad's garden.

During this whole time, mom offered very little criticism about the situation. If asked, mom would say that she wished that our father had picked the zucchini earlier, or that she wished that he had planted less densely. But she'd only say it once. She didn't pretend, but she didn't nag either.

Somehow mom was able to keep a balance between saying too much and not saying enough. She was the perfect example of saying what you mean, meaning what you say, but realizing that unity is more important than the size of the produce or the taste of the meal.

She was wise enough to know the difference between those things that must be accepted because they could not be changed and those things that were worth fighting for. Her words and deeds were completely in line with each other: she displayed integrity.

Without saying a word, she taught me that people are more important than things, that loving means putting up with something less (or in this case, more) than perfection. These were lessons that shaped my view of family and marriage.

Mom, the Great Audience

After dinner, the girls would spend time together in the kitchen. Dad was not expected to do kitchen work at that time. Mom could have escaped with him, and left the clean up to Debby and me. But she didn't.

Mom stayed with us, in the kitchen, listening to our songs, laughing at our jokes, being a great audience. These endless hours were another way of telling us "I care what you think. I'm interested in the things that interest you."

Frequently, our stories recounted funny things that had happened in our family:

- The time that dad couldn't ask for directions to the Botanical Gardens in Arizona because his Roanoke lips couldn't say "Botanical."
- Our brother Eddie's first joke about farts that went "Batman offered to Flatman and said 'Pew.'"
- Eddie's emotional trip to the Hallmark store during one of dad's many business trip seasons when his little heart cried for the "sad bug."
- Our own inability to stop giggling during a serious family dinner, especially if that dinner was preceded by an extended blessing prayer. We frequently had to eat dinner with our napkins covering our faces, so that we didn't catch eyes again and burst into renewed laughter.
- The grinch-like comments of an overnight baby-sitting shrew, "You girls still wear bibs?"

Mom was our coconspirator, our confidant, our encourager, our audience. She taught us songs like "She has freckles on her BUTT she is pretty" and helped us pen the famous "Tongue is on the Floor" ballad which we wrote during an especially lengthy car ride to Watoga State Park in West Virginia.

The song lyrics go something like this:

*Drivin' down the highway
Doin' 94
I looked at my mother,
She was hanging out the door.*

*I said "Oh, mother dear
Why don't you come back here?"
She said "I cannot daughter
'Cause my tongue is on the floor."*

*Oh, her tongue is on the floor
Her tongue is on the floor
She cannot come back here because
Her tongue is on the floor*

Well, maybe you had to have been there. It was really funny.

Mom's life spoke many important messages. Messages that life is to be enjoyed, family times are good times, loving means sharing, laughing together makes us strong. These were lessons that shape my view of life.

Looking Back

As I write this, I look back on the family of my childhood. Our numbers have grown from the original five members to eight, not counting pets. I have lost a dad, I have gained sisters-in-law, I have substituted one husband for another, I have been blessed with a son. And yet, so much remains the same. The lessons taught us by mom and dad about God, about ourselves, about love and about life will live on. They will live on in the hearts of those remaining and in the lives of people we touch.

Thank you, Mom and Dad for caring enough to carry the message. I love you very much.