

Don't underestimate the abilities of fathers

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By:

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Too Much Information

Father's Day is this weekend, which means sales on steaks, tools and outdoors gear are abundant, which I will surely be taking advantage of because my husband, of course, happens to like all those things. But this holiday is bittersweet for me because my own father is gone.

This will be my second Father's Day without him, and I honestly, sadly, don't even remember how we spent his last Father's Day because by that point he couldn't really eat or swallow, couldn't really leave the house, and was too weak to do most things himself.

He was a complicated man, but he was my hero all the same. My younger brother and I weren't his first kids; he had six other children and two other wives before us, and he didn't have a hand in raising them hardly at all.

But A.J. and I spent basically all the childhood we have memories of with him as our sole caretaker after he and our mother divorced when I was 8 and A.J. was 6.

Although he'd gotten the role of dad so terribly wrong in the past, he embraced A.J. and I fully, something he never expected to do as a man in his 60s.

Although school was not his strong suit in his youth, he spent every evening with A.J. and me, quizzing us on spelling words and making sure we did our homework.

Despite the fact he didn't like to cook (something I didn't learn until I was 20), he cooked us dinner every single night, and made us pancakes on the weekends, and packed us lunches every day that would surely get the stamp of approval from the health-conscious "crunchy moms" of today, filling our lunch boxes each day with a fresh fruit (carrots for A.J., broccoli for me), a fresh fruit, usually apples or oranges, a piece of cheese, a yogurt and a sandwich he made himself. He continued this on days we stayed home in the summer.

He didn't keep chips or sodas in the house (except his coveted Pepsis, which were exclusively his), but would let us get a treat (usually a candy or soda) every time we took family trips to the grocery store.

When we were in elementary school in Carson City, Nevada, he drove us to school every day and walked us to the doors. When we moved to Montana and lived up Yaak, a good 25 miles from Troy proper, he drove us the two miles to the bus stop every morning, even in the winter when it was still dark at 7 a.m. and the dirt road from our house was treacherous. Every morning

when we got in the car, he would hand both A.J. and me a shiny white rectangle of spearmint Eclipse gum and tell us to repeat the Faur motto: Winners never quit and quitters never win.

He encouraged us to do extracurricular activities, he coached our soccer teams when we were younger, and then as we got older he went to every sporting event, every band concert, every awards ceremony. I was quite the theatre nerd in elementary school, middle school and high school, and I owe it to my dad. He was the one who encouraged me to audition for my first play in second grade, and I probably never would have had the courage to step onto a stage if it weren't for him. He drove us to every practice and rehearsal, too, even though, again, we lived about 25 miles from town until I was 14, when he decided we needed to live closer to town to shorten those trips.

He indulged in foul language quite often himself, but tried to abstain in front of us, telling us he believed we could be better, do better. He smoked cigarettes for most of his life, but never smoked in the house, and made sure we never dared to do the same.

Obviously, like many parents of his generation, his parenting style was very "do as I say and not as I do," and I can't speak for A.J., but for the most part, I've succeeded in that.

He wasn't perfect, mind you. But all of this is to say that if my dad, a jaded womanizer in his 60s, can get it together and raise two kids all by himself, then then the average young man today is surely capable, and we just don't give them enough credit. My husband, for his part, is an amazing example of this.

I've heard so many mothers bemoaning how cooking every meal, going on outings by themselves with their kids, and just generally doing all the child-rearing duties is expected and regarded as "nothing to see here," but their husbands taking their kids to the pool by himself is met with "oohs" and "ahhs" and a pat on the back. This type of story is usually received by a laugh and a shrug, maybe a comment of sympathetic disbelief while thinking that's just how it is. But the truth is, maybe if we lived in a culture where men were not treated as if it was so hard for them to do the basic parenting duties expected of women daily, maybe it wouldn't have been as easy for my dad to be such an absentee parent to his first two sets of children, lending only financial support.

Fathers are capable and so important in the shaping of their children, and they deserve to be treated that way in both the praise they receive as well as the bar that is set for them.