

As I see it

By David Lindstrom, District 3

With both of my parents in their 80s, I struggle each year to come up with an appropriate way to celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day.

While mothers have had their special day since 1914, fathers have only recently received the official recognition they so richly deserve. After all, dad is a pillar of the family unit. He's the one who makes us feel safe, loves to tickle and tease, and above all gives us a sense of security.

Despite heroic efforts by sellers of cards and clothes and sporting equipment, Father's Day remains a lame runner-up to Mother's Day, although well ahead of Grandparents Day in recognition of various family members.

Father's Day had modest enough origins. In 1910, Sonora Smart Dodd felt inspired by Anna Jarvis' efforts to establish a day for mothers and determined that there should also be a Father's Day. Her father, Civil War veteran William Jackson Smart, had as a single parent raised his six children in Spokane, Wash., after his wife's death. Dodd initially suggested June 5, the anniversary of her father's death, but she did not provide the organizers with enough time to make arrangements and the celebration was deferred to the third Sunday in June.

Unofficial support from such figures as William Jennings Bryan was immediate and widespread. Calvin Coolidge recommended it as a national holiday in 1924, but the all-male Congress was mindful that passing a measure so favorable to males could be seen as a conflict of interest. In 1926, the National Father's Day Committee met for the first time in New York City. Lyndon Johnson made Father's Day a holiday in 1966, but it was not officially recognized until the presidency of Richard Nixon, who in 1972 signed into law a permanent U.S. Father's Day, to be observed on the third Sunday of June.

As children, we often saw our parents in different roles. Mom was the pillow to fall on; dad was the rock who held us up.

As children, the sacrifices our parents make for us aren't easy to recognize because we believe our parents are immortal, among the few precious things in life that can't be hurt, sad, or scared like we can.

In reality, my father was carrying a cross that burdened him, though he never let it show. He dealt with stressful jobs and long hours so his children could pursue their dreams more easily than he could. And just as important, he taught us lessons and common sense that we could not have learned in a classroom.

He did all this while making sure our needs were met as a struggling blue-collar family and carrying the hurt and pain that became part of the story life wrote for him. In doing so, he proudly watched his children grow, attend college, begin their careers, and start their own families.

I have always been close to my father, but have to admit that we didn't always see eye to eye. I am reminded about what Mark Twain once said:

"When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

I'm sure we all remember our teenage years, and how true and insightful this statement by Twain remains from generation to generation.

By the time we become parents ourselves, our parents are entering their golden years, enjoying the new role of grandparents and having homes marked with remnants of their children and their children's children. The countless cards, pictures, and drawings that they have kept are among the ways our childhoods have been preserved forever.

With age, we start to realize our parents are just as fragile as we, that no one is immortal, and that aging can take its toll on preserving precious memories.

If your family is like most, storytelling is at the center of every gathering. Dad has the same few stories he loves to recall, and Mom loves to tell him he's gotten it all wrong!

Hearing my parents telling stories is important to me at this stage of my life, even if I have heard them countless times. I recently sat down with my father and mother to videotape their fondest stories, the good and bad times of their life history, and other memories to preserve that precious information. By taking the time to record these stories today, I am ensuring that my family roots will never be lost or forgotten.

In closing, what is a dad? I'm sure not everyone would answer exactly the same way, but this poem by an unknown author seems to sum it up very well.

What Makes a Dad?

God took the strength of a mountain,
The majesty of a tree,
The warmth of a summer sun,
The calm of a quiet sea,
The generous soul of nature,
The comforting arm of night,
The wisdom of the ages,
The power of the eagle's flight,
The joy of a morning in spring,
The faith of a mustard seed,
The patience of eternity,
The depth of a family need,
Then God combined these qualities,
When there was nothing more to add,
He knew His masterpiece was complete,
And so, He called it—Dad.

Thank you, Mom and Dad. I am truly proud to be your son!

Footnote: This year, Father's Day is June 21; Mother's Day is May 10, and Grandparents Day is Sept. 13.

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