



## Three Life Lessons Learned from Dad

### Description

This week has been bittersweet. January 26, 2015, was the day my father physically left this earth. If you have lost someone you love, you know that the person is never gone from your heart and mind. There is not a day that goes by that at some time my father does not pop up in my mind in some fashion. My mother is 96, and when we talk, it is very common for her to quote a lesson she learned from her mother. And her mother has been gone for a while.

Many people leave us with valuable lessons. These include both “what to do” and “what not to do” items. With it being six years since my father’s passing, I have been thinking of what I inherited from him and what I can be better at.

First, my father made a person feel very special. When I would call my father, he would greet me with, “Hello, Sonny Boy!” It was as if this call were the greatest thing in the world. The same was true when someone entered a room. He made people feel that their coming through the door was the highlight of his day. It was not fake. It worked for it was authentic. That is how it felt.

So, Lesson One is Help people feel special.

My father and grandfather loved to write. This is something they passed along to me. People will often bring up when they received a letter or card from me. When she arrived in Pensacola in 2019, Dawn Rudolph, the president of Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital Pensacola, sent me a copy of a letter she had received from me in 2010. She had received it when working at another hospital. Her sending it back impacted me.

I learned the value of letters from my grandfather L.L. Studer, who passed away when I was 16. At his wake, person after person came up to my grandmother Belle Studer and shared that they had gotten a letter from her husband and how much it meant to them. This left an indelible mark on me.

My father always had a letter he was composing. Some were to companies he was not happy with. Most were to a friend or relative. Some were humorous. Many were heartfelt.

Here is an example: As my parents both got older, I encouraged my dad to spend money. He was a

saver. My dad resisted getting a credit card for many years. He avoided debt. I was concerned because, while they were not rich, he and my mom could afford to do some things, but their years of being able to were being reduced. I had a discussion with my dad and explained that if they did not spend the money, the government would end up with it. (This was always a motivational message to my father. He was not the most trusting person of the government!)

I left feeling I had made progress. A few weeks later, a letter from my father arrived. It was quite long and listed every job he had ever had from age 14 on, the last sentence being “I have worked my whole life to earn the money and I just can’t spend it.” It was not the money that mattered to him; it was the feeling that the money represented his hard work. His letter helped me understand why he was so reluctant to dip into his savings.

Most of his letters were love letters. They were letters of thanks for various things, but mostly just “thanks for being a good person.” When my dad passed six years ago, next to him was the ever-present writing tablet. The last letter he was writing started out “to a wonderful son.” I have this letter and will cherish it always.

I learned the value of letters, notes, and greetings from my father. Lesson Two is Stay in touch and don’t wait to show love and gratitude.

My father taught me a lot about hard work. I never remember him having just one job. While he worked for General Motors for 41 years, he always had side jobs. They ranged from weekends at Pilot Brothers Junkyard, to doing cement work, to fixing motors, to renovating basements, to roofing and drywalling. I think every house on our block had some work my father did. While I am sure the money was helpful, I don’t think that is why he worked so hard. I feel it was about being useful and helpful to others.

If you want to see my dad, you can. A statue of him is on Palafox Street, in front of the Bodacious Shops. Rishy commissioned it for my birthday a few years ago. You can see it features a pencil behind his ear for construction, a tool belt, and his shoes. Because he worked so much with his hands, they became painful. Yet he kept working. Because he could no longer tie his shoes, he bought ones with Velcro tabs.

Lesson Three is simply this: Work is not work if you love what you do. Be useful and helpful.

I look at the statue of my dad often. At times I think, There he is. Sometimes I pat it, and, yes, I talk with it. It reminds me of how very much I miss him and how much I learned from him. We learn a lot from others. We may lose a person physically but we never lose their memories and lessons. Love you, Dad.

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