



My dad turned 87 yesterday; and, all things considered, his is a relatively "young" 87. He lives with my mom in the home they've occupied together for 20 years.

He drives, albeit much slower than he did during the previous millennium. He works: He researches, writes, and files a popular bi-weekly feature for this magazine, and, in collaboration with my mother, delivers copies to our advertising partners, every other week.

Work has been a key to longevity on my father's side of the family. He's an only child, so the data set is small; but, his aunt (his mother's sister) rode to and from their shared office with my father every day until she was near 90. His mother kept active at her desk decades after she first qualified for social security distributions. So, it's no surprise that my dad continues to write and deliver, and will until he physically can't. Plus, he's anxious and restless...a pair of very familiar traits. Yet, he's been napping a lot over the last year or so, which would worry me if he weren't always a napper. A fact I know from our time working together in his factory: Midmornings, he did his rounds in town, to the Post Office and the bank. When he returned to the factory front-office parking lot, he often stayed in the car and slept for 10 or 15 minutes before coming back inside.

Work is one measure of a man's life; but a better one might be an inventory of the things he prioritizes and his level of commitment to fulfilling those priorities. For my dad, it's been simple: Family, and the associated responsibilities trump everything else. Sometimes his tactics lack nuance or flexibility and aren't fully actualized in a modern way. But he is relentlessly steadfast, almost to a fault.

It is both hard and heartwarming to watch a man age. He is slower, but his current pace provides him time to carefully consider things that would have previously remained unthought. My father has been "successful," by the full range of the vernacular definition. But he never stopped trying to reaffirm his value to himself and to a father he lost too young. Lately, he has transitioned from pursuit to reflection, a metamorphosis that makes me both very happy and a little sad.

My father is opinionated and stubborn, a combination that simultaneously frustrates and comforts those around him. The cocktail of these two forces manifests in two admirable traits that my dad demonstrates in spades:

He's so honest he doesn't need to try to be, and he's as consistent and predictable as the tides.

This is who my father is at 87: Upon receipt of the card and present I gave him, he texted: "Thanks for everything." And I suspect he meant "everything" in the macro sense. "(I'm) thankful for all of it, especially (an) exceptional family!" he added. And then he signed it in his comically usual way (because it's a text from a number in my iphone address list): "Dad."

He is wistful now, and it's touching. On Father's Day he wrote inside the card he sent me: "I am eternally grateful that I was able to provide what you needed to get started on a very good life." In other words, my opportunities are his biggest personal rewards.

My dad is not perfect; he can be a veritable bull-in-any-number-of-china-shops. He maximizes his potential for empathy, though it's naturally limited by his sibling-less early life. As my mom points out (and has for as long as I remember), to which he angrily objects, he carries a few more pounds than his heart might prefer. But he has attained a thing that I hope I will have by the time I'm 87: His son knows exactly who the man is and what he stands for, and that son (and the other people the man loves) can depend on him beyond any doubt. God has gifted my father in this simple way; a gift I pray he (and/or He) passes on to my daughters and me.

Scott A. Lawrence



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