

In Honor of Fathers
By Gail Kauranen Jones

“One night a father overheard his son pray: Dear God, make me the kind of man my Daddy is. Later that night, the Father prayed: Dear God, make me the kind of man my son wants me to be.” --Anonymous.

Through my son’s activities, dating men with children, and in coaching a variety of male clients, I have been fortunate to observe a lot of great fathers. Additionally, my own dad, who passed away almost nine years ago, was the most family-oriented man I’ve ever known. His passion was his kids, more than his work-- even though he wouldn’t retire until illness forced him to stop doing a job he loved, which was managing construction sites.

The core trait I most admire in the men I’ve watched with children is the level of presence they give. Sitting through hundreds of Little League games over the years, I am in awe of the dedication many of our local fathers provide to our children. From entrepreneurs and CEOs to an FBI agent and another dad battling cancer, these fathers show up three times a week, sometimes rushing home from work to do so, to teach our kids how to play ball. They often model other lessons, too, like how to stay positive when a game doesn’t always turn out as hoped.

Then, there are the widowed men I know, who do double-duty parenting their children. While understanding they can never fully replace a child’s mother, these men have altered their lives to be there for their kids on a more full-time basis. One took early retirement; another cut back on travel, restructuring his job to attend 99 percent of his children’s activities. I know a few divorced dads, who got primary custody of their children, who make similar professional sacrifices to be there for their kids.

A set of dads sometimes not adequately recognized for the incredible gifts of love they bring is stepfathers. There are two in town who come to mind because of the depth in which they love their wives’ children as their own, committed to fathering exceptionally well while also respecting the biological dads’ role.

Since becoming a sole breadwinner seven years ago, I also have a greater respect for the men who, when they became fathers, graciously accepted the provider role that is conditioned into so many males as young boys. I’ve learned first-hand when you “must” provide to support a family, you often have to put yourself on the line in a way those who are financially supported do not. Some men (and increasingly more women, too) carry out these “duties” at a great personal cost, forfeiting their own dreams and aspirations, entering mid-life and beyond feeling burned out or empty. Ideally, loving and caring for others should never mean sacrificing our authentic selves. If you must do work you dislike to meet financial obligations, do at least three other things a day that give you joy so you stay connected to your sense of value and power, which keeps your self-esteem afloat. For some, that may even mean taking some quiet time to reflect on what uplifts

you. We're so programmed to follow "to do" lists that we forget what makes us happy. Begin your day first by doing something from the joy list, and see your satisfaction of life continually increase. Modeling happiness to children is as important to their sense of well-being and security as financially supporting them.

This Father's Day, give the dads you know special acknowledgment for all the ways they help our children thrive. And, perhaps take a little extra time to see what kind of gifts the fathers in your life would really appreciate that you need not buy.

One thought shared by men I've encountered is that they want the women in their lives to believe in them. Consider choosing an act of kindness or thought to share that shows the fathers in your life that you truly know their value beyond a paycheck.

I thank all the dads in the Tri-Town who give their time, talents and wisdom in teaching, coaching or protecting our children. Happy Father's Day.

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