

## Lessons I learned from my father

by Kathleen Vallee Stein



As Father's Day - today -approached, I no longer have to buy my dad two cotton/polyester blend polo shirts (with pockets) in beige. He wanted the same thing every year, and I got the style he liked. My dad has been gone for more than twenty years now, but on Father's Day, I stop to think about the lessons he taught me.

My father was stern and demanding. I learned to respect and obey authority. I turn off lights when I leave a room, I close doors behind me to keep out the cold, and if my clothes fall off the hanger, I hang them back up. My father didn't take the family out to eat very often. Because it was such a rare occurrence, I learned to speak quietly in restaurants and other public places and to understand that I should not infringe on another person's space.

My father wanted me to get out of the bathroom quickly because he shared it with his wife and four other children. I learned that my priorities had to be balanced with other people's needs. My father required me to do yard work and housework. I learned to clean up after myself and respect those who now clean up after me, such as restaurant waiters and hotel maids.

My father taught me not to quit in the middle of a job, no matter how hard it was or if I bit off more than I could chew. I learned to stop and think before committing to a project. My father often said I shouldn't give a damn what people think. I slowly and painfully learned when to heed that advice and when not to. Once I figured it out, I chose my path with less fear.

My father knew how to improvise and solve problems creatively –and cheaply. I learned how to make something from almost nothing and solve economic problems. My father expected me to be gainfully employed and to move out of the house when I was eighteen. I learned I had to be responsible and manage my finances because he would not bail me out. I learned to conduct myself as a guest in his home, as he did in mine.

My father's lessons help disperse the butterflies that gather in my stomach when I am about to speak in front of a group. They help me analyze a problem and find a solution when people are standing around, waiting for me to decide. My father's lessons taught me to identify insincerity and not practice it myself.

I learned self-reliance and industry. Most of the time, I don't feel sorry for myself.

My father accepted his fatal illness with dignity and faced his final days in hospice with courage and restraint. I learned that dying is frightening and best done with loved ones nearby.

My father's fierce independence faded in his last days as cancer slowly shut down his body. He had to accept help from others. He was considerate and cordial to those who cared for him. He accepted his demise with humor when he could, and stoicism when he couldn't. He passed away from this life in his sleep, in his own home, on his own terms.

Those are the lessons from my father that I keep.