

adult - 1st Place

## What I Most Learned from my Stepfather

It has been said that one of the best teachers in life is EXPERIENCE – and that is how I learned from my stepfather. Let me tell you why I say this:

At the age of forty-seven, my “dad” married a widow (my mother) with five children. (My biological father had passed away when I (the youngest) was four and one-half years old.)

“Dad” and my mother were only married fourteen months when she passed away; in addition to his grief, he was faced with a decision about what would happen to these children, ranging in age from eight to sixteen. Oh, there were relatives who were willing to take one or two, but certainly not all five!

Knowing in his heart that my mom would want us all kept together, he decided to do just that! At the age of forty-eight, with no previous parenting experience and at a time when most parents are looking forward to their children being on their own, he legally adopted these five orphans and raised us as a single parent on a coalminer’s paycheck.

He gave us all that he had to offer, emotionally and financially. Without this man’s selflessness, I am sure we would not have had the opportunity of education beyond high school. We may not have even known each other because we probably would have become separated. More importantly, we would not have experienced the kind of love that would take on the task of raising three teenagers. an eleven-year-old and an eight-year-old.

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When we grew up and made our mistakes, as all young people do, he never said “I told you so.” He just always opened up his home and his heart to us, just as he did when we were children.

Years down the road, “Dad” also became “Grandpa” to our twelve children!

What did I learn most from my stepfather?

- ❖ I learned, by example, what unconditional, real love is.
- ❖ I learned, by example, the meaning of total unselfishness.
- ❖ And I learned, by example, that no task is too large if you have the will to accomplish it.

Submitted by:

Verna Weiskerger  
40 Atherton Ave.  
Wyoming, PA 18644

570-693-4669

(Adult Category)

**P**atience is a necessity for parents, and great parents model it effortlessly. From midnight feedings and sleepless nights to mending scraped knees and broken hearts, my parents tirelessly tended to my every need growing up. From the first step I took, to every step in life's journey, through smiles, tears, and everything in between, they devoted their lives to raising me and patiently teaching important values along the way...

**A**ttitude shapes one's outlook on life and how one is perceived. It's important to have a positive attitude. My father suffers from heart disease and has had several hospitalizations in recent years. Yet now, more than ever, my dad has the most optimistic outlook of anyone I know. His favorite quote: "Is the glass half full or half empty?" always reminds me to be thankful for all I have, focus on the positive, and always keep a smile!

**R**espect others and respect yourself. My parents have taught this from an early age. Treat others the way I would like to be treated, cherish and honor my elders, and practice humility. Further, it is important to respect myself, to be my own person, and to stand up for my values and ideals, even when they aren't popular.

**E**mpathy allows one to place oneself in another's shoes. As a child, I recall crying after watching "Rudolph," because I felt sorry for him when the reindeer called him names. Whether it was animals or people, I was taught to always think about what others are feeling. Ask myself if my words and actions could potentially hurt someone, and if so, imagine myself in their place.

**N**urture that for which you care, and it will grow and prosper. From as simple as growing a garden of vegetables, to training our family pet, to raising me, my parents have demonstrated how love and nurture can help anything and anyone grow and thrive. They have modeled how it takes love, support, and commitment to provide the optimal environment for success.

**T**olerance is an important virtue in life. My parents taught me to value what makes each individual unique. Tolerate people who are different from me, and even tolerate those who have wronged me. Because no one is perfect, accept and value the talents of everyone; everyone has something important to offer.

**S**elf-discipline is a drive that fosters success. My parents have always modeled hard work, commitment, and dedication, and have instilled in me a drive to always strive for my best. Leading by example, they have helped me to be accountable, work hard, and commit myself wholeheartedly to my endeavors.

Ten months ago I was blessed with my first child, and now more than ever, I can fully appreciate and understand just how much my parents have positively influenced my life. I can only hope to demonstrate and teach these values to my son, not only to raise him with these virtues, but to honor and preserve the valuable lessons which my parents have given me.

Contact Information:

Jennifer Glahn

5 Robbins Rd.  
Dallas, PA 18612

(570) 814-6509 – cell

Age: 31

*Adult 3<sup>rd</sup> place*

What I Most Learned From My Parents

by

Linda Muhitch-Scheuermann

After encouraging my sons to enter this essay contest, they in turn, encouraged me to write about my own parents. As I thought about this I realized how much I have learned from them and I accepted my sons' challenge.

Today my parents are still living in the family home where I grew up. My father is ninety-four and my mother, eighty-four years of age. I am so thankful that God has blessed them with good health and longevity; and enabled them to continue living independently. My husband and I and our three children live three hours away and we visit them as often as we can, but it's never as often as we'd like it to be. So as I look back over the years and into the present, here are some of the things I have learned from my parents.

First, I learned to put God first place in my life. My mother taught me to know and love God early in life, along with the value of sharing in the community of a church family. Even today I consider the families in our church a type of extended family. My mother taught by example, the art of caring for others. At least once a week we would share dinner with a sick or elderly neighbor. Christmas always included baking cookies to give away and extra people at the dinner table. She taught me to love the neglected and the seemingly "unlovely people" in my world, a value I am striving to nurture in my own children.

My father taught me the importance of working hard at the job you were fortunate enough to have. I remember him leaving early in the morning, after his Old Spice scented good-bye kiss, to work all day at a job he didn't particularly like just so his family would be provided for. He also taught me to love nature, gardening and the outdoors. Every year we went on a family camping trip to a new park. My mother, who was not fond of camping, dutifully participated in these "vacations" because she knew the value of time spent together as a family. My siblings and I loved setting up the tent, gathering firewood, cooking outdoors, swimming and reminiscing about the events of the day around the evening campfire.

Both of my parents excel in what I've named "back porch hospitality". Anyone and everyone who visits or drops by their home is welcomed to come sit and relax on the back porch with them. After being offered iced tea and cookies, my parents are able to easily converse with guests, drawing them into the conversation and showing genuine friendliness and camaraderie.

Love, faithfulness, respect for others, commitment to God and family, caring for others, the love of nature....these are important values that my parents taught me; and I'm so glad they did.

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15 N. Main St  
Wilkes-Barre, PA

Submitted by: Linda  
on Nathan } Schenermann  
Feb. 10, 2011 + André }

RR 2 Box 236  
Dallas, PA 18212  
675-4301