

## Tributes to Dad

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In honor of father's day, we asked readers to write about an overlooked member of the homeschooling team: dad.

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*From Laura Heitzer*

"Code Blue! Code Blue!" squawked the emergency room loudspeaker as doctors and nurses rushed in. I lay as though an onlooker, helplessly watching the drama unfolding in my cubicle, too weak to move, overcome with nausea as my blood pressure dropped drastically. "60 over 40!" called a nurse as she read the figures off the monitor. "That's not good," I thought impassively. "If that doctor doesn't stop the bleeding, I'll be dead in three minutes." With only a moment to think of my husband and four children, I breathed a silent prayer before lapsing into unconsciousness.

Startled by the unexpected flashback, I returned to the present task at hand. Our last pregnancy had ended in a devastating miscarriage that had almost cost me my life; moreover, we had also suffered a miscarriage, though far less drastic, six months prior to that. Shaken by these two experiences, we were thankful for the four children with whom we had already been blessed. It had taken two more years of prayerful consideration to reach the point we were at now.

I picked up the phone and dialed my husband's cell number. I knew he was at a major regional hospital, surrounded by the dismantled pieces of a CAT scanner for which he had received an emergency call just that morning -- the hospital had a full schedule of patients to scan that day. As an electrical engineer for a major medical systems corporation, he was under a lot of time pressure to get that system back up and working as soon as possible. I knew he would want to know, but I wouldn't bother him with my fears.

"It's positive," I announced cheerily when he answered the phone.

"How are you feeling?" he asked quietly.

Suddenly the words tumbled out. "Denny, I knew this was going to be scary, but I was not prepared for the absolute terror I am feeling right now."

"I'll be right there," he replied. To this day, I have no idea who put that CAT scanner back together again -- I only know it wasn't him!

At home, Denny gently held me as, after two miscarriages in a row, I tearfully expressed my fears and my total loss of confidence in my own body. "I can't carry this baby to term -- I may as well try to climb Mt. Everest! I can't go through nine months like this!"

Gently, calmly, Denny responded: "You don't have to go through nine months -- you only have to go through one day, today. I want you to get as much rest as you can. We are going to go through this pregnancy together, one day at a time." Stunned, I looked into his eyes. Who was this man that I knew so well, and where did he get this quiet strength and wisdom? I knew where, and I was awestruck.

Nine months later I looked gratefully into his eyes as, elated, he bent over my bed in the birthing suite, our youngest son in his arms, and gently said, "Thank you for my son."

Together we went through three more high risk pregnancies, and we have now been homeschooling our eight blessings for the past twenty-two years.

Our family would never be where we are today without Denny's wisdom, guidance, and leadership. I am so thankful for his willingness to carry the whole burden of financial responsibility for our family, enabling me to homeschool full time for the past twenty-two years. I don't think that many of us homeschooling Moms who have been out of the work force for years realize just how brutal and cutthroat the current atmosphere of today's workplace has become for our husbands, who must face this day in and day out.

Often Denny has to work long hours because of the nature of his job, but somehow he is always there just when I need him most! Frequently, on those occasional days when our students are noisy and restless and I am struggling to hold their attention in a group class, we hear the door to the schoolroom quietly open and close as my husband silently slips in and takes a seat. He doesn't say a word -- he doesn't have to. All eyes turn toward him as our students whisper to one another, "It's the principal!" Quiet and order are suddenly restored and our class proceeds as planned, thanks to the presence of a husband who cared enough to step in just when I needed him! Denny's strengths complement my weaknesses. Last week the children and I were doing a science experiment in the dining room designed to demonstrate the differences between a CD disc and a DVD disc. As we struggled with the experiment, my husband, who was in the living room completing some paperwork for his job, quietly stepped in and assumed leadership. He is an expert in complex computer systems due to the nature of his work, and he held our students absolutely spellbound for an hour at his fascinating explanations and demonstrations of how CD's and DVD's work and how they differ. If I, or one of our students, had presented the limited information provided in the experiment, we would not have derived nearly as much benefit! Often my husband can make mathematical principles perfectly clear to an older teen who is struggling with a particular concept in his or her more advanced math text after I have attempted to explain the same concept several times, to no avail!

Frequently Denny is not home during our Bible and character-training studies after breakfast in the mornings due to an unexpected emergency call on the hospital equipment for which he is responsible. On the days when he is home, however, he naturally assumes leadership shortly after I begin the study, picking up wherever we are and imparting wisdom and encouragement.

When Denny comes home after a demanding day at work, he often spends time individually with several of our children during the course of the evening on an art or computer project, or just "shooting the breeze." Our teenage daughters especially seem to thrive on time spent with him; I believe a father imparts to teenage daughters a wisdom

and a sense of their own worth and infinite value in a special way that a mother cannot. Recently Denny has been spending a lot of time with our 17-year-old son building a fully-functional 18th Century musket from a kit our son purchased from an historical gun shop for his use as a Native American reenactor during the French and Indian War period. In the process, Denny is patiently teaching him how to use a variety of tools and how to work with wood and steel. Often Denny will take one of our sons with him to change the oil in our car or to repair something around the house, invaluable training for their future roles as husbands and fathers in their own right. Denny keeps appliances in good repair around the house, at the same time teaching our sons how to replace, install, and repair them. As a father, he is making indispensable contributions to both our sons and daughters which will serve them well as they enter young adulthood, and for this I am very grateful.

After thirty years, I am still awestruck at the most unexpected moments by Denny' s wisdom, his strength, his courage, his calmness in the face of adversity. You would think I would have learned by now. You see, he's my hero. He's my husband.

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*From Suzanne Troll*

Our family thinks homeschooling without the help and support of Dad would be extremely difficult. The best part is that he enjoys sharing his gifts and talents with the family. In essence, when you give, you get back much more. There is no greater love than to lay your life down for someone. This is what he does every day of his life.

Dad has used his organized, engineering qualities to teach everything from original, intricate, symmetrical snowflakes to painting acrylic masterpieces that Mom has entered into area contests.

The heart of a good education blossoms with the planting of balance and providing that good model of work and play with the family. Dad knows how to read stories at night, exercise, dissect a starfish, play checkers and chess, and still have time and energy to muster up a good wrestling match on the floor with the kids. If some kids need help with Mom, he watches the other kids and even will make dinner, give baths, and change diapers. Of course he's tired while doing some of this, but he does it anyway.

As things break around the house, his patience shines as he teaches everyday, useful skills.

The kids' favorite is when they say something like, " A ton of snow fell!" and Dad has them estimate how much snow fell -- with his guidance, of course. The kids have to be careful about asking a question such as, "How old will you be when I'm 17?" Inevitably, they need to figure it out. Since Dad has that great engineering, problem-solving mind, algebra, trig, calculus, mind-puzzles, and the like always make their way to the surface. He is strict yet fair and always brings humor into a situation.

He encourages our faith on Sundays and everyday through teachings and example. Piano, computer, nursing home visit, experiments on sinking and floating, field trips, and discussing character and proper behavior, are just a small part of what he helps with. When Mom is pregnant or on bed rest or just tired, he will take the kids to piano lessons, sport games, play

practice, trips to DuBois to see friends, a special Veteran's night, or a trip to Ohio to see family.

Overall, he knows what F-A-M-I-L-Y is -- forget about me, I love you. Thank you, husband and father, for your contagious confidence; humor; positive attitude in challenging times; rich work ethic; easygoing nature; love that always puts your family before yourself; endless hours of playing, listening, teaching, and being patient; and most importantly, sharing your life and making others better because of it.

We never had to ask for a rock of unshakable faith because God's grace is in you. Thank you for everything from cleaning up the vomit of a sick child to encouragement. Thanks, Dad and husband. Love, Mom, Catherine, Charles, Christopher, Christine, Caroline, and baby-on-the-way

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*Ellen Stewart of Johnstown, PA*

When I married my husband over twenty five years ago, I had faith that he was a good man and would become a fine husband. I was right. What I didn't know was that he would also become a sensitive, compassionate, giving father.

We have an unusual family. Five of our seven children have special needs. Some are more visible than others. Learning disabilities and attention deficits tend to be more hidden and therefore evoke less compassion from others. When one of our children has surgery and walks around with bandages all over her face, everyone pats us on the back and gives us waves of encouragement. However, when a child acts years younger than his actual age, our parenting skills tend to fall into question. Even if there are neurological deficits that fuel inappropriate behavior, they can easily be dismissed.

Let me share a little about my husband. He is one of the brightest men I know. He completed college in two years and was enrolled directly into medical school through an accelerated program. He is a determined, diligent worker who sets his hand to the plow and keeps on going. He works in an emergency department where the number of patients is rapidly rising and his pay is not. Therefore, he works harder than ever to simply maintain a family of nine people.

A few years ago, I looked much like Phyllis Diller after I had tried to pull out my hair. My son, Ryan, had just stepped on my last nerve and literally, I was afraid that I could hurt him. I angrily marched by my husband's desk and told him I had a job for him to do. He needed to decide where Ryan was going to go to school because I had simply had it. I couldn't take it anymore. I am as much a fighter as my husband, and to admit failure was one of the most difficult things I had ever had to do. I had failed Ryan.

James thought long and hard about the situation then decided that he would take Ryan on as a student. "Putting your hand in a blender might be more enjoyable," I thought to myself. Not a kind thing, I know, but that was where I was at the time.

In addition to ADHD, Ryan also has an autism spectrum disorder. He is very rigid, literal, and concrete. In addition to that, he is a teenager with testosterone oozing out of his skin. His social skills are pretty limited and having several siblings ignites his passions at times.

Most days I will walk into see James and find him laboriously explaining math problems to Ryan. Ryan couldn't grasp the meaning of "x" and "y". I listened to James explain it in this way:

Ryan, the 'x' is like Frodo and the ring in *The Lord of the Rings*. The number added to it is the Nazgul. First you gotta get the Nazgul on the other side of the equation in order to separate the Fellowship from the enemy. Then you can break up the Fellowship, leaving Frodo and the ring on one side of the equation, and send the Fellowship to the other side to fight the Nazgul.

Stupefied, my mouth gaped open and I thought, "This man is amazing! How was he able to connect to Ryan's understanding, make it interesting to him, and explain the meaning of isolating the 'x' variable, all at the same time?"

I guess it is because he loves Ryan. I love him, too, but I was at the end of my rope. This man showed me an example of love in a method that literally takes him hours every single day working one-on-one with Ryan. Ryan actually completed the first level of Algebra this year. That is almost as miraculous to me as the Red Sea parting. You have to know Ryan.

I wish you could know my husband, too. A few years ago he decided he thought we should have another child. He approached me with the idea, and my heart sank. I was tired! I worked from when my eyes opened to when they shut. How in the world could we adopt another child?

"Okay, James. Listen to me. I think we've done enough. I don't want another child. I am exhausted. However, I will leave the door open. If God tells me to adopt another child, I will." I meant it.

Two weeks passed and I was looking through a magazine from Bethany Adoptions Services which we usually refer to as "The Baby Catalog." I usually look at the little children without any hope, feel badly, close the magazine, and go on with my life. This time it was different. I looked at a picture of a dear little eight-year-old, hearing impaired girl and the Lord whispered, "This is your daughter."

*China*. I said I would never adopt from China, or adopt an older child. She was hearing impaired. Oh well. This was the child we were to have as our very own.

We completed the adoption process (a very rigorous and demanding process) and flew to China to receive Christy Su Chun Lei as our own daughter. She was so brave when we first held her. I began to cry, and then she did, as well. She had American friends who would take her home on the weekends. They had moved away a year ago and she was afraid she would never see them again. We were told that was the reason for her tears. Nobody would tell us who these people were or how to contact them.

Miracles do happen. We were able to make a connection with Sue and Eddie Turrentine. They were the nameless people who had loved Christy. We had given our email address to a worker and pleaded that if the couple ever returned, to give them the information. Months later they did return to visit Christy, only to find her missing. Nobody would share where she had gone. However, one willing worker slipped a little piece of paper into their hands. They contacted us, then came for a visit. Miraculous.

So is my husband. Christy is just learning English. She is just learning Chinese, too! She didn't have a language when we brought her home from China. She would have been left abandoned, a little street girl, with no prospects. She would have been sterilized and without family or friends.

My husband's willingness to go to a foreign land, go even deeper into debt, and bring home a handicapped child makes him a hero in my eyes. He was willing to save her life. He was willing to adopt all seven of the children, then spend the rest of his life pouring himself into their lives to give them a future, and a hope.

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*From Eleanor Joyce and kids Andrew, Lauren, Erin and Megan* It's what he DOESN'T do that makes this homeschooling Dad special. He doesn't complain when he gets home from work and finds a science experiment on the kitchen table where the dinner should be. In fact, he doesn't hesitate to roll up his sleeves and join in, or else get dinner started.

He doesn't stress about his income being spent on curriculum or educational opportunities. He doesn't waver from his role as husband, father, and leader of the family. He doesn't resent the responsibility of providing for our needs, and doesn't doubt the value of a stay-at-home, homeschooling mother.

He doesn't like to miss an adventure or learning experience, and doesn't think twice about taking the family along whenever and wherever he can. He doesn't ever lose his temper and doesn't seem to mind the noise and chaos that can accompany four offspring and two dogs!

He doesn't hesitate to cut loose with a hearty, familiar laugh; the one that we can hear from the basement to the upstairs bedrooms. He doesn't forget what it's like to be a kid and how to act like one! He doesn't mind stepping over a project in progress to get to the couch, and doesn't get rattled by electric guitar practice at challenging decibel levels. Instead, he sometimes picks up his own guitar and joins the "jammin."

We take for granted all these things that he doesn't do, until an event like Father's Day reminds us to stop and think about it. There's one thing that we hope he doesn't ever do, and that is change. We love him exactly the way he is!

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*From Beverly Gray of Lancaster, PA*

I wish there were words to express adequately how grateful I am for my husband Clark's support and help as we homeschooled our 4 children over these last 20 years. In two years, our youngest will graduate from high school. Few homeschooling dads have had to do all that Clark has done. My degenerative eye condition, which causes progressive vision loss, has presented us with unique challenges.

I remember our excitement as we picked out curriculum and attended seminars in preparation for our first year of homeschooling our oldest child for kindergarten. Clark has continued to show that same kind of caring and interest throughout these years. I cherish all the times of preparing together. Since I could not drive, or find my way alone among the crowded booths, the homeschool conventions were an annual date for us.

The fact that I cannot drive has placed great demands on him. Still, he has never complained. He has shown a true spirit of servanthood. He has chauffeured the children to activities and doctor's appointments, and has run endless errands.

Clark has been responsible, to a great degree, for the strong emphasis on good writing in our homeschool program. Starting in the third grade, he directed the writing of a yearly research paper. This included a bibliography, outline, and quotes. The paper was to be as many pages in length as the grade the child was in. While he could not direct all the steps along the way, he always helped with the final proofreading. There are many other things he has taken care of, like paying all the bills and managing the mail. To describe it all would take more space than I have.

There have been many times I have felt discouraged. I have entertained thoughts that a blind mom has no business homeschooling her children. But Clark has always believed in me and has always encouraged me. He has felt very strongly that this choice to homeschool was the best for us and our children. I couldn't have done it without his 100% support.

So, Honey, I thank you with all my heart. I am so happy to be your partner in life. I thank God for you every day. Thanks for giving me the gift of partnering in our children's education. I love you.

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*From Pamela Cockley*

Not too long ago, our family sat down to dinner with a king. It was Mesopotamia Night at our house, and the kids and I had gotten together a meal that simulated (loosely) an ancient Assyrian menu. There were some appropriate table decorations, bowls instead of plates, no silverware, and whatever else we could come up with to make the evening a bit authentic as well as fun. Then someone had the brilliant idea that Dad should be King Ashurbanipal of Assyria at our feast.

Things took off from there; the kids made a stylish Mesopotamian crown and cardboard bracelets, found some appropriate earrings, and draped their father in a bed sheet.

The great thing about all of this was that their father was willing to play his part. He was willing to eat dinner in a floral bed sheet and sandals. He was willing to act



condescendingly gracious when grapes and pickled grasshoppers (sweet gherkins) were served to him on a platter by a giggling "servant." He was willing to be amused by the evening's entertainment that had been prepared "especially in honor of the king." I think he did all this because the guy is a genuine homeschool dad!

Dads can be such a great asset to the homeschooling program. In most families that I've talked with, Mom is the "teacher" and Dad is the designated "principal." As the authority figure in the home, he gets called upon to back up the teacher and deal with the really tough things, whether they be issues of discipline, final curriculum choices, or priority-setting discussions.

But there can be another side to dads that is almost at the opposite end of the spectrum from being the "big heavy"... dads can be playful!

Fathers can liven things up and make events fun in ways that mothers may never think of. I think this is true partly because they're not so intimately involved in the day-to-day learning and activities, so when they do get a chance to become involved, their presence lends an extra spark of excitement to the occasion. I have seen this over and over, both in our family and in others. I think it's also true because men never quite outgrow that "what-can-I-get-into-now" mischievous quality that we see in our boys. Their rowdier nature, prone to roughhousing and adventure-seeking, brings energy and zest to activities with the kids. This is certainly true of the dad in our home.

My husband is quite busy with his private counseling practice, various ministries, and all the handyman jobs it requires to hold our old home together, but he always manages to rise to the occasion when called upon to be part of some homeschool activity.

He has played many parts in addition to that of King Ashurbanipal at various theme evenings; he thrills the kids with appropriate role-plays on history field trips, he willingly plays games with the kids on Game Night that I suggest but then feel too tired to stay engaged in, and he makes trampoline time into a high-energy adventure. He makes our hikes extra interesting by engaging the kids on topics like types of tree bark, grass-blade whistles, deer tracks, and bird calls, he slops around in the mud on science outings that I have little enthusiasm for, and he enters our son's world as an enthusiastic gun-toting cowboy (among many other things).

Dads like to play!

Unleashed and encouraged, particularly in homeschooling dads, who tend to be much more interested in their children's upbringing than most fathers, these traits can be such a particular blessing to the homeschooling way of life.

Homeschooling offers countless opportunities to make learning memorable, and homeschooling dads, with their unique masculine traits and their uncommon interest in their kids' upbringing, really help make those times special.

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*From Molly Richman Inspektor*



In college, one of the main questions that I was asked about homeschooling was, "Who teaches you, your mom?" My answer was a usually simple yes. It surprises some people to know that my dad was rarely involved directly in my education. Despite my father's doctorate in education, he openly deferred to my mother as a "master teacher." He spent most of his days in the upstairs office, working. He once tried to lead a unit on pendulums, but all I really remember of that was counting the swings of a paper clip on a string.

Yet as I read these tributes to fathers, I how much my father, too, taught me.

Because of my father, I can't lapse into cynicism, because I know that he devotes his life to a business he believes in passionately. My father felt that homeschooling should be legal for all Pennsylvanians, not just for us, so he spent years lobbying for a law change. More recently, my father unearthed a tax loophole that aggravates the trade deficit, and he drove to Washington, DC to explain it to his representative. I can't justify passivity, because my father is active.

It may also surprise people to learn that my father can be hilarious. When my older brothers were little, he bought a monkey puppet at a folk festival, and so arose the tradition of "Monkey Stories," Curious George rip-offs about a mischievous monkey and his owner, John. Our favorite story was of Monkey's backpacking trip, when he saved weight by disposing of tent poles, canned food and first-aid kits along the trail as he hiked. We would ask for this story around the campfires of our dad-only backpacking trips. Because of my father, I grew to love storytelling. I came up with my own Curious George rip-off, about a monkey named Toodledoo who was obsessed with the color green. I also enjoy a trek up a good hill.

My father can surprise others with his stubborn, competitive streak. When I was little, he led our family in competitive running, so I suppose you could say he was the gym teacher. He would pound out loop after loop of a running trail around our house, spurring me on to train for 5K races. Last year, I convinced my father to run a marathon with me. We trained through January snowstorms that made me jealous of the glasses shielding his eyes and through hot July days when we went through bottle after bottle of frozen Gatorade, and this time I spurred him on. In September, we finished a marathon together (or at least, we stuck together for 21 miles until I left him behind in the final five), even though my father had worn himself out the week before in one of the aforementioned hikes along rocky paths through torrential downpour. I could never keep up with him when I was little, and at some level it scares me that we run at about the same speed now □ not that I'd ever let him win.

Sometimes, my father surprises even me. From time to time, he took over the bedtime read-aloud ritual from my mother, and once he read aloud the entire Little House Series. When we reached the scene in which "Pa" plays the fiddle to Laura on the night before her wedding, my father's voice became rough. He cleared his throat. He tried to finish the sentence but could not.

Then he went downstairs and got his own fiddle, and soothed us to sleep with a waltz.