

# The greatest privilege of a lifetime

**When the month of June rolls along, there is one day that stands out: Father's Day.**

I am one of the fortunate sons who had a caring father. He drives me nuts, but he is mine.

In the nursery and greenhouse industry, I see many fathers who should be the leading example to a nation. Honestly, when I thought about naming a few who stand out, I realized it would take the entire space of this column just to list a fraction of them.

I feel that the gift that my wife, Jennifer, gave me is the greatest role and honor of my lifetime — being a father of Andrea Margaret and Carolyn Rose.

## The role of the father is critical

It was a surprise to me that the science around the impact of a father is a recent phenomenon. There is no question that parenting styles matter. They impact a child's well-being long into the future.

Traditionally, parenting advice centered on the mother's role. Dads were expected to contribute just a few good stories and some hard-earned lessons. But it turns out that according to more recent research, fathers are far more valuable than that, and ideally, more involved.

It's true that fathers are no longer the sole breadwinner in most families. The stats bear this out. Five decades ago, dads were sole breadwinners in 50% of families. These days, it's 27%. But as stats tell us, a father's contribution is about a lot more than money.

Studies show that children with involved fathers, stepdads or father figures are less likely to get in trouble with the law. They will have a higher IQ, tend to do better in school, and are more likely to hold a job.

Unfortunately, a third of U.S. children live in a home without their birth father. This typically has a negative impact. Some 71% of high school dropouts come from a fatherless home, and girls from those homes are seven times more likely to become pregnant. These kids are four times more likely to live in poverty or have behavioral problems, and two times

more likely to be obese or abuse drugs.

Not to put pressure on anyone, but the "father effect" is a real thing.

## I am a product of an involved father

I am the first to acknowledge my good fortune of having a nurturing and caring father. While my personality more closely reflects my mother, I am a physical replica of my emotive father. He is also an identical twin. Now that I am older, I get more comments about being my dad's brother — got to say, that hurts! Then I look in the mirror and concede the point.

He was a clear favorite of my gaggle of friends growing up in South Eugene. He was a coach in baseball, a vocal supporter in football and basketball, and a constant attendee of years of band concerts.

He was an advocate for me in school when I firmly rejected the teacher during a geography lesson on the United States. My father got a note that "Jeffrey" was dug in about Cincinnati, Ohio and Atlanta, Georgia being in the West. My father thought about it and realized I was not thick in the head. Rather, I was talking about baseball's National League West at the time, where my beloved Cincinnati Reds competed against with my dad's favorite team, the Los Angeles Dodgers.

But what stands out about my father is the unquestioned love he has for me and my brother. Saturdays at Oregon football games in Eugene were part of my upbringing. Breakfast for dinner was made fun of without a hint that the budget for the month was tight and we were out of money. Sunday family dinner was not only a command performance but something that enveloped friends in Eugene through college.

Dad was devastated by the unfathomable suicide of my middle brother, Roger, 16 years ago. A death in the family reveals a lot, and the Stone family unit is fiercely close.

## Being a dad

I do not try to hide my love for my girls. They have my fair complexion and coloring, but their mother's looks (thank



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goodness). They are awesome. Being a father is the greatest privilege in the world. I had a tremendous role model of involvement and structure in my father, Mike, and have followed his example as best I could.

I was the fifth generation of all men in my family. The assumption was that my brother, Craig, and I would also have boys — so much so, that when Jennifer was ready to deliver our first child, all the clothes given to us were blue!

Nope. We had girls, so the all-boy streak ended. I was at a loss, so I asked my father-in-law, Ed Satalino, for any tips. To paraphrase it in a suitable manner, he said, "Get ready to not understand a damn thing that is going on, protect Jennifer from their wrath during puberty, be there for them, and good luck." This was good advice.

I have been to every practice, ballgame, round of golf, choir concert, and parent-teacher conference that came down the road. I am retentive, and one of my best friends saw our family calendar. It's quite a sight — all the activities (color-coded of course) that resemble a paint-by-numbers sheet, and a logistics gameplan. He asked how I do it.

My simple answer was that I have one shot to be a good father and that is exactly what I intend to do. I tell my girls I love them every day. Eyes get rolled, snarky comments about I am nothing but a mouth-breathing grunter come my way, and I take it all in stride.

The best thing that has ever happened to me is being a father. Happy Father's Day, everyone! ☺