

## Heeding a father's advice

By Peg DeMarco - Special to The News Herald | Posted: Friday, June 17, 2016 4:34 pm

According to Wikipedia, Father's Day, a celebration honoring fathers, paternal bonds, and the influence of fathers in society, began in 1907 after a memorial service was held for a large group of men who died in a mining accident in Monongah, West Virginia. In 1909, Sonora Dodd of Spokane, Washington, proposed that fathers needed to be honored every year, like mothers, and the tradition stuck with the third Sunday in the month of June as its official day.

My Dad has been gone for more than 15 years, but his strong influence and guidance are felt by me even today.

He wasn't thrilled when I turned down a college scholarship to go to work in an office at 17 and unhappier still when I left a secure job and joined the Peace Corps a couple of years later. He probably threw his hands up in the air when Mom broke the news that I was leaving home for a two-year tour halfway around the world in West Africa.

What he didn't realize was that something he had told me when I was around 12 years old had influenced almost every decision I made after that — good, bad or somewhere in between.

We were having a rare father/daughter talk because he worked the graveyard shift in a machine shop and slept most of the day, so talks with Dad were sporadic and far between. I was a typical teenager with a mad crush on Frankie Avalon and just happened to have a few minutes before starting homework.

"Did you ever regret not doing something, Dad?"

He thought for a few minutes as he whirled the spaghetti around in his fork in preparation for the next bite. Instead, he put the fork down and looked into my eyes.

"Yeah," he said with a hint of wistfulness, "there was one time when I may have made a huge mistake."



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My father admitting that he might have made a mistake? This intrigued me because he didn't let that side of himself appear very often in front of his kids.

"After we moved from Queens to Long Island, my company was looking for workers who would relocate to California."

"California?" I exclaimed. "Oh, wow, Dad!"

"Un-huh," he said with a smile. "California was booming in the '60's."

"You mean we could have been in Hollywood about now?"

"Well, I'm not sure about Hollywood, Peg, but I turned the job down."

"Why?"

He thought for a few minutes. "I suppose I was afraid to take the chance because I had a family to think about and California was so darn far away. We would have had to leave all of your mother's brothers and sister and your grandmother and grandfather behind. We had no one in California. Turns out the company had made the right choice and I may have made the wrong one. The business boomed in its new western location and, as a result, there were cutbacks on the east coast. My job was okay, but a lot of my friends who didn't relocate lost their jobs."

Suddenly, I felt guilty. My silly question had stirred up unpleasant memories and had made him sad and all I had wanted was a couple of minutes with him.

"It's okay, Dad, I said quickly. "California isn't so great. There's a lot of earthquakes out there and smog."

He smiled. "What I mean is that sometimes it's a good idea to take a chance even if it's scary and you're teetering on whether to do it or not. Life is like being on a merry-go-round and once in a while you pass by a whole bunch of rings. You could play it safe, stay on the merry-go-round, or you could reach for a ring and get off. Don't be afraid to take a chance even if you know it's going to be a tough ride."

"Yeah, sure, Dad," I said, getting up from the table when he began eating again. "I'll let you finish your dinner now."

That bit of advice helped me make many decisions, some good, some not so good. But I was never afraid to reach for a ring.

Thank you, Dad.

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