

What I Learned From Watching My Dad - Happy Father's Day

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As a child, Mondays were special days because it meant pancakes for breakfast made by my dad. Working as hospital chaplain and the pastor of a Mennonite congregation kept my father quite busy. Mondays were his days off and he developed a whole-wheat flour recipe that he mixed up for us the first school day of each week.

Served with butter and warmed syrup, we enjoyed this weekly treat and it became part of our family tradition. And if there were some left over, we might have them that evening with some vanilla ice cream sandwiched inside. As adults, my siblings and I would often request pancakes for breakfast when we visited.

As we are approaching Father's Day, I have been reflecting on the influence of my father on my life. Every summer, my dad helped my mom pack us in the car for a day trip to the Oregon coast or a camping trip to Honeyman State Park where we collected sticks and sea shells, built sandcastles and rode the dune buggy on the Oregon Dunes. My dad helped me appreciate the wonders of nature.

Later when we moved to Kansas, we spent several summers in the Ozarks. I remember once, we were expecting to hear some local musicians perform on the courthouse steps. However, when we arrived at the empty town square, it became clear that we had outdated information.

My dad asked around and eventually found some local musicians gathering nearby to play for their own entertainment. Being an awkward teenager, I am pretty sure I was lobbying for going straight back to our campsite. But soon we found ourselves seated in some battered folding chairs enjoying the music from a dulcimer, some fiddles, a banjo, a few guitars, a hammered dulcimer and even a couple of cloggers (a type of folk dance.),

On one of our visits to the Arkansas Ozarks, my dad asked around about how to make a dulcimer and before we headed home, he had purchased plans to build one. I am the proud owner of one of his 'limited editions.' From my dad, I learned the importance of curiosity and not letting shyness get in the way of experiencing life.

From the very beginning of my life, I was influenced by the lifestyle choices of both my father and mother. I was born in Mathis, a small Texas town near Corpus Christi in a maternity hospital built by volunteers from the Mennonite Church. As the directors of the program, my parents provided leadership, support and meals eaten around a ping-pong table.

Through the Mennonite Voluntary Service unit, the local community benefited from having access to the maternity hospital, a kindergarten to help children learn English before starting elementary school, cooking and basketball after school clubs, adult education and more. MVS, started in 1944 as a practical peaceful alternative to serving in the military, continues until today as a way for volunteers make a 1-2 year commitment to make a difference.

I find the words of American writer Clarence Budington Kelland sum up well what I learned from watching my dad, Millard E. Osborne. "My father didn't tell me how to life; he lived, and let me watch him do it."

Thanks, Dad and Happy Father's Day.