

It's Not Too Late For Lessons From Dad
By Virginia Dante Perry, Esquire

I grew up in a "broken home." My parents divorced in 1953, when everyone was not doing it. I was the only kid in my class all the way through public school whose parents were divorced. It was hard on me and it hurt a lot. I got tired of having to explain to other people about my family or lack of one. There were no books on blended families when I was growing up. "Parent Trap" with Haley Mills was my favorite movie and my favorite dream was for my family to get back together. This never happened for me. My family tree was quirky and complicated with siblings from four different marriages, including not only half siblings but step siblings, as well. I resented the fact that some of my siblings were able to enjoy having him in the household, a benefit that I was denied. I also resented the fact that those children and their children seemed closer to him than I and mine were. Through time and the Grace of God, I have been able to release the hurt and resentment and come to terms with it. As a divorce lawyer, I identify most with the children of divorce. This allows me to advocate with genuine passion for what I believe to be in their best interests.

Because my dad was not around much, I did not really get to know him, until I was grown. You might think that this would limit his influence in my life and you would be wrong. My dad is a deeply religious person, although he doesn't wear his faith on his sleeve or carry it like a banner or protest sign. He isn't in your face about it nor is he highly evangelical in his approach. Instead he walks his faith on a daily basis and lives it in the myriad of tiny details. He is a good man and a great guy. He works hard to support his family. Supporting his family and providing for them is the way that he shows his love and commitment. By support, I mean not only financially but spiritually and emotionally, as well. My dad has always encouraged me to do my best and to be my best. He has always told me that whatever I can conceive and believe I can achieve. He has always accepted me just as I am. He has demonstrated the knack for accepting each of his children just as they are without comparing them or trying to make them over into something else. He hasn't held any of our mistakes or shortcomings against us. He has demonstrated that tolerance and acceptance are part of family life. People are fallible and will make mistakes, even get in trouble. Those mistakes and troubles do not negate the family connection. Tolerance and acceptance of others are other lessons I learned from him.

I also learned from his work ethic. He doesn't do things half way; if he does it, he does it all the way. Somewhere I have an old spatula with the paint scrubbed off the handle. According to my mother, my dad scrubbed the paint off! He worked his way through Virginia Tech, selling sandwiches and other necessities to his fellow students. He remains active in the real estate business, despite being over 80 years old; he is always emailing me about his latest deal or prospective sale. I am like my dad in this respect. My goal is to be the best in my field, to do what I do with excellence.

Despite having been divorced multiple times, my dad believes strongly in family and the importance of strong family ties. He helped me care for my mom in her later years, volunteering to drive her around for her errands when she was no longer able to drive. I am extremely grateful both to my dad and to his current wife who allowed him the freedom to help me in this very important and personal way. Some of my favorite times now are when the extended family, dad's

children, grand children and great grand children, get together at my dad's house for food and fellowship.

My dad, a real estate broker, is a consummate salesman; I like to say he could sell long ears to a mule. He taught me that whatever you do involves selling, whether it is selling yourself to your clients or selling your position to opposing counsel or selling your client's case to the judge or jury. My dad is one of those guys who always sees the glass full; he is always upbeat. Whatever is going on, he sees the opportunity in the situation. When I would go on job interviews as a young woman not yet sure of myself, I would ask myself how my dad would approach the interview and many times I would adopt his persona for the interview. As a seasoned attorney, I have learned to look for the best in people and to present their best to the court in my arguments in their behalf.

My dad looks at his work in terms of helping others, not in terms of earning a living. He's helped a lot of people reach their goal of home ownership, including people who would not qualify for a bank loan. For me, that is the reason that I became a lawyer: to help people who need help. I have a prayer hanging in my office that speaks of directing the doubtful and instructing the ignorant and of righting wrongs and terminating contentions. My goal is that each person who comes to me seeking advice, counsel or representation will leave edified, encouraged and exhorted to be a better person. Life is an adventure, law is an adventure. My dad taught me to enjoy the journey and to help others along the road. He's still teaching me, encouraging me and lifting me up.

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Virginia Dante Perry is a licensed Virginia attorney and has been actively engaged in the general practice of law with an emphasis on family law and trials for over 30 years. For more information about Virginia Perry, or for additional publications and articles on family law, see the website at <http://www.valawtalk.com>.