

MY FATHER, MY HERO: A FATHER'S DAY TRIBUTE

Growing up in the suburban NorthEast, most of my peers had dads with light hair, light eyes and last names like Smith or Jones or Anderson. My father has dark hair, dark eyes, and a thick Greek accent to go along with his long last name.

There was one time in my life, after being made fun of in school for my aforementioned long last name, that I remember wondering why I didn't have a "regular" dad. At seven years old, I thought a "regular" dad wore a suit to work each day, took the train into Manhattan, played golf and took the family skiing – oh, and he had no accent at all. But that thought quickly vanished and has never returned, because my father is a hero to me for all he has overcome and all he has accomplished. And what my dad has done for me and given to me is more than I could have dreamed of back when I was seven – and even more than I could hope for today.

My father came to America from Greece in 1969 after marrying my New York-raised mother of French and Italian descent. Together, they worked hard, and promised to fulfill their dreams – one of which was to have me. Growing up in turbulent times in Europe, my dad swore at a young age that he would move to America and live the American Dream. He wanted to make a good life for my mother and me - a better one than he had. With my mom, he has achieved his goal and in that journey, my father has added such richness and knowledge into my life – more than I can ever truly say.

Here are some examples:

1. **You Can Always Talk to Dad** - Since I was little, my father has always made sure I understood that I could talk to him about anything. Being a girl, sometimes it was easier to go to mom with things, but he always stayed involved. I look back now in laughter, but I remember how embarrassed I was to take my first bra out of the shopping bag to hold it up and show him because he wanted to be part of the moment where his little girl began growing up. Little things like that allow me to go to my dad now with everything from work gripes to money questions to boy advice, and I know that he will try to help me as best as he can, always ready with (very) honest answers and nonjudgmental feedback.
2. **Family Matters** - My daddy's first priority is his family. Everything he does and every thought he has is for our well-being. We keep the family closely knit with frequent visits and daily phone calls and no one can come between the three of us (four if you count the dog).
3. **Work Hard** - I grew up hearing that there is no excuse for not doing your best job and working to constantly be better. Dad taught me that if you work hard, you will be OK - no matter what happens. You will sleep with a clear conscience knowing that you did all you could do, and ultimately, by being true to your values, good things will continue to come your way.
4. **Believe in Yourself** - In order to achieve your dreams, you need to believe that you can accomplish them. Even the slightest bit of self-doubt can throw your goals off track, so keep your head high and believe that you can do anything you set your mind to.
5. **Never Listen to Other People** - While you are believing in yourself, there are sure to be people who will try to discourage or even sabotage you. This is just jealousy on their part, surfacing because you have the strength to pursue your dreams. Naysayers should be ignored. Life is too short to worry about what other people think.
6. **If Someone Tells You No, Ask Someone Else** - My dad, the immigrant, was told "no" by everyone when he first got to America... "no" for jobs, "no" for loans, "no" for everything. But he never gave up and kept asking and found that first person to say "yes" - and that's all it took! He made sure that each time I got knocked down he was there to help me up so I learned that I could eventually get up and do it again all on my own.
7. **Enjoy The Little Things** - My father doesn't need (or like) Rolex watches or elaborate vacations or fancy gadgets. In fact, the things he goes crazy over are the little things – a bird in the backyard, a well-grilled steak, an IMAX movie, even Big Mouth Billy Bass. He can laugh for hours enjoying simple pleasures rather than surround himself in luxuries, and that has helped me to feel fulfilled by the little things in life.
8. **Find Some Zen** - Every Sunday in the warmer weather, my dad works in the garden. We in the house miss him when he's out there in his 80'x 80' retreat, but he gains a lot from it. While he tends to his tomatoes and cultivates his cucumbers, he is also clearing his mind from the constant stress of running a business. He plays with the dog in the backyard and waters his orchard and, if even for one day out of the week, he can escape into his daydreams.

9. **Stand Up For Yourself** - A pacifist, my father is not. One thing that he does not do is let people walk all over him. He has his pride and his honor and he taught me to stand up for myself whenever I have encountered something unjust. He helped to infuse my self-esteem and taught me to speak my mind, while also diplomatically picking my battles.
10. **Love With All of Your Heart** - Sometimes my dad looks at me and tells me how much he loves me and I can feel it just by looking in his eyes. I know that his whole heart is in those three little words and it means so much to me. In turn, I have been able to carry that sort of warmth and sincerity into my other relationships so that I am a true friend, and the people closest to me know how much I care about them. My dad makes sure I never need to question his love for me, for there is no time to leave people guessing about their importance to you.