

Fathers' Day

From the June '99 Port City Pacers PaceLeter

Dear Dad--

I always wanted to be like you. When I was young I tried to please you. I mowed the lawn; I raked the leaves; I chopped the wood. While you beamed proudly behind your paper, your coffee, that 1st, or 3rd, or 30th cigarette of the day.

Then something changed. Your fatal heart attack at 47 shattered my life. I was only 21. Where my path had been set--get a good job, a big house, a nice car--now I was left with a daunting maze of tough decisions. My carefree college life suddenly ended and it was off to work to pay those bills: *Your* mortgage, *your* car payments, food for *your* family.

Dad, you worked so hard to give us a good life. Your daily commutes, those long hours at the office, the work you took home at nights and on weekends were, to you, a small price to pay for your family. You cared about us, but in the end, your hard work and the stress it brought took from us what we cared about most: You.

Eventually I found my way back to school; an athletic scholarship came through to pay the bills. I got my degree. Then went back for another. And another.

You would have been proud. But wanting the best for me you would have questioned my choices. Firmly. "Are you ever going to get a job, son?" And a big house. And a new car... I never made a conscious decision to let go of that brass ring, but in the end I didn't choose your life. I simply chose to live. I am an athlete. As you were. But just as surely as your varsity letter from Tolentine was the end of your athletic days, my varsity letters were the beginning of mine.

I still struggle with that deep-rooted Catholic guilt that compels me to please you, but I've had to betray the life you wanted for me. And I've become less and less like you. Stress kills, and it is not an option for me. When I work, I love what I do. But I choose to do it infrequently, saving my time to do other things I love more. It's a big world, with too many mountains to climb, oceans to swim, and races to be won to be shackled to a job. I live every day like it's my last. Because I know too well that it could be.

But work wasn't the only cause of stress in your world. So your beloved church no longer casts a judging eye on the way I lead my life, and I've moved far away from that pressure cooker of a metropolis that was our home. They say if you can make it in New York you can make it anywhere. But you didn't make it, Dad. And I will.

This may not be the life you wanted for me, but I'm at peace. I'm happy, and I'm healthier than you could ever have been in the life that you chose to live. I don't know where this road will lead me, but I endeavor to stay on it far beyond the 47 years that you toiled on this earth. And I promise to enjoy every minute of it. I will run. I will walk. And I will survive.

Your son,

David

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