

# Gifts from my Dad

by Connie Brisson

I've never written about my Dad.

I've written a lot about how I saw the relationship between myself and my Mom; I think because it was the so significant for me. It's taken almost five decades for me, and her death, to finally appreciate the wonder and grace of that relationship. Maybe it wasn't exactly what I wanted, but still perfect in its own way...

My relationship with my Dad had its own journey too. I don't really remember my Dad when I was young, growing up. In fact, if there weren't a few old black and white photos with the two of us in them, I wouldn't even know for sure that I saw him at all in my younger years.

I'm not going to lie. I don't remember the relationship between my parents being blissful. By the time I was 10 years old, my Dad and Mom moved from owning a farm to a general store in LaCorey, Alberta. Dad didn't love the store (or working there) so he was out on the road all the time, selling Texas Oil for roofs and farm photos, while my Mom took care of the store and us. The few times he was home he was pretty miserable and, if I'm honest, I mostly just resented him.

We really didn't have a relationship until I was in my 20's and they retired in Iron River. I came home from the University of Victoria and my Dad and I had our first really honest conversation. I think I surprised him, and in turn, he surprised me too. Over time, and numerous other soul searching talks, I began to appreciate him.

My Dad was crusty, brilliantly funny, albeit sometimes biting sarcasm and anytime I'm witty or smartly funny, I'm grateful because I definitely got that humor from him.

But more than that, what I loved and appreciated tremendously about my father was his ability, his willingness to "hear" me when we talked. I think that everyone we have significant relationships with, gives us a gift. My Dad's greatest gift to me was his ability to hear whatever I had to say, consider it and then (bless him) often change. My Mom couldn't do that. No matter how hard I tried to communicate with her, she always pretended I'd *never* said a thing. So, it made my Dad's ability to easily do so, so much sweeter.

When I was 30 years old, about to marry Marcel, my Dad wrote me a letter that I never expected. He told me how

happy he was for me, that I finally had a guy like Marcel to love me (after all my earlier, crummy heartbreaks). I still have that letter and no one (ever, in my life) has written me anything more meaningful than that letter from my Dad, probably because it was such a beautiful surprise and gift.

My Dad wasn't perfect and he never pretended to be. But, he was definitely one of my favorite people because he was brutally honest and I got that gift from him too.



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When I was about to get invitro for a baby, of course, I told my parents. Even though I was 36 years old, I wanted their support. In response, my Mom was very stoic (she acted like I said I wanted a divorce, not a baby) and my Dad, after a moment of contemplation, solemnly asked me if having a baby was more important than the career I already had at Telus.

Now, let me explain that my Dad was *always* worried about money, always trying to make sure he had enough money (after growing up poor through the depression, serving in WWII and working very hard his whole life).

But still, I was horrified by his question. And I told him so. I told him that no career and no amount of money could ever compare with a baby. I wanted a baby. I wanted to see what it was like to be pregnant. I wanted to see what it was like to be a mother and to love this little person, this part of me, forever.

My Dad was stunned by my intense reaction. And after just a moment, he told me he was sorry. That was my Dad - that man - with his amazing ability to change instantaneously.

And when my little Gabrielle came, he treated her like gold. No one was more important than her when we came to visit. She sat in HIS chair. HE watched Scooby Doo with her. And I loved him more for every little thing he did for her, for me.

There are people who would judge my Dad harshly. He wasn't a big people person or liked by "everyone." But he was one of the few people in my life who showed me that people could CHANGE. And, it's actually one of the best gifts anyone has ever given me...

Change is difficult, for everyone. But I think that's why we're here, living *this* life. We are all here, right now, trying to be better people. We pick our parents for a reason. The gift comes from realizing what the gifts are...