

25 Father's Days

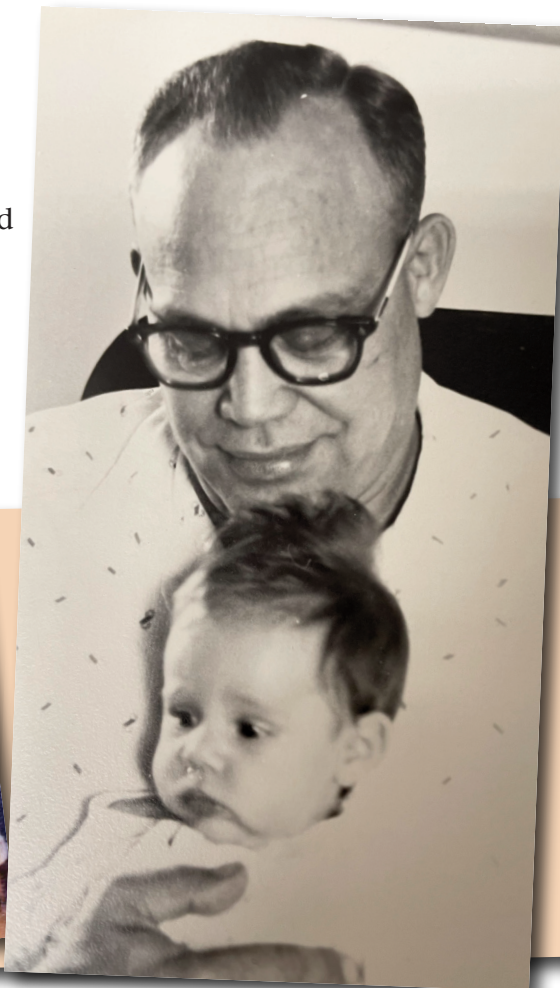
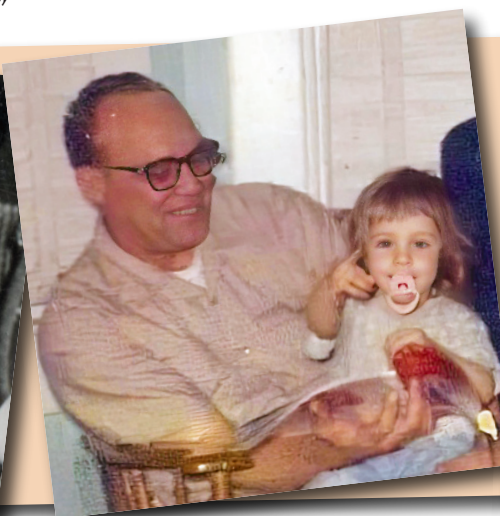
Laura Urista

This year marks the 25th Father's Day since my dad passed away. It's hard for me to imagine he's been gone for a quarter-century. I'm the youngest of five children, and of all of us, I probably had the closest relationship with our dad.

Dad was a "career Navy man,"



when I reached my teens, it felt like Dad became even stricter and more distant. After I left home and went away to college, I was frankly glad to be out from under Dad's "rule," even though the college I attended was strict too, at least in comparison



entering the Navy at age 17, shortly before the United States entered World War 2. He ran a "tight ship" at home and was strict with me and my older siblings. When I was three years old, Dad joined a strict, legalistic church that dramatically impacted all of our lives. Church doctrines and culture further amplified Dad's strict enforcement of rules at home.

As a young girl, I loved to crawl into Daddy's lap and listen to his stories or hear him sing. I was born on Father's Day, and I think we had a special relationship because of that. I was definitely "Daddy's girl." But

with other Southern California colleges in the 1980s.

I knew my dad loved me, but I often wished we could just have a happy, enjoyable conversation without it becoming a lecture filled with judgment, criticism and correction. I remember as a teenager saying once (and ONLY once!), "Okay Dad, I don't need a dissertation." Boy, did I get in trouble for that! I actually didn't even know the meaning of the word "dissertation" at the time, but I'd heard my older brother say it. Of course, he knew not to say it loud enough so Dad could hear!

Unfortunately, Dad started to

develop Alzheimer's disease when I was in my late twenties, just at a time I truly wanted to reconnect with him. But by then, it was too late to have a real conversation. There were snippets, but nothing of real substance. I treasure those precious snippets now.

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about what I would say to my dad if I had just one more chance.

I would like to tell him how much I love him and how proud I am to be his daughter.

I would like to thank him for his examples of loyalty, honesty and faith in God, even when it was terribly difficult to do the right thing.

I'd thank him for his service to our country.

I would thank him for working hard to provide for our family and instilling within me the desire for a good education.

I'd tell him I understand a little better, now that I'm a parent and grandparent, why he was so strict and sometimes tough on us kids.

But most of all, I'd tell him I wish we had gotten to know and understand each other better.

A ROYAL LESSON

My husband and I have been enjoying "The Crown" series on Netflix. Watching the unfolding turmoil and drama of members of the royal family, it deeply struck me that no matter how much wealth, power or fame a person might have, life can be desperately hollow and agonizing without love, acceptance and understanding. You could be living a fairy-tale life, with seemingly every physical blessing anyone could ask for, and yet be miserable without close, loving relationships with God and family. Wise king Solomon seemingly "had it all," but he came to understand this at the end of his life (see Ecclesiastes 2).

If you are blessed to have living parents or grandparents, please make an effort to tell them how

you truly feel about them. Try to let them know how much you love them, even if it's difficult. Tell them before it's too late.

And if you are a parent or grandparent, try to intentionally have enjoyable conversations most of the time. Let your children and grandchildren get to know who you are, but also make an effort to really get to know them, too. Take an interest in what they're excited about and ask them questions to draw them in.



Try to listen and enjoy their thoughts without completely dominating the conversation with your own point of view or stories of how it used to be "back in the day."

Twenty-five Father's Days—a quarter of a century! It's a long time, but it has gone by in a flash. I pray that my experience with my dad will help me do a better job of getting to know my own children and grandchildren. I hope I will be more intentional about letting them know how much I love them. Which reminds me of the final lyric of the song *Do You Love Me?* (from the musical "Fiddler on the Roof"): *Yes, I love you. It doesn't change a thing, but even so, after twenty-five years, it's nice to know.* □

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