

IN PRAISE OF FATHERS

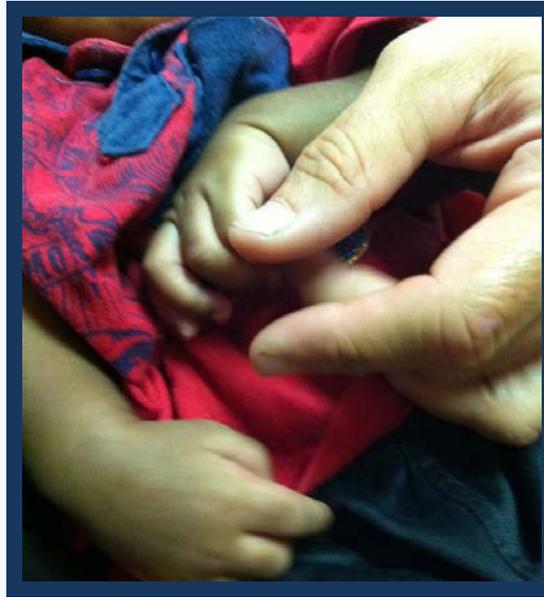
My Dad sold cars. But before you offer me your sympathy, I want you to know that he definitely didn't fit the stereotype of the sleazy "Friendly Frank" who conned people into buying expensive cars far beyond their budgets. Instead he steered them to vehicles that would meet their needs and not get them into debt. His customers appreciated that and repeatedly came back, knowing they could trust him and if there were problems, they could count on him to go to bat for them. He was a man of integrity and modeled that for his family.

Like most men of his era he rarely talked about feelings—it wasn't seen as manly. Yet shortly after his retirement he remarked to me that he was realizing that "the most important thing in life is relationship." And he spent the next 25 years of his retirement nurturing those relationships with his family, friends, and his community. He struggled to say he loved us as frequently as we said it to him, but his "like you" got the message across.

He loved learning and never stopped trying new things, becoming computer literate before some of his children and grandchildren. He found email was a great way of keeping in touch with those out of town and often passed on things he had read. He also tutored children at a local public school. He was a favorite with the boys because he found a way to tie learning into basketball. He was a voracious reader and developed reasoned opinions on current events and he shared them in essays and letters to the editor. He did this so often that he was identified as "a frequent contributor to these pages" when an article or letter would appear. In fact, one of his letters appeared just three days before his death.

I've learned a lot about life from my dad and I'm learning a lot about faith, courage, determination, and bravery from our Guatemalan and African fathers. With only their love of family and trust in God, many risked death to escape from oppressive situations to make new lives for their families. One man I know stood in front of his wife and infant

daughter, protecting them as he faced the point of a gun held by a soldier. "You'll have to shoot me first," he told them. Another told me "In America, you only sleep three hours." He's busy taking his children to school, taking English classes himself and working a full-time job. He sees education as so important that he tells his daughters' teachers to "give them more homework." Some of the men had professional careers before the wars. Now most work in maintenance, always striving toward the day when their English is good enough and they can find jobs in their field. They've done things that would have been unheard of in their native lands, like seeing their babies born or helping with childcare. It's an adjustment, but most are doing it gracefully. Children go everywhere with their families and it's not unusual to see Hispanic toddlers next to their parents in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament at Thursday evening prayer meetings. Several of the adolescents are active with their parents in one of the many music groups.



We've all seen the commercial with the burly man chanting and waving pom-poms, practicing cheers with a young girl. The tag line is "take time to be a dad." Many of our dads seem to do it naturally. Yet not everyone's experience of their father is positive. For some it is defined by pain or absence. For them, God often provides a father's love and care through an uncle, a coach, a teacher, or a clergyman.

At a time when God was often seen as distant and far away, Jesus called God "abba" —"daddy." Jesus invites us to the same kind of intimate relationship with his "abba" that he has. He wants us to know God as a gentle loving father who runs to the lost child and welcomes him home with a party, who knows what we need before we even ask for it, and invites us to be one with him as he is one with Jesus. This sounds like the kind of daddy we might like to spend lazy afternoons with, just hanging out enjoying each other's company.

-Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate