

Fishing for my Father

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Some people say you have to start from the bottom and work your way to the top. But in this person's case, he started at the bottom and stayed at the bottom. He never reached the top, never reached his goals. He wanted badly to achieve his goals, but he had to put all that aside, even his education, to support his family.

Mostly seen with a beer can wrapped tightly in his hand, my father was a very hard-working man. He did everything in his power to make sure his family had whatever they needed, even if it took blood from his body and inflicted pain in return. Before the sun came up, he'd wake the roosters—and sometimes me—as he got ready to go pick peas in the fields. At the end of the day, I'd be playing football with my friends in the yard. Across the hillside my father slowly dragged himself home from a hard day's work. He'd take off the beat up straw hat that protected him from the brutal summer sun. His head was covered with dust from the fields and from the gravel roads, which spread clouds of dust over him as cars passed him.

My father never started out with much, but he always ended up with a family's love. When he finally made it home, I'd leave the football game and give him a welcome-home hug. My mother would have his plate of hot food waiting for him as she kissed him and asked him how his day was.

I was the youngest child in the family. I was there from the start of my life to the end of his. He was the first one to show me how to fish for catfish in the muddy ponds—something he loved to do and I grew to enjoy. I also fished him out of many smelly barrooms full of old drunks who wet themselves when they were unable to go to the bathroom because they were full of beer. We also fished each other out of problems around the house. When there was a minor job to do, like cutting the grass, and we didn't feel like doing it, we just paid someone else to do it and called it a day.

I could not always fish my father out of rough situations. He needed someone stronger than me. Sometimes he felt everything he tried to do went wrong. He also felt alone and unfulfilled. His disappointment covered everything from undignified, backbreaking work as a longshoreman to failing at social events. Once he tried to make my mother happy by giving her a BBQ birthday party. He did everything from buying the cake to cooking all the food such as BBQ chicken, ribs, and shish-kabobs. My brother and I were out at the mall buying my mother a gift while my father was cooking. No one showed up at the party after my father asked people to come. My mother on the other hand, loved him in spite of no one showing up, but because he tried.

In situations like this disappointment, my father never had God to turn to for comfort. In his time of depression, I was unable to help him. He needed someone who could help with all things: God.

I can tell I'm my father's son. Like him, I'm easily disappointed in myself. Recently I've disappointed myself by being out of contact with God. For most of my father's life, he was also distant from God. He stopped praying, going to church, and making God the head of his life. He just got up without praying every day. That is somewhat how I feel right now. But, my father always told me, "Son be the best you can be at whatever it is you want to do or become. I want you to be better than me, not like me, so you can give my grandkids what I was unable to give you." Now when I get to that point where I stop going to church and start feeling lonely, I fall to my knees and pray to my Lord, thinking him for waking me up, keeping me strong and healthy and blessing me with everlasting life.

People who didn't know my father would say that he didn't achieve anything. But, my father achieved the greatest thing there is to achieve in life, and that is LOVE.

I miss him now that he's gone. And sometimes I stray from the things I should be near—like God. I'm also lucky to have a mother who loves me. I really guess the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree.

—James Pernell