

A Tribute to My Father

WHY AM I TAKING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PRAISE MY DAD? Primarily it's because I'm proud of him, but I hope most people can say that about their dads (and moms). And maybe it's because I think there are some lessons in his story.

Morris Gutterman is almost 93 years old now—not Methuselah but doing pretty well by any standard. (And by the way, I also thank him for the longevity gene I hope I've inherited.) His most recent job is the one he still has, as a volunteer at a local elementary school in Clearwater, Fla. He uses LEGOs building blocks to teach a special class in creativity and small-motor skills to gifted children in grades one to five. He's been teaching this class, in small groups, for two hours each day for 15 years. He's received several local Senior Volunteer of the Year awards.

He recently confided to me that his biggest fear in life (other than his and my mother's health) is being fired. So each spring he nervously awaits the end of the school year, when the teacher he reports to says, "I'll see you in August; have a good summer."

The way the kids feel about him can be summed up by a letter he received from one of his graduates this year, a boy named Andy McEwen:

"I have had fun for five years in *gifted*, but my favorite throughout them has been LEGOs. Brick after brick I'd construct something that made the noise of click. I'd see as those quick little gears, the joiners, and the rubber bands, joined together in my hands, to make a miracle happen, a miracle of machinery ... but the only thing that really made it worthwhile ... was the great ol' mister G."

I can't add much to that; it's hard to top the praise of a fifth grader. And almost as important as the benefits that Andy and others like him get from their LEGOs class is what my father gets. As my dad says, the everyday en-

thusiasm of his students makes it all worthwhile.

My father is thinking of retiring at the end of next year when his driver's license has to

be renewed. He isn't sure whether he'll be able to pass the driving test when he hits 94. But then again, he hinted the other day that he may not mind putting in just one more year after that.

Why have I chosen to write this personal story in an actuarial magazine? For several reasons. First, because in the course of actuarial work and looking at lots of numbers, whether they represent lives in a mortality table or millions (or billions) of dollars, it's really the individual people who ultimately benefit from the products and services that many of us actuaries deal with who count. Each has his or her own story;

each is special in his or her own way. This sounds sort of corny, because it is, but it's something we shouldn't forget, either.

Second, everyone can be a teacher or a mentor. Although being a school aide or an Advancing Student Advancement tutor (thanks to the *Actuarial Foundation*), you can always serve as a good mentor at work. You should do something to give back to society. Even giving money to the right cause is OK.

Third, in order to contribute to society, my father doesn't have to be brilliant (although, of course, he is). He has a lot of perseverance, which is necessary and appropriate for his task. And most important, his enthusiasm is catching; the kids know he really enjoys what he's doing. And of course that is very important—doing something that you like to do and getting enriched at the same time!

And last, for your own development, search for the right mentor(s) for your own continuous improvement, regularly re-engineering yourself if necessary. Yes, you can do this even at age 78, when my father started his most recent career. And do like my dad—do something you enjoy!



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