

Sing It Again, Dad
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A man named Red Foley wrote and recorded a song in 1940. Later, the song was also recorded by Elvis Presley, Hank Snow, and Johnny Cash. But the person who sang it the best was my father, the late Vernon Legg. The song? “Old Shep.” The melody sounded as if it had been inspired by one too many visits to a funeral home. The incredibly sad lyrics were about a love between a boy and his dog, Shep. The two had grown up together, and now the dog was dying. The last verse was a tear jerker: “Now old Shep is gone where the good doggies go/No more with Old Shep will I roam/But if dogs have a heaven, there’s one thing I know/Old Shep has a wonderful home.”

I loved that song—because of my father. Dad sang it with such emotion, whether he was singing it a cappella in the car while driving or in the living room while strumming his old guitar. I asked Dad to sing “Old Shep” so much I’m sure it drove the rest of the family crazy. But Dad never complained. He’d just smile at me and say, “Sure Punkin, I’ll sing that song for you.” (Sniff. Sigh. No, I’m not crying. By the way, where are the tissues?)

Dad had a lot to say about a lot of things: like who I date, where I was going, what music I listened to. He’s say witty things like, “What makes you think you can leave the house in that short skirt?” During a time when my mother was ill and I took possession of the kitchen, Dad had more to say: “The only vegetables worth eating were corn, green beans, and potatoes, all of which needed a lot of butter.”

Dad had a lot to say when he taught more Sunday School lessons than I can count, preached a sermon or two when asked, and quoted scriptures like he had just had coffee with Peter, John, and Paul.

My father determined to be a good father because his own father was not. My grandfather divorced my grandmother, abandoned his four children (all under 12) so could marry the woman he had been “dating” for five years. Miraculously, Dad didn’t resent my grandfather. Rather, he prayed for him and tirelessly told him about the saving grace of Jesus. Dad didn’t want to be bitter, he just wanted to be better.

Dad decided to be a good father in spite of the example he had grown up with, in spite of knowing fatherhood would be a difficult, thankless, sacrificial, life-long duty.

Fathers are you aware that you are one of the greatest gifts from God that your children have been given? Do you know the memory of your loving hand on the shoulders of your children will remain with them forever? Do you know you have a special calling? Do you know you are loved? Do you know the words to “Old Shep? It starts out like this...” Now when I was a lad and Old Shep was a pup...”

Happy Father’s Day.