

The bond between dads and kids

Time is the key for fathers and children

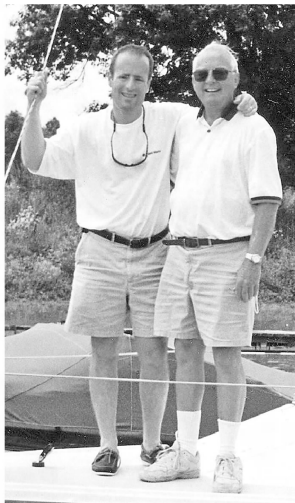
By Scott Anderson

This is my first Father's Day without my father, and so I have joined that unlucky club of celebrants who gather today without a guest of honor. My father, Donald Anderson, passed away last November after a long battle with cancer. He was 74.

My father took an active role in my life and in the lives of my two sisters. He coached our teams, drove us to school, watched our plays, joked with our friends, sent us to college and provided a warm home away from home after we grew up and moved away.

As I tend to my two young daughters, I keep in mind this simple lesson from my father: Nothing can take the place of time with your children.

My dad was a traveling salesman of air conditioning systems, but he worked his schedule around his kids, not the other way around. Now that I'm a father who juggles professional duties with parenthood, I know that he must have passed up certain "business" opportunities in order to put us first.



Scott Anderson and father, Donald.

My dad was there even when I didn't want him there, like the time I played for our ninth-grade basketball team. I am short and not a great shooter — a challenging profile for most any basketball player. It was pretty obvious that I wasn't going to get into a game unless everybody else came down with the flu.

Yet there my dad was, game after game, practice after practice: standing in the shadows, talking with the other dads, waiting outside the locker room so I wouldn't have to ride the after-school activities bus home.

After each of our games, he always had a supporting piece of advice: "You had some great shots in the warm-ups today" and "you really looked ready to play." Looking back, it was very sweet.

When I was in college, I protested the registration for a military draft initiated by then-President Ronald Reagan. It seemed like sacrilege to my dad, a retired captain in

the National Guard, that I was out in front of our post office asking kids to be conscientious objectors.

He and I fought tooth and nail. I argued for my right to protest. He argued that I should be enjoying college and not saving the world just yet. In the end, we called a truce, and he bought me a T-shirt that said "Draft beer, not people." I wish I still had that T-shirt.

My dad made the transition from father to grandfather in typical fashion: by being present whenever he was asked. We spent our last Sunday together, in fact, watching my older daughter play soccer.

My father and I grew closer as he — and, I guess, as I — grew older. Except for my wife, he became my best friend. We bought a sailboat together, as you can see in the accompanying photo, and we learned to sail. We fished together. We barbecued, watched the ball game, hung out. Our relationship became ever more comfortable and secure. He loved me and I loved him — no questions asked.

On this Father's Day, I will visit his grave for the first time. I will say a prayer and tell my dad that I miss him every hour of every day.

And then I'm going to do what I know he would want me to do: spend the rest of the day with my kids.

Scott Anderson lives in Des Peres and owns Physician Risk Services, a small health care consulting firm in Clayton.

He has never met a hot dog he didn't like

By Tim Hollenbach

He will tell you he's a lucky man, and he's not wrong.

He has been blessed with four sons and a daughter, four daughters-in-laws, one son-in-law, 18 grandchildren and the love of a dark-haired, fiery Irish woman to whom he will have been married for 50 years come June 23.

This Father's Day, the best man I've ever known will be 72 years old, and he will start the day with more spirit and energy than a puppy dog. He gets up early, before 7 most mornings, and he wakes up happy. He shares his sunshine with everyone within earshot — reading the newspaper aloud or turning on Sinatra at full volume and singing along with stylized versions of "Summer Wind," "New York, New York" or, on particularly bright mornings, "My Way."

My father is a man of simple tastes. He's never had a bad hot dog. "Ummmmm, good dog," he says without fail. He likes a dry martini in the evening, and if the martini comes with a big stuffed olive, that's good. If the olive is stuffed with one of those little cocktail onions... even better. He has never complained about a meal, never turned back a bottle of wine and never argued that a drink was too strong or too weak.

My dad has problems with pronunciation — *pro-noon-see-a-shuun*, as he might say. The wine Cabernet Sauvignon comes out *cab-er-ay-old-sun*. As in "I'll have a glass of caberray, old son." The citronella candles that keep away insects in the summer are "cannelloni candles." He confuses movie titles and celebrity names. The movie "What About Bob?" becomes "What Ever Happened to Bill?" Redford and Streisand's "The Way We Were" becomes "Yesterday it was Us." Katie Couric is forever Kathy Kerky in his world.

He remembers baseball the way it might have and should have been: when Terry Moore and Red Schoendienst and Stan Musial lived in the neighborhood and played stickball with him and his buddies in the street. He was a member of the knot hole gang and used to take in St. Louis Browns games for free.

He has no known enemies. He has no formal training in any language, not even English, but he can communicate with people of all nationalities. I've seen foreigners come up to him and ask him for travel directions in their native tongue. He then successfully provides the directions in a language that appears to be universal.

In everyday life, he is a gentleman. But on the golf course, he talks while you are swinging, walks in your putting line and even will hit your golf ball, oblivious (or so it seems) to the problems he is causing in your game. Yet his joy for the game, his naiveté about etiquette on the course and his obvious pleasure to be in the company of fellow golfers have him booked up in foursomes all summer.

My father cries a lot quicker than he used to, and angers a lot more slowly. His patience with his grandkids is remarkable, especially from the man who, as a young father, wore out such phrases as "on time means 10 minutes early," "zero tolerance" and "turn that music down."

He truly believes — and he taught me to believe — all the supposedly out-of-date lessons I've ever needed to live a complete life; messages like "Give your employer 10 percent more than they expect," "treat everyone with respect," "anyone can be strong when things are going good; the best people are strong when things aren't so good," "don't be a phony," "always empty your own trash," "nobody works for you; you work together," "you are your brother's keeper" and "you're not smart enough to lie; nobody is."

He did not serve in the military. He's only an average athlete, and he has yet to save anyone from a burning building. All he did was quit high school in his teens to support his widowed mother, helped raise five kids (now all college graduates), stay married to the same woman for 50 years, work his rear-end off in as many as three jobs at one time, pay his bills and try to be the best man he could be. Every day.

He'll tell you that there are plenty of men out there just like him.

But this particular man — this early rising singer with simple tastes and simple lessons, with the energy of a puppy, fractured English, terrible golf etiquette and unlimited patience — is my dad.

And that makes me the luckier man.

Tim Hollenbach of O'Fallon, Ill., is a freelance writer and a regular contributor to the Commentary page.