

A NOTE FROM FATHER PHIL



My dad was one of the finest people I have ever known. One of the best things about him was his elfin spirit, an innocent devilry that complimented his unpretentious piety. Once, when I was running late for a physical exam, he bagged my urine sample and handed it to me as I flew out the door. When the nurse opened the bag at the doctor's office the whole staff started giggling. My dad had taped a small poinsettia plant to the urine sample bottle with a card that wished the staff a Merry Christmas. Hardly a prank appreciated by a self-conscious teenager.

My dad was a salesman and branch manager for the American Chicle Company. It made gum like Dentyne, Trident, and Chiclets. My brother, sister and I were pretty popular because of the gum samples that we could hand out. We were pretty popular with the dentist, too. During the summer months my dad would sometimes take one of us with him to work so that we could have the rare experience of sleeping in a motel room and eating out. When he worked in the Muskegon area he would drop the family off at the beach and later would join us for a swim when his work was finished for the day.

My dad was a decorated World War II vet, but he seldom talked about the war. We did hear about a host family in England, a severe case of frostbite, a bit about the Battle of the Bulge, his date with a French comedienne, and a visit to Lourdes.

My dad was a teacher of sorts. He tried to teach me how to drive both on the road and on the fairway. The first skill was best taught by a professional who had a brake on his side of the car. The latter frustration was beyond my concentration: I couldn't keep my head down. Sliced every time. But, he never stopped trying.

My father faired better teaching me about God. He rarely spoke about religion, he just practiced it. Every Tuesday and Saturday mornings, he made it a point of attending Mass. When his work schedule allowed, he would participate in the Eucharist even more often. He was an usher, a volunteer for the DDF campaign (the precursor to the CSA), and a volunteer for various other church activities. Some of his best friends were priests whom he met growing up. Occasionally, they were guests at our house.

By example, my dad taught me to love the Eucharist, the Church and the priesthood. I owe him my vocation. I realize that many people do not have a good relationship with their father—my relationship with my dad was also strained from time to time. But he, together with my mom, introduced me to God albeit imperfectly. So, needless to say, any Father's Day gifts that I gave him over the years could never equal the one he gave me. His last words to me on the night before he died were, "I love you, Phil." And I believed him.

Happy Father's Day to all those dads whose children believe in them.