

Dear Dad:

For so many of my adult years, I used the phrase “my dad was just doing the best he knew how” in raising his kids and leading our family. I’ve learned that even though that phrase may be right, it didn’t make my life any easier or diminish the pain that I experienced growing up in our home. I see a very sad and lonely kid just flying under the radar screen of life – staying out of the way so I wouldn’t get into trouble. I spent a lot of time alone as a kid. Did you ever connect the dots that maybe I would have enjoyed some time with you? Did you ever take me aside and ask me how I was doing, what I was working on, what I might be struggling with? NEVER. Looking back, it seems that it was all about you and your kingdom – an image that all was perfect at our home.

Mom made you king of the castle – protecting your time and space. You never helped out around the house – the house revolved around you and your authority. Yes, you did the manly things like changing the oil in the car or painting the house, but mom ran the house – she provided the care and you provided the cars. We laugh about the old reclining chair you had – it was protected territory. In reality, it’s a sad statement to the life we had as kids in our home – stay out of your father’s way. He works hard – give him a pass. He served in WWII therefore he can run the household like a boot camp. Give me a break – where was the love?

You ran our home like the military – do as I say and that’s an order. Everything was about accomplishment – and usually you never said – great job! It was always, “you can do better”. What we heard was “you’re not good enough”. How many times did we have to get up early and shovel the walks only to be told “it’s not good enough, go do it again”. Mow the grass – do it again – it’s not good enough. You made the football team – why aren’t you starting?

I can’t remember you ever saying to me “nice job son, I’m really proud of you.” What would have been so hard to celebrate my successes? Why was my life – just not good enough – why didn’t I measure up? Did you really think that keeping someone down (rightfully or not) was a way to bring out the best? Did the military convey this? As a parent myself, I can’t imagine not encouraging my own kids and telling them how proud I am of them. Am I perfect – no way!

What’s really sad about my childhood is that I feared you. The words “wait till your father comes home” still ring in my ears – those words were always a negative for me. It always meant something bad – grounding, spanking, yelling. I did not look forward to you coming home.

Dad, today I am saying goodbye to the patterns you set for me and our family. I reject your style of leadership and I reject how you showed love – through power and authority. I reject how you made mom do everything – work, take care of the house, take care of the kids and drive the crappiest car – all so you could be treated like an emperor – your new car, your chair, your TV and so on.

I have chosen and continue to choose lead my family with a spirit of kindness, encouragement, praise, love and devotion. I will be leaving these old patters behind and embracing the patterns that are healthy. I will lead my family and my life differently. I reject how you did it. I embrace a new way in my life.

Sincerely, Your Son

Dear Mom:

My letter to you won't be near as long or as filled with faults as my letter to dad. At least in my experience, you did a lot of wonderful, really helpful things in bringing me up. I am really grateful for that. Thanks for doing what you did.

The main issue that I want to write about in "cutting the cord" is how you tried to meet numerous emotional/relational needs through me that really should have been taken care of in your relationship with Dad. You knew that I was sensitive and a good listener, and so you talked to me about things that you couldn't talk to dad about. When your back hurt, you asked me to give you a back rub, not Dad... just to name a couple. I never felt violated or overly burdened by what you did... I just know that I was supplying something to you that Dad should have been the first source for. And that didn't seem like the best thing. Thankfully that has changed some over the last number of years. You and Dad are a lot closer now. You still have your challenges, but because I am not around, you have had to work on things more diligently.

Mom, the other thing I wonder is what would have happened if you had pressed through your frustration with Dad earlier. I can see that you have long felt like there is something more... more to relationship, more to connection with God, more to your marriage, and more to how you enjoy life. Again, I see you making progress and talking about those things now.... but why not 30-35 years ago? How much farther could things have been if you had? Not only for yourself, but also in helping me and Ann to see some deeper models of marriage/relationship than what you and Dad showed us.

Mom, I think you are hungry for freedom. And I will be praying that you continue to find it. Maybe you'll even go to an Ultimate Journey group someday. You've got a lot of life left... I don't want you to waste any of it living according to old patterns.

Again, I don't feel like I have as much to break from with you, but in whatever ways that you and I had a bond that went beyond what it should have, I cut that off. You and Dad need to be you and Dad, and I need to have my own life. I am intent on pressing through my issues and stuff, and I set you free to do the same.

Your Son,