

Visiting my dad

By [Diane Roth](#)

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I got a call recently to visit someone in the hospital. I didn't know her well, but I recognized her name, and when I got to the hospital, I remembered her husband. Two of her four daughters were there. They were not sure about their mother's prognosis, so we prayed to strength for whatever the future would bring.

Then I went to visit my dad at the nursing home.

I don't visit my dad enough. Every time I go, I consider this truth.

When I got there, he was napping, but was ready for a visit. So we got him up and I asked him about his day. It was quiet there on a Saturday afternoon, though I thought I heard a movie in the background of the social room. We talked about his favorite foods (pizza, meatballs, cherry pie, corned beef), and sang a few songs, including Bing Crosby songs and some hymns. My dad had a pretty good voice back in the day, and he loved to sing Bing Crosby songs most of all. I tried to get a little crooning in my voice when I sang "When the Blue of the Night Meets the Gold of the Day." I didn't know all of the words, but then, neither did he.

Then we said the Lord's Prayer together.

My dad used to read Bible stories to us when we were getting ready for bed. My parents both said our prayers with us, but when my dad said them, he would often pretend he was Methuselah, the world's oldest man. He would tell us that he remembered Moses and Abraham and all of the heroes of the Bible, and he would talk in an old man's voice. When we started to say the prayers, he would pretend that he was falling asleep during the prayer, and when his voice trailed off, my sister or I would kick him.

So, that's my memory of my dad teaching me the Lord's Prayer.

My dad wasn't a terribly educated man. The youngest son of Swedish immigrants, he at first longed to be a high school teacher: he wanted to teach Shop. But he

found that college was more of a challenge than he imagined, so he changed his plans and opened his own business: Radio and TV Sales and Service. I still remember the smells of that old shop, oil and picture tubes and carpeting.

My dad was traditional, which means that he didn't really cook or do much cleaning, unless my mom specifically told him what to do. He was endlessly fascinated by television and he could fry an egg, grill hamburgers and make a mean bean sandwich. He wasn't a cat person, but he loved our dog. He was sentimental, believing that love should always win out. But I don't remember ever seeing him cry. He liked to cover up tough times with a laugh or a joke.

He liked to sing, but he rarely knew all of the words to the songs. So sometimes, he made up his own words.

When I was trying to figure out whether to change course and go to seminary to be a pastor, I was desperate to know what my parents thought about it. They're Scandinavian, though, which means they aren't always free with their opinions. But finally, I practically begged. I asked my dad, "Do you think I would be a good pastor?"

"Oh," he said, "I think you'd be good at whatever you did."

"You never say that," I told him.

As if thinking it for the first time, he said, "Nobody ever said it to me, either."

I don't visit my dad enough.

But when I do, we sing. Even though neither of us remembers the words.

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