

What kind of father have I been?

The contradiction between my youthful dream and the reality of my life raises the question: “ was I well prepared to be a father to six daughters?

A comment to a posting <http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474976804990> asked how it was raising six daughters. I answered that my daughters were better qualified to answer the question.

My youthful dream was to be a missionary priest of a Catholic Religious Order. I spent 11 years living and studying in Religious Community preparing to be a missionary priest (1946-57). But I decided against my childhood dream. In 1959 I married Felicitas A. Garcia, a graduate student from Iowa State Teachers College, Cedar Falls, IA. From 1960 to 1969 we became parents of six daughters. Now, ten weeks from my 77th birthday I am mature enough, I think, to handle the truth. So I am putting the question to my daughters.

Daughter #1: Monica: A Wish, A Framed Gift, Father's Day 2000

“Father”

“For always and forever
you were there to care and inspire.
There are countless things about you
that I fondly love and admire.
You have those special fatherly ways,
knowing when to advise when to praise.
Father dear, may my wish come true—
That all things good you've shared with me,
will somehow come back to you.” (Bee Ewing)

Daughter #2: Veronica:

Dad: Problem Poser/ Problem Solver....

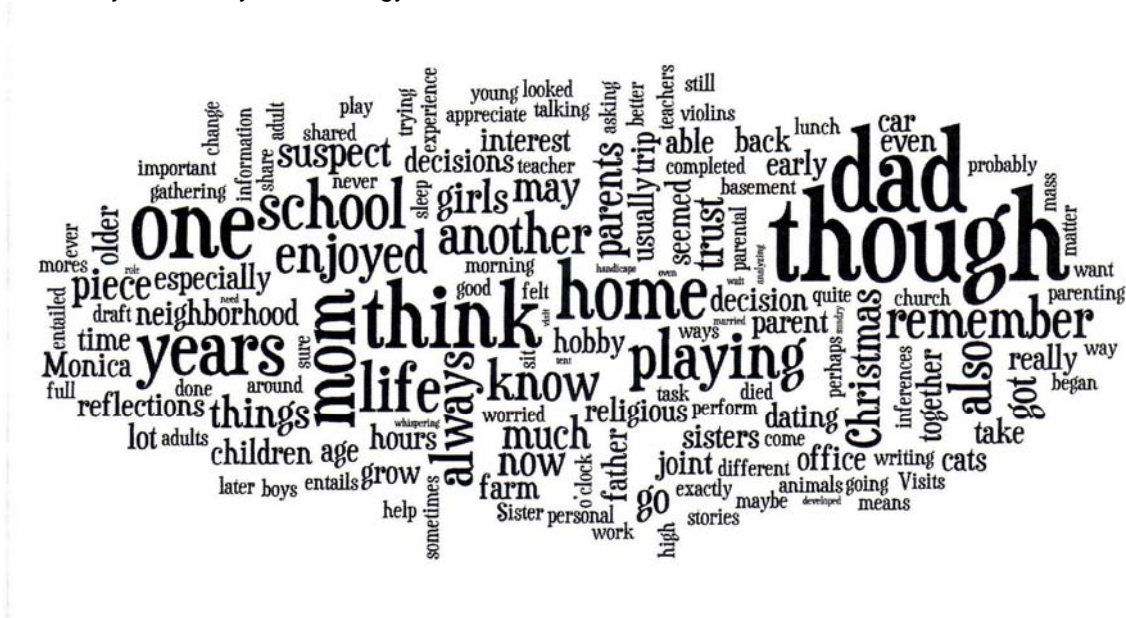
My father confronts and has been confronted by a variety of problems in his (our) lifetime. Those problems ranged from:

- *how to get the attention of a young Filipina in one car trip* to
- what needs to be done to get my wife US citizenship*
- *how to keep an old gerbil or new born kittens alive* to
- what is the role of women in religion*
- *how to keep the girls safe when wandering around Grandpa's farm* to
- what will get the girls to sing for the visitors*
- *how to get the envelopes stuffed at the office* to
- what will keep the girls from giggling at mass or in the car*
- *how to take apart and put together an old violin or cello* to
- what will keep the girls interested in violin lessons*
- *how to maintain the optimum weight in a kernel of corn* to
- what to do with associates that bankrupt the business*
- *how to keep the neighborhood boys at a distance* to
- what is the role of quantum physics in religion,*
- *how to keep girls from climbing the neighbor's tree* to

- what curfew to give adolescent girls*
- *how to catch a loose pig or horse* to
- what will keep the pipes from freezing in the winter*
- *how to convince a daughter studying overseas to return home* to
- what conversations to have with adolescent grandsons*
- *how to deal with the pain of losing your oldest daughter* to
- what can be done to maintain our memories of her*
- *how to market evolution and theology* to
- what do my daughters think of me as a father*

and so much more....

Our perceptions of what he was/is like as a father are tempered by his actions to try to resolve these kinds of problems. The visual summary below summarizing what he was/is like as a father celebrates problem posing/solving in a not-so-conventional format reminiscent of one of my oldest sister's projects for him. It also embraces the 'problems/solutions' he has encountered more recently with today's technology.



<http://www.wordle.net/>. Veronica Steffen

Daughter #3: Rebecca

In answer to “What kind of Father have I been?” My name is Rebecca. I am the 3rd daughter of six. Wow – how do you answer a question like that on one page? My husband Randy and our two children, Andrew and Steffenee, live in the country about 45 minutes away from my mom and dad.

Our dad has, with our mother, helped to set a solid foundation for what is important in life. Our family has always been their priority, I believe. Dad has worked all his life to create a solid grounding both spiritually and physically for us. A major part of laying this groundwork has been his desire to try to explain to not just us, but to people in general, a connection between the physical and spiritual. His life work has evolved around his writings and his working at trying to explain and understand the connection. I've always known that if I needed sound, grounded advice on anything, I could talk to dad. Though

the answer may not have been the one I wanted to hear, he always gave me feedback and forced me to think.

He's given me a real appreciation for nature and my surroundings, and has taught me the importance of caring for all that is around me. Some of the most vivid memories are with him walking outside in the summertime. When the weather was threatening, and the clouds were ominous, most people were heading to their basements to wait out the upcoming storm, but he would calmly walk outside and point out the clouds and tell us what they were and what to look out for. He was more fascinated than frightened by the churning clouds and the looming storm.

Though his training and upbringing may not have taught him how to raise six daughters (I don't think there is any training that could prepare anybody for that kind of assault!) I believe he has always done what he thought was best for us. I am lucky to have a father who is there for me, and is supportive and loving always.

Daughter # 4: Theresa

“What kind of Father was I?” you asked me: **You Allowed Me To Be Free**

After much reflection and thought –
I have come to the conclusion that you were a Father
that allowed me to be free.

It's the greatest gift you could have bestowed on me
To be free is all one could ever want and need to be
To search the world and find what God had planned for me – my destiny

Like the wind on our farm racing through the Walnut trees
You allowed me to be free
You cared, nurtured and you taught me
About the land, plants, birds and the sea
To protect all of these – you always said – “we have the ability”

You allowed me to explore – to succeed, to fail, to learn, to grow...
I just wouldn't be me
If I hadn't had a father like thee

Six daughters in all and a beautiful Mom you see
And none of us quite the same. Why?
Because you allowed us ALL to be free

It couldn't have been easy
Not sure how you survived – but I am glad you did
If I could do it all over again – I wouldn't change a thing

I love you Dad – to me You are King
Thanks for everything. Theresa

Daughter #5: Maria

Out of the six, I think I was the most difficult to handle as a child, probably still am. It's Christmas, so one of my fondest memories of my dad is the Christmas he made our Christmas tree...a dowel in the center with four round platforms in decreasing size to the top. We complained that we wanted a "real" Christmas tree, but I remember that tree and hold on to that memory.

My early school years were laced with many "sick" days. Dad had to pick me up from school on many occasions. We did many fun things on those "sick" days. I remember spending an entire day pruning raspberry bushes behind the shed. Dad never yelled at me for missing so many days of school. I suspect I learned more from my dad on those days than I would have from the public school.

Looking back, I probably spent more time with Dad than any of the other girls. I was his helper, getting tools for him when he built our house. I remember just wanting to "hang" out with him. He was always so patient and kind to me.

I cherish our many talks as a child and as an adult...the long trips to North Dakota. I'm not always the most loving daughter, and can be tough with my opinions about our growing years. We were and are not a perfect family...and I think that is where my dad and I differ. I am a realist and he the great optimist. Sometimes I want to shake him and make him admit that he wasn't the perfect father, so that, I don't know why....but he comes close.

Considering what he wanted to do and his actual fate, he did a pretty good job. After all, I picked a pretty great husband. I've my dad to thank for that, since he was the most significant male role model in my life.

Candidly, I think he always wanted a boy! I beat you there, Dad! Must admit, boys are much more fun and innately kinder beings than girls. I'd be surrounded by boys any day than to live in a house of girls again! You will always have my undying love and admiration, Dad. You are one of the two most intelligent men I've ever known (you and Tim, my husband). This was fun. Thanks for the memories!"

One more thing...we have names. Wonder why daughter #1, #2, etc? We were always grouped as "the girls". I never really felt they knew us individually. Always, "you girls are very good at this", not "Maria, you really excel in this area."

Daughter #6: Leticia

As I thought about how to respond to Dad's request to answer the question "What kind of father have I been?" one theme quickly emerged. Some of my earliest memories of my interactions with Dad involved listening to him:

listening to his unique renditions of fairy tales and favorite childhood stories, including his very entertaining character voices, when I was a preschooler;

listening to his deliveries of readings during mass throughout my elementary years;
listening to his advice on how to handle invitations to my first boy-girl party when I was in junior high school;

listening to his scientific explanations of how airplanes fly when I was in high school;
listening to his philosophical theories during dinner with the family during my entire childhood and well into my young adulthood.

My father is truly a man of words, and he has instilled the love for words in me as well. Perhaps that's why I found a home in the field of journalism and now share my love for words with students at the university where I teach.

But Dad isn't only a man of words; he's also a man of heart – and actions that come from the heart. I remember getting an assignment in fourth grade to write about my hero. The assignment came just days after I witnessed what I felt was a great act of heroism by Dad. We were clearing brush from the ditches around our house by doing controlled burns; Dad noticed a young bird stranded in a smoldering shrub in the ditch. He walked through the fire-heated area to free the bird.

To me, that memory epitomizes my father's deep respect for life and his love for the most innocent living creatures. And this, I believe, is the more indelible impression he's left, as a father, on me. Mom used to joke about Dad being like St. Francis, complete with the bald head and animals gathered around him. I guess that image really took root in my mind. I will always see him as someone who has the deepest respect and love for nature.

I believe that respect and love for nature is something all of my sisters, regardless of how different we are in other ways, share. And I believe that Dad was instrumental in nurturing this love in each of us."