

# Memories of Dad - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

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## Memories of Dad

By Mike Gordon

Not long after I was first married, my wife asked me about my father, who had been dead and buried for 10 years at the time.

What was he like, she would ask.

What memories do you have?

What did the two of you do together?

*I don't remember.*

*None.*

*Nothing. I don't know. Why is this important?*

She looked at me in disbelief.

Her father, a robust man with big hands (and even bigger shoes to fill), was a pillar in her life. Joe was a former New Jersey trucker who decided one day to uproot his wife and two daughters and relocate to Hawaii.

Joe was different from my father. Joe owned his own construction company. He was gruff, like rough-hewn lumber, but with a big heart.

My father, Morton, was a college professor with two graduate degrees. He was a thoughtful, gentle man who came home from World War II with a Purple Heart. He couldn't build anything, but he once wrote a book.

I can tell you this now, but I couldn't back then, when Mrs. G probed further.

Don't you miss him? she asked, and I lied.

*No.*

When I thought about my father, the only real memory was of the way he died: in midsentence in our Kailua backyard as he and I talked about the run he had just finished. He collapsed into a hedge and was gone by the time I pulled him free.

Even today, if I close my eyes I can see his face as he lay on the grass. I can see the moment when he crossed the threshold. His doctor blamed a massive heart attack. He was 51 and I was 19. Nothing was the same after that.

Beyond that dark September afternoon, I didn't have anything else to share with Mrs. G. I wanted to remember more but I couldn't. It was as if those thoughts had been locked away.

I knew I should have some. Everyone has memories of their parents, even bad memories. Where were mine?

None of that was on my mind when I became a father at about the same age as my own father when I was born. I wasn't consciously thinking about whether or not I was doing something that would create lasting memories for my two daughters. I just wanted to be involved. It felt natural.

Fathers create memories, good and bad, but memories nonetheless.

So I sat outside of ballet lessons and tried not to look bored. I helped carve jack-o'-lanterns with their elementary school classes and felt their childhood joy. I coached their soccer teams even though I didn't understand the game. (I figured if I yelled loud enough and stalked the sidelines, I would fool them all.)

We went for chocolate milkshakes after school. We went surfing in Waikiki and I pushed them into waves.

When you're in the middle of all that, it doesn't really feel like your children are getting older. It seemed to me as if they were going to be young forever, until one day, suddenly, they weren't.

I had tried to be their pillar, but some days I wasn't very strong. I tried to be gentle, too, but I could get mad over stupid things, like when one of them spilled a glass of milk.

I tried to be there for them, to give them things they could remember if they chose to. I'm not sure if I succeeded. It isn't something you ask about when they grow up.

But Mrs. G kept asking me: Isn't there something you remember about your father?

And I would think and we would talk and somehow, she helped me find them. She had turned the conversation to sports and asked which ones I played as a boy. That's when it struck me.

My father loved baseball. How could I forget that?

When he washed the dishes after dinner, he would listen to the San Francisco Giants on a small AM radio. When the Hawaii Islanders played at Honolulu Stadium we would sometimes make the drive over the Pali to see them.

And when I played on Little League baseball teams, he and I would throw the ball in the

backyard.

Because we lived along the 12th fairway of Mid-Pacific Country Club, we would walk our dog there at night. Out in the middle of the course, my father and I would stretch out on the soft grass and stare at the night sky. We would talk about space and stars and how incredibly small we were in the grand scheme of things.

When he went running around our neighborhood in Enchanted Lake or along the golf course fairways, I rode my bike alongside him. This was before running became popular so most of our outings were at night when no one could see my father, plodding along in old Hush Puppies and a floppy fisherman's hat.

When I was trying so hard to learn how to surf, my father would stuff my surfboard through the backseat window of our old rusted Rambler and take me to the shorebreak at Kalama Beach. His patience seemed unlimited as he sat on the sand watching.

When I ran track in high school, I won only one race, but he was there to see me.

Memories triggered other memories and there was nothing orderly about them. They rolled out into the conscious world like apples spilling from a sack.

They had always been there, of course, fighting a subconscious battle for my affection. I just had to look for them. More to the point, I had to allow myself to tell them.

I had missed my father. I still miss him. Those stories — nostalgic, overly sweet and true — brought him back to me.

But in this cascade of rediscovered moments, I can't help but wonder what my father thought of our time together. I'll never know. If we could toss a baseball back and forth once more, I would ask him. I would ask him so many things.

And I would tell him that he has shaped my role as a father: I want to do things that my daughters refuse to forget.

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