

She was a born advocate.
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“Dadisms”
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Happy Mother’s Day! Whether or not you’re a mother, we all had a mother. Guaranteed. Step-mothers appreciated too. The heart can supersede the uterus.

Which is why we start with my Dadisms. Sayings from Dad. Dadisms. You probably have something similar: Don't do anything that would embarrass the family (why would he keep saying that to my brothers and me?); Smile and world smiles with you, cry and you cry alone; In uplifting, get underneath; If you’re bored it could be because you’re boring; If all your friends were jumping off a cliff...; Always do the dirtiest job first; My favorite? The top hit on Dad’s playlist? If you can’t say something nice about someone, don’t say anything at all.

Sorry, there are no Momisms – her style was less ‘stipulate’ and more ‘advocate,’ starting with an invitation to come to the kitchen table for a talk. Dad liked to think he was in charge. Mom was subtler. When I’d get into one of my rages about things being unfair mom knew to scratch my back and calm me down. Dad would tell me to work to fix it. They worked well together. Parenting is basically tag-team wrestling.

Dad was school board president and church trustee. Mom served as church elder and a board member for an orphanage. Periodically, as I’ve shared before, she hosted parties at our house for the children. We had a back-yard built-in pool. We also had in our side yard a blacktop court for basketball and volleyball. Those were cowbell years, when mom could ring the cowbell and call her wayward herd home. Several of our friends’ parents didn’t like these pool parties. Some informed mom they disliked their children swimming in the same water as some black orphans. Mom pursed her lips and kept hosting the swim parties. She was a born advocate.

Advocacy is the wiser method. Years ago, one of our churches wanted to begin a mentoring program for primary school parents in need. The intention was loving but the approach needed to be turned around. It’s why most mentoring programs fail. Mentoring comes from Homer’s Odyssey where the goddess Athene would impersonate Mentor, Odysseus’ friend and advisor, and tell Odysseus or his son, Telemachus, what to do from a position of superiority and authority, sometimes scolding. Better is advocacy, partnership, talking with rather than talking at.

I saw advocacy in action during our mission trips to Honduras and Nicaragua. Christian non-profits wanted to offer solutions, but they waited until the poor mommies in the villages or barrios would get fed up – enough is enough! – and create choices, with the ecumenical organizations as experienced allies.

Watch out when mommies say enough is enough. What they will do for their children is ferocious, oft heart-breaking. One day in the town of Talanga, Honduras, one of our mission persons realized her Spanish wasn’t as fluent as she thought. This person conducted Bible school with the children of the village, talking about Jesus, giving puppet shows. One morning, one of the local women approached her

and asked if she would take her children too. Our mission friend said, of course, all children are welcome. After lunch the mother arrived with her children. She carried two small plastic bags containing all her children's clothes. What she really had asked was if she would take her children back with her to the United States.

Such stories remind me of a church elder in my first congregation, Ed. Gentle man, good man. He worked in management for Bell Telephone. He started out with fewer advantages. His mother was widowed. She earned money by hand-stitching baseballs for the Philadelphia Athletics. Every summer young boy Ed would be tagged and sent out by train to a dairy farm in western Chester County. The Thompson clan was kind and good. They welcomed him and folded him into their large family. Fond memories. How different from those religious boarding schools that the National Geographic wrote about in last month's edition, Native American families ripped apart. Children separated by force. Children abused. One of the first boarding schools was downriver: the Carlisle Industrial School. "Kill the Indian, save the man." We have much for which to atone.

When Ed retired, the Thompson's offered him a piece of their land so he could build his retirement home for him and his wife.

A simple means for measuring men: in the secret chambers of their hearts, is your wife or your mother proud of you?