



# BURNS INSIGHTS

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## Lessons From My Father

Our core tenet at the Burns Investment Group is, “Life is about relationships and experiences.” Well, on February 2, I lost one of my dearest relationships – my father. When I heard the news, I was shocked, but not surprised. Shocked in that I spoke to him the prior day and he was in good spirits. Not surprised because he was 88 years old and he had health issues, namely he suffered from COPD and was on oxygen full-time.

Am I sad? Yes. But that is not my overriding emotion. More than anything, I am grateful! Grateful that I had him in my life for so long, and that he was an excellent role model as to how to handle all of life’s transitions. I hope to grow up and be like him some day.

On the positive side as well, my family has no regrets with regards to my dad. All five of his sons and two of my stepsisters spoke to him the day before. He was proud of all of his kids (five sons, three stepdaughters, and a stepson) and his 23 grandkids. He was loved by many, including numerous in-laws, extended family members, and friends. He led a simple, but full life. And he went peacefully – at home, in his sleep – the way he expressed many times to us all that he wanted to go.

In reflecting upon him over the past few weeks, I am seeing that although he is physically gone, he has left a part of himself in all of us that we now carry forward into our lives. Right now, I’d like to share a few of these life’s lessons that have shaped me into the person I am today – namely, a better husband, father, friend, and financial advisor.



Do you think there is a family resemblance?

**Your past does not define your future.** My dad was born in College Point in Flushing, New York. His mom and her family had immigrated from Scotland, and his dad had jumped ship in NY Harbor from Ireland as a merchant marine and entered the U.S. illegally. Yes, my grandfather was an illegal alien. My dad experienced a lot of loss early in his life. His mother died when he was around seven from what I have gathered were mysterious circumstances. He also lost contact with her whole side of the family because they didn’t like my grandfather, who was a violent drunk. He came home one day with a new wife. This was probably a marriage of convenience, as she was a widow herself. Back then, they didn’t have the social programs in place – he needed a mother for his two young boys, and she needed a home. My grandfather was not a nice person, so it became my dad, his stepmom, and his brother against my grandfather. My grandfather worked for the NY subway, and when my dad was 16, he was killed by a subway car while on the job. His death certificate read cause of death as “Beheaded.” True story.

Somewhere in himself, my dad found the resolve to not repeat the past. He had every reason in the world to wallow in self-pity for the cards he was dealt. He vowed, though, that his life would be different, that he would be a good dad, and that he would make something of his life. At 17, he joined the Army, met my mother in France, and moved to California, where he made a good life. Looking back at our lives in the sixties and seventies, our family had our issues that could have easily negatively defined our futures. He role-modeled making a choice to move past adversity toward a brighter future of one’s own choosing.

*Continued on back ...*



**Serve others.** My dad was a cop. He joined the Lynwood Police Department circa 1957 and was a patrolman during the Watts riots. His fifteen minutes of fame came when he was Chief Detective in 1974 when members of the Symbionese Liberation Army (the SLA), including Patty Hearst, robbed and shot-up a sporting goods store in Lynwood. He was on the 5 o'clock news explaining the situation when the infamous SLA shoot-out and fire happened in the neighboring city of Compton. His fifteen minutes was cut down to five. I believe that my dad became a police officer for the security it provided for his growing family. Due to the way he grew up, he wanted to make sure his family would have stability. But my dad also had a high sense of duty to be of service to others. During this time, he had self-studied to become an attorney and passed the bar exam on his second try. Many of our neighbors would come to him for practical advice. Yes, he had strong opinions, but people trusted that he would give them a straight answer. (NOTE: He was never known for his diplomacy or political correctness.) Two of my brothers followed in his footsteps into the police force. All of our other siblings have chosen to serve others in different capacities. I believe I made the right vocational choice to become a financial advisor. Trust me, the world is much safer with my not being a policeman.

**Be grateful, not entitled.** When I graduated early from high school because I wanted to work, he declared that \$90 rent would be due the first of the month. What? Rent? Who, me? There was no way, as an adult, I would be allowed to work and not contribute financially to the household. He made it clear that he didn't need the money and that he would enjoy spending it. (He and my mom were just getting divorced at this time.) He told me that I would appreciate the lesson he was teaching me. I tried to assure him that I would appreciate having the ninety bucks in my pocket more than the lesson. To no avail! With a house of five teenaged boys, there was never any extra money. If we wanted something, you better find a way to pay for it. As a kid, I was always looking for a way to make a few bucks: Collect bottles, rake leaves, wash a car, deliver papers, check coin returns, for example. Looking back, I have to agree that he was right. I learned that I took better care of the things that were MINE, and I gained a huge sense of accomplishment from doing something on my own. Much to the chagrin of my kids, I have continued his pattern. There were certain things that they had to figure out how to pay for on their own.

**Leave a rich legacy.** Your legacy is not your riches, but the memories you have left behind and how positively you have impacted others along the way. Financially, my dad lived simply and comfortably in Leisure World Seal Beach on his police pension. He ended up being one of my best clients. He was a testament about what happens when you save consistently over many years. Even though we appreciate our inheritance, the real gifts were what he meant to us.

He didn't preach, he lived. He was far from perfect, but he was authentic. He could be crass, but he could be a softy. He was frugal, but never missed anyone's birthday. He was off-color but very accepting of others. He had wit and a great sense of humor. Yes, I see a lot of him in myself. But more importantly, I also see him in my kids and nieces and nephews. His memory lives on in our hearts. I look forward to our seeing what legacy I can impart to the newest generation as my first granddaughter, Cosette, is due at any time.

Thank you for indulging me in sharing a piece of my father with you. As we move closer to a normalized world, I wish you all a 2021 filled with many experiences with your friends and family. We look forward to seeing you all in person real soon.

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