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relating

5 QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK YOUR DAD

WHAT IS YOUR FIRST MEMORY AS MY FATHER?

IT'S GRATIFYING to be told what you can't possibly recall. My sons, both still young, laugh hysterically at tales of their infancy—their refusal to nap, their reliance on a pacifier. I hope someday to explain to them why I still have the blue shirt I wore the day my husband and I sat in a conference room and met our oldest for the first time. It conjures for me that warm October afternoon, our dumbstruck silence in the cab heading to the meeting. Memory is not a record but a theory—a story we tell ourselves, close to the truth but not quite true. But this shirt is proof that my life changed in an instant; it helps me order my story. Asking your father what he remembers may help you tell your own.

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WRITTEN BY SARAH J. ROBBINS — PHOTOGRAPH BY ROGER WEBER

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WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A PARTNER?

MY DATES USED to have to come over and “meet” with Dad before we went out. He’d make them play pool with him and answer questions (not intimidating at all). I always cringed and just prayed that Dad would let us leave sooner rather than later. Still, I’ve always known how important it is to get my dad’s opinion. My mother is fiercely independent. Her advice is often along the lines of “Make sure you’re able to support yourself so that regardless of what happens, you have yourself to fall back on.” Fathers tend to be protective. Because Dad considers Mom his equal, and because he knows I’m my mother’s daughter, he was able to offer another perspective. His biggest wish for me was that I’d find a partner who wasn’t threatened by my shine and who was confident enough to not be intimidated by any success. Someone who would proudly walk by my side, defend my honor, and encourage me to achieve my dreams. Thankfully, I did.

ASHLEY BIDEN IS THE FOUNDER OF THE SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS APPAREL COMPANY LIVELIHOOD AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE DELAWARE CENTER FOR JUSTICE IN WILMINGTON, DELAWARE.

Find out what wisdom readers’ fathers have passed on at realsimple.com/dadadvice.



WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR LATER YEARS WILL LOOK LIKE?

WHEN MY DAD was taking care of his older relatives, he thought a lot about what he was looking for when he got older. He forced me to have a talk about it. At first it was awkward—he drew up a contract, and one part said that when a medical professional says it’s time to live in an old-age home, he and my mother will go. I’d always thought he’d want us, his kids, to take care of them at home, but they don’t want to be a burden. I can’t change his mind, and it’s nice that we’ve settled it so there’s no guilt. Frame the question positively: “What is your vision for your retirement and later years?” Open the dialogue early so you don’t have to guess.

JULIE AGNEW, PHD, IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE RAYMOND A. MASON SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AT WILLIAM & MARY AND A RESEARCH ASSOCIATE FOR THE CENTER FOR RETIREMENT RESEARCH AT BOSTON COLLEGE. SHE LIVES IN WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA.

WANNA GO FOR A WALK?

RESEARCH TELLS US that exercise is the most powerful tool to prevent many diseases, including Alzheimer’s. Along with maintaining a healthy diet, moderate daily activity—a brisk, 30-minute walk is all you need—is a proven intervention that can help increase how long we live and improve how well we live. Another thing that can add happiness and years to your life? Strong family relationships. A stroll together can help there, too.

PINCHAS COHEN, MD, IS THE DEAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LEONARD DAVIS SCHOOL OF GERONTOLOGY IN LOS ANGELES.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE DURING THE WAR?

EVERYONE LIVING in the last century has some kind of wartime memory, whether of Vietnam or the first Gulf War. You’re bound to get some stories, even from a man who didn’t serve. (It would still have been an impactful moment in his life.) If your father is stoic, asking this question can be a good way to break the ice. He may say, “I was in this battalion in such-and-such a province.” From there, you can ask, “Would you mind telling me about it?” If he doesn’t want to say much, he can have the out. But if you have a father who’s been under actual fire, you are likely to learn something new and interesting.

MEGAN SMOLENYAK IS A GENEALOGIST AND THE AUTHOR OF *WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO TRACING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY*. SHE LIVES IN ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA.