

# Fathers – Then and Now

✘ My parents had me and my brother late in life (but not by today's standards). When I was born in 1951, my father was 46, my mother 38. By 1960, my father was a widower raising an 8-year girl and a 10-year old boy on his own.

As a child, I adored my father and wanted to marry my "Prince Rochus" and often regally extended my arm instructing him to kiss my hand just as any Princess would request of her subject. Of course, he indulged my childhood fantasy.

I've no doubt that my strong work ethic comes from him. I remember him leaving every evening around 6 p.m. to go to his baking job at Ebinger's Bakery in Flatbush. I don't remember him ever taking a day off. On Saturday nights, he worked a second job in the bakery below our 4-room railroad flat. After my mother died, he needed to be home at night so he changed his shift and I vividly remember him getting up at 4 in the morning to leave for work so he could be back home when we returned from school. I remember waking up and feeling sad and wondering why he had to leave in the middle of the night. He died too soon in 1972, just eleven months after he retired.

He was a simple, decent man with a gentle soul and good heart who was ill-prepared for the task of raising two children. But my father had something that made him rise to the challenge – dignity and love for his children. We grew up and, through education and hard work, have become successful professionals.

I can't say that our lives were reflected in the television shows that were so prominent in the 50s. We didn't live in the suburbs and we weren't middle class, but, I miss those shows that depicted fathers as strong, loving, figures who worked to support their families. Fathers were the head of households while the women welcomed the role of being the

heart of the family.

I grew up with Donna and Alex Stone watching the "Donna Reed Show" and with Jim and Margaret Anderson on "Father Knows Best." Of course, there was Ozzie & Harriet, Leave it to Beaver, and Margie Albright who was raised by her widower father in "My Little Margie." All the fathers in these shows were honorable, decent men whose worst flaw was forgetting a birthday or arriving late for dinner after working overtime and forgetting to call home. These were men who took their responsibility seriously as fathers and they were seen as caring and loving and respected by their tv wives and children.

As the decades went by, there continued to be respectable portraits of fathers in other television sitcoms such as The Patty Duke Show, The Brady Bunch, The Courtship of Eddie's Father, Happy Days, Family Affair and, of course, I Love Lucy. Even Jed Clampett of the Beverly Hillbillies, who was not an educated man, always doled out common sense to guide his family through life's trials and tribulations. Again, the men occupied an esteemed place within the family unit.

But as the years passed, something happened that caused fathers to be unnecessary fixtures around the house, superfluous to the family, and the butt of far too many jokes. Fathers depicted in the "slobcom" Married with Children and in King of Queens, According to Jim, Everybody Loves Raymond, and Malcolm in the Middle are described as "deadbeat," "immature mentally," "lovable but lazy," "childish," and "someone who avoids any responsibility."

If sitcoms are a reflection of society, we're in a very sad state of decline because fathers are routinely depicted as buffoons and wimps who are just taking up space in the home. Rather than representing fathers as sniveling spineless creatures, they should be portrayed as strong, responsible men who take their jobs as fathers and husbands seriously even in

comical situations.

Perhaps this evolution of men's decline in stature on television resulted from the decline of viewing men as integral, necessary components of the family. Despite the fact that men are essential to the creation of a child, more and more women are choosing to eliminate men as quickly as possible after his initial participation in the process. When a man, for instance, has no say over whether a woman has an abortion, his position in the family is rendered moot.

You might say I'm stuck in 50s TV Land where a mother and father were the accepted ideal family, and, you'd be right. But, if it could be done in the 50s, why can't today's sitcoms show strong, noble fathers instead of immature little boys dressed in men's clothing who are incapable of tying their own shoelaces.

I'll admit I'm also stuck with the obviously out-dated notion that not all men are buffoons, as reflected in today's sitcoms, but are responsible, hard-working fathers who contribute to the family and should be admired. Bottom line: I'd choose Ward Cleaver over Al Bundy any day.

To all the men out there who are wonderfully mature, loving, responsible, providers for your families, Happy Father's Day!