

Stories and words: my life with my Dad

By Tracy A. Shaw

I was raised as an only child, by a Vietnam Vet and an Italian from NJ, my childhood came with great adventures and even a few challenges along the way.

During my childhood my father spent a few years in California. When I was 8yrs old, I would take my first trip out there to see him. It was very exciting; I had a stewardess as an escort, and earned my “wings” for assisting her with passing out peanuts. I’ll never forget the moment of seeing my father as we walked off the plane, he had a contagious smile larger than life personality, he quickly scooped me up and we drove away in his sporty TransAm.

During the visit, he would make up for lost time. He put me on a soft-ball team, took me to Disney and even signed me up for the local fashion show. I can still see my Dad and his good friend Charlie Colette, jumping up, waving while filming as I walked down the runway.

A few years later my father returns to Maine-hooray! And by the way, my parents are getting re-married?! Despite the fact, life in our household gets a little interesting. My father was still determined to keep up with planting a few seeds.

He made sure I knew how to change a flat tire, which would prove beneficial after getting my driver’s license. He instructed me how to drive a stick shift, the practices were held at Sanford Airport. I think we went there, so no one could hear him yelling as I dropped the clutch. Then I would see him hold his heart and say, “oh Elizabeth it’s the big one!” It was also important to him to make sure I knew how to shoot a

firearms, this would result in a kickback that would land me on butt. Without a word of sympathy I heard, you'll be fine, now get up! Many already you know the story about the summer that I "stole my father's car"-for the record, it's true-I was just 13 yrs old and was summoned to court for auto theft. Hard to be raised a trucker drivers daughter and not go for a joy ride. Although, my father kindly dropped the charge, I was grounded for life.

As there are many stories, there are also words that come to my mind when I think of my Dad. These three words stand out...

Encouragement, Support, & Sacrifice

Encouragement...

My father always encouraged me to do what was right for me. His encouragement was greatly appreciated during the time that I worked as the Program Manager for the Military Working Dog Program at Lackland, AFB San Antonio Texas. Here I was in Military City USA managing and presenting a program to distinguished guests and an even four-star General. My father never once doubted my ability to keep the mission moving forward. He believed in me, always offering words of encouragement. Thank you Dad, for the encouragement when I needed it most.

Support...

Although as a child we never had a dog. Each birthday my father would ask me, what do you want for your birthday? Each birthday my answer was the same, "a Dog". One year he responded to my answer with, "when you grow up you can have as many damn dogs as you want." Well he was right, I never did get that dog for my birthday. However,

he did support my love of dogs by driving me to my Aunt's house in NJ during a school vacation. We drove down in his big rig and a trip to the Seeing Eye was planned. I had a private tour, watching the amazing training of service dogs for the blind. I stood there in awe at 12yrs old, thinking to myself, someday when I grow up, I want train dogs! Thank you Dad for the ride, as it paved the road for my future career.

My love of animals didn't stop with dogs; my father supported my love of horses with securing my seat in the saddle. Later in life I would muck stalls in exchange for lessons. Most recently, he supported my desire to rescue a wild mustang from a kill pen in Texas, she was on her way to a slaughter house in Mexico. This mare would be transported to Maine to live the rest of her years loved and well cared for. Upon her arrival there was Dad, he couldn't wait to see her and even made a little video. Just maybe he knew, that mucking out a stall in the dead of winter, would be the best therapy, during the toughest time of my life. Thank you Dad, for being almost as excited, about that magical mare, as I was.

Sacrifice

My father was just 17 when he voluntarily enlisted in the US Army, sacrificing some of his teenage years to serve our country during the Vietnam War. During my time at the Military Working Dog Program I had the opportunity to work with Wounded Warriors. I also took a trip to Belgium and toured the Trenches of WWI. These experiences allowed me to see firsthand the sacrifice of our many soldiers. My father was instrumental in my decision to take a position at the Military Working Dog program and have the opportunity to see the sacrifices made by so many.

Dad I want you to know, if it wasn't for your words of encouragement, supporting my love of animals, and sacrificing your teenage years to serve in the US Army, during the Vietnam War, to then meet up with the bleach blonde Italian, while you were stationed at Fort Dix-I wouldn't have all these great adventures and stories to share.

Thank you DAD for the roots, n' wings and everything in between, I love you!