

PERSPECTIVE: A Letter to My Daughters

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Two words I would never associate with my childhood are *compassion* and *encouragement*. For quite a few years, I've successfully used my Buddhist practice and the organization as, in a sense, a source of substitute parenting to compensate for the almost total lack of guidance and attention that I received as a child.

Last year, I began seeing a professional therapist to help me understand and modify some behavior patterns I no longer wanted to manifest in my life. During that time, I wrote a letter that expresses the guidance and love I wish I could have received from my parents. (They passed away several years ago.) The act of writing the letter was a very healing process.

Fortunately, I have a much healthier, loving relationship with my two daughters. My youngest is just finishing high school and preparing to go off to college. They both have become remarkable young adults.

I decided to write them a letter as a reminder of some of life's important lessons, as well as a way to tell them one more time that no matter what may happen in their lives, they are truly loved. This, I believe, is the greatest gift a parent has to give.

Dear Megan and Jamie:

Here are some guidelines... rules of the road...I want to share with the two most wonderful daughters in the world.

Never forget that you are always loved. No matter what you do or where you go or what mistakes you make, Mom and I will always love you. Follow your heart and do what you want to with your life, not what other people think you should do.

Learn to accept your joys and your sorrows. Through your sorrows you will grow and learn valuable lessons about life and yourself. Your joys will cause you to reflect on the mystery and beauty of life. Sorrows make the joys even sweeter.

It's OK to be sad sometimes. No one will think less of you. Don't hide your sadness — you might not be able to find it when you need to. It's OK to let another person comfort you. Going through your own hardships will then enable you to comfort others.

Face your fears. When you're afraid, find someone you can talk to and trust. Some of your fears are justified and serve to protect you from real harm. But most of them will prevent you from expanding your life. More often than not, your greatest fears are in your imagination and not reality. Recognize your nightmares as just fears in Technicolor. Observe them as you would a horror movie. Be scared, but don't let your fear paralyze you.

If all else fails, come to me for a hug. Even if it's in the middle of the night. I'll always have time for you.

Don't be afraid to dream big. The sky's the limit. You won't be able to do everything in life, so don't limit yourself while you're still young — there's plenty of other people willing to do that for you. You can accomplish anything if you set your mind to it. Realize that major victories are the result of many small efforts.

Work hard every day. Be diligent in your studies. These are two things that great accomplishments are made of.

Sometimes you'll succeed, and sometimes you'll fail. Don't let this fact slow you down. There is usually a degree of pain associated with going outside your comfort zone. You'll get stuck if you don't accept some risk. I hope that you continue to expand your lives in new, exciting directions.

Title: Perspective: A Letter to My Daughters

Subject: World Tribune 06/26/98 n.3197 p.3 WT980626p03 Vienna, Virginia

Author: Michael Lisagor

Keywords: Daughters Experiences Family January June Letter Opinion Parenting Perspectives Relationships Tribune Vienna Virginia World

Communicate. So much of our unhappiness arises from our unwillingness to engage in honest dialogue with others. When talking about something is most difficult, you probably need to do it the most. I will always be here for you when you need to talk. Don't be reluctant to seek out help when you need it. No one said we have to do it all alone.

Be nice to others. Have compassion for their sufferings. Avoid gossip. Your friends' feelings can be hurt just as easily as yours can. On the other hand, speak out against injustice. Do not tolerate abuse.

There are many ways to define a successful life. Ask yourself what you want people to say about you when you are old. How do you want to feel about yourself? Then, let that guide your decisions and actions.

Be a person of integrity. Honor your commitments whenever possible — especially your commitments to yourself. But also learn to forgive yourself. Perfection is a futile goal.

Finally, and perhaps most important, make your spiritual development a lifetime journey. Some truths are universal...some might apply to you alone. Seek them out and try to let your actions be guided by them. Find ways and take the time to return to your center...to that place where you are filled with wisdom and compassion for yourself and others.

Add your uniqueness to the tapestry of human life. And respect others' uniqueness as they go about their journeys. In this way, you will make the most of each precious moment.

Always know that you have a father who loves you more than life itself.

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