*Belated Father’s Day*

Well, I want to start off wishing everybody a Happy Father’s Day. I thank God for the father and brother figure in my life. My dad recently passed away. It is my firm belief that he is with the Lord now and out of suffering. My dad was an athlete, hard worker, and family man. He played college golf. Once, he was helping me with my golf swing. He said, you gotta position your hips like so, hold the club like this, move your shoulders like so . . . etc. Of course, I swung and missed the ball! My dad then said, “Tom, forget everything I said and just keep your eye on the ball!”

Dad worked in public relations for General Motors and I loved when he came back from visiting colleges. When he returned from Minnesota, which was famous for honey, he’d bring back different flavors: strawberry honey, cinnamon honey, coconut, maple honey . . . etc. They were great. I guess honey was a Minnesota thing. Now, when he came back from Wisconsin, guess what he brought? You got it. Cheese! In many forms and flavors. Great stuff.

As I said, my dad worked for General Motors. On the side though, he helped out with a charity program called DAPCEP. DAPCEP stood for “Detroit Pre-College Engineering Program.” The program helped foster a desire for math and science education in the ghetto. I remember asking my dad once, “Is affirmative action good if someone can get a job scoring lower on a test because they are a minority?” My dad answered, “Tom, if someone grows up in the ghetto in tougher living conditions, with parents who perhaps can’t speak proper English, he/she has to be smarter and even more perseverant. If they score slightly lower, they might be more qualified.” This stuck with me at the time.

As I said, my dad recently passed away. One movie that makes me think of my dad which he loved is “It’s A Wonderful Life.” In this classic, the main character George Bailey is fired from his job during a depression, drinks too much, gets punched out in the bar, fights with his family and is at the point of giving up. He jumps off a bridge to end his life. His guardian angel, Clarence, saves him. Clarence then offers him a gift, the chance to see what it would be like if he had never been born. George sees that the entire town would have been even worse if he had not lived. One man or woman can make a huge difference. His family transforms the town with love and sacrifice. My dad, I believe, was like George Bailey. His life and his love for family brought change to many lives. He was a catalyst.

My dad, when I was a young child, was more connected with my older siblings. My brother, however, was like a father figure for me, being seven years older. However, he wasn’t perfect. He wrestled in high school and used to like practicing wrestling moves on me. I was his practice dummy! He would practice arm bars, scissors, and cradles on me. It wasn’t fun. One time I had had enough and hit him pretty hard. We were in the living room. My mom heard it from in the kitchen, came out and said, “Thomas Joseph Roman! Did you know your brother prayed nine months for you, when you were in the womb. He prayed you would be a boy because he had three sisters and wanted a brother.” I responded. “Well I didn’t hear him!”

In my brother’s defense though, he was a senior in high school at the time and only weighed 105 lbs. He had wanted to play basketball but was too short. Wrestling, with assigned weight classes, was the only sport he could attempt but he didn’t like it that much. Better wrestlers practiced their moves on him and so he did with me. High school was a tough time for him.

Still, he was courageous. I remember he would stick up for us. One time, a kid who was twice his size, threw a volleyball at our car at an intersection. Jim got out of the car and confronted the kid. He asked him to apologize. Unfortunately, the kid just picked him up and threw him into a bush. Jim brushed himself off and approached him again, asking him to apologize. The kid pushed him down again.

I wanted to get out of the car and help. So did my two sisters, but His best friend, Jimmy Manning, who was even smaller than him, said, “Stay in the car!” He got out and tried to help. Jimmy Manning grabbed the kid from behind, but the kid hoisted him on his shoulders and threw him into the bush too. Finally, the kid’s girlfriend asked him to leave them alone. But Jim was red with embarrassment. He felt he’d not been courageous enough. He beat himself up over it for months. I felt, however, that he had been like David against Goliath. Jim looked out for us and stuck up for us as kids.

Jim also liked daring feats such as: bungee jumping, skate boarding, mountain climbing . . . etc. He grew a lot in college and was a bouncer at a bar. Jim always loved family like my dad. Family came first.

In conclusion, I thank God who is may Father, but also for father figures. Good fathers are hard workers, protective, humble, compassionate and loving. I wish all a Happy Father’s Day!