

Daddy Duty

Liz Somes

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Getting Your Priorities Straight

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I told my boss this recently. He asked me a very reasonable question: why did my dad give up something he enjoyed (he did enjoy private practice, even though it gave him unrelenting heartburn) for something he hated (three decades of stultifying mergers and acquisitions law)? I replied that 80-hour workweeks were unsustainable for him, what with a young family and the heartburn. My boss remarked, "Sounds like he had work-life balance issues."

My boss was exactly wrong. Ironically wrong. Even with one and a half jobs, my dad always had time for us. He solicited time for us. He would nag me to play racquetball with him Sunday afternoons in high school. He was home for dinner every night and drove us to school every morning. My boss, on the other hand, works trial-attorney hours. His wife works on Wall Street, where he met her, and they have an 8-month old daughter. For a few years he was a derivatives trader before hatching this start-up where I currently work. (Now it's me who's getting the heartburn, but that's a different story, something called "New York Start-Up Culture Is Super Intense.") It seems that the most they see their baby is via nanny cam.

This isn't meant to be an indictment of the Big Bad Boss. I wish my dad had been a little more professionally courageous. It is meant to partially be an example of how one's passion doesn't necessarily have to be translated into a career, and partially proof that work-life balance is achievable. But mostly it is a "thank you" to my dad.

One day last week, my boss brought in his daughter—he had "Daddy Duty" because they'd just fired their nanny. Watching him with her (cute, I have to admit) made me think of my dad and this picture I have next to my bed. We're on the beach, and he's wearing these 80's-fabulous shorts and a Gilligan hat. I'm wearing a life jacket and pointing at the camera.

Last year my dad passed away from a leukemia-like disease. I miss talking to him about life, its meaning and purpose, and I miss his zealous attempts to make me into a trader.

- Liz Somes

Illustration by Gustaf von Arbin