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'Legacy of relationships never disappear'

by Catherine Minolli

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"A legacy of relationships that will never disappear..."

I hear this quote while listening to a TED talk sent to me by an intuitive friend. The speaker is a lifelong teacher, who was raised by educators as well. The talk is called 'Every kid needs a champion,' and Rita Pierson is the speaker.

The gist of the talk is about the importance of relationships. How you might not like everyone who has something to learn or who has something to teach, but are connecting with them on a human level nonetheless, because in the end it's the relationships that count.

Ms. Pierson talks about her mom's lifelong commitment to teaching, and how at her funeral when she looked around and saw many of her mom's former students, her heart soared.

It was "a legacy of relationships that will never disappear..."

This is so familiar to me. Though I was in a fog and mostly numb, I recall looking around at the packed room in the funeral home where my dad was and being amazed—but not at all surprised—that there were people there of all ages. Many were high school students and young college kids dad had made an impact on through his volunteer involvement with the FIRST Robotics program. For several years my dad was a mentor to students at Novi High School—one year they even named their robot after him...it was 'The Holey Minolli.'

This weekend, I'll meet yet another group of young people who will be part of that "legacy of relationships that will never disappear."

My mom, sisters and I will meet at an awards dinner hosted by the Joyce Ivy Foundation. During the evening, the first three recipients of the Frank Minolli Foundation summer scholar program winners will be recognized. The award winners are all juniors from high schools around the state. It was really difficult to choose the inaugural recipients, because there were so many qualified and deserving applicants. It's uplifting to see so many girls interested in a STEM career, and since our scholarships are focused on promoting science, technology, engineering and math studies among girls and young women, it was gratifying to know there are some talented and inspired candidates out there who are certain to succeed.

One student will study at Stanford this summer; another is enrolling in a summer program at Brown University or Cornell, and the third—a freshman interested in neurosurgery—will pursue summer programs at Brown or Smith College.

Impressive, for sure, and it's big for me to wrap my arms around, conveying the spirit of my dad to these young women who've never met him...to create the "legacy of relationships that will never disappear..."

What's also really amazing about these young women is they're not just outstanding students—they're involved in their schools and communities. They're gifted athletes—one's a dancer. They're not allowing financial restraints to thwart their desire to carve out a career in really challenging fields.

And, like Ms. Pierson says, "every kid needs a champion," and it feels great to be able to be their champion—at least vicariously—in memory and honor of my dad.

Being able to add to that interesting and diverse roster of people whose lives were touched by my dad is gratifying, and very touching. I feel so blessed that his "legacy of relationships" continues to grow and will indeed, never disappear.

I think Rita Pierson has it right. In the end it's not necessarily what you say or teach, it's how you connect with someone—how you show your willingness to gather together in this brother and sisterhood of humanity we all share.

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