



Covering All Bases

By Ronald Scaglia
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Father's Day And A Lesson For Us All

"Watcha' doin' tonight, Ronnie? Why are you in such a hurry?"

I remember one of my friends asking me that question as I was fumbling around with all of my stuff, trying to leave work for the day. After the workday had ended I was trying to not be held up, yet my books, notes, and other stuff kept dropping on the floor and every moment spent collecting them was a few more seconds I was being delayed. I always seem to be the least organized when I'm in the biggest rush.

"I'm just going bowling," I replied sheepishly, feeling that the call of the alleys probably didn't justify my haste. "If I get there late, it could hurt the team."

"Oh that's cool," my friend said. "Who are you bowling with?"

I wanted to reply that I had a hot date with an attractive supermodel, and maybe add that I have Gisele's number on my speed dial, hence my haste in leaving.

"My dad and are on a team," I said, answering honestly.

Perhaps sensing that my answer seemed half-hearted, almost as if I felt bad that I was bowling with my father and not going to the opening of an exciting, new club, my friend said something to me that I have not forgotten in the dozen years since this conversation took place.

"My dad died from cancer a few years ago," he said, "And there isn't a thing in the world that I wouldn't give up to be able to go bowling with him tonight."

I felt horrible as I realized that I was trying to hide an opportunity to spend time with a family member that he and countless others would love to have.

As we approach Father's Day this weekend, I'm sharing this story to remind everyone of how precious our families are. I've had the opportunity to spend "quality time" with my parents, and have never regretted one moment of it. And "quality time," does not have to be a trip to Disney World or an elaborate vacation. It can be as simple as a phone conversation, a dinner, or watching a ballgame together.

My father is a longtime Yankee fan. Although I spent my adolescent and teenage years cheering for the Mets, partially influenced by my mother who is from Queens and who was a teacher right near Shea Stadium, somehow I became a Red Sox fan. And yet, even though my dad is still a loyal and avid Yankee fan, when the two teams are not facing each other, he will pull for Boston, simply because they're my team.

"What did I do wrong?" he jokingly responds when folks see us together as I wear a Boston cap and he dons a Yankee one. They question how fans of the rival teams can get along, yet his apparent disdain for the BoSox, is really a façade, because if his team doesn't win, he wants mine to. As a side note, my mom still cheers for the Mets but also roots for Boston as well. Boy, the sacrifices that parents make for their kids.

It's these moments that truly create memories. So whether it's watching a game with my dad, or spending a few

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From the desk of NY State Senator Jack Martins

7th State Senate District

Degrees And Debt

Sometimes I look at my four daughters and catch my breath, not just because they're beautiful (although I think they are), but because I wonder how in the world my wife and I are going to pay for their college educations. It's not just us. It seems as if every couple we speak to has precisely the same dilemma. And almost everyone's response is the same: get anxious, then get angry about tuition rates, and then try to ignore it for lack of a better answer. It's not much of a plan, but unfortunately many people are pinning their hopes on scholarships and loans.

So today, I'd like to share my own thoughts about the student loan crisis, which has been drawing national attention as of late and how I think we're responsible for a bit of this mess. I think it's a worthwhile discussion for us to have here at home on Long Island, and of course, I welcome your thoughts should you care to email me.

For starters, if the average American couple walked into a bank and tried to collateralize a loan for \$100,000 using their home, you could be pretty sure they'd have a hard time getting that loan in today's economic environment. If they did manage to secure it, you could also be sure that they probably had to jump through quite a few hoops to make it happen. For better or worse, loans are getting harder and harder to come by.

Now consider for a moment that loans like that are made all the time, but to 17- and 18-year olds, who have no collateral whatsoever, no credit history, and who

don't even have a job. These loans are based solely on the supposed strength that their future college degree will help them find gainful employment.

We all agree that higher education is important and that as a nation, it's in our best interest to make sure our young people have access to the American Dream. We've all heard the studies that indicate a degree is worth nearly \$1 million in added income over a lifetime and, last week, I actually read that those with college degrees can expect to live five years longer (I don't buy that one entirely). But what if access to these loans has backfired? What if we're actually mortgaging away the dreams of our children by burying them in debt?

Here are some sobering statistics: on average, today's college graduates leave school owing \$23,000. A full 10 percent of them owe more than \$54,000. And sadly, 3 percent owe a whopping \$100,000. As if those numbers aren't shocking enough, the total amount of student debt in this country is now approaching the \$1 trillion mark. That now surpasses the total amount of credit card debt owed in our country. Just think: our children already owe \$1 trillion dollars.

That's why after graduation they can't afford to live on their own, get married, buy a home or start a family. To supposedly give them access to the American Dream, we've saddled them with so much debt that they can no longer afford to pursue it. What's worse is that this happened quietly and until now, no one has paid much attention.

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Not So Humble Opinion

By Karen Gellender
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Teachers: Not Really The Issue

At the risk of sounding precocious, I've been suspicious of new curriculum initiatives ever since I was 5 years old. Actually, it's more like I have one very vivid memory from when I was 5 that I only realized the significance of much later, but it certainly planted a seed of wariness.

One day in kindergarten, my classmates were called up to our teacher one at a time during our usual playtime. When my name was called, I nervously approached the desk only to find my teacher pointing to a single word on a page. "Can you read this?" she asked.

"Ah-ah-ah..." five-year-old me responded.

"Apple," she said, and I can still remember the almost palpable disappointment in her voice. At the time, I was upset because I had let my beloved teacher down. Now, I wonder if she was really disappointed in me because I couldn't read, or if she was just disheartened by the curriculum she was being forced to teach. She had to ask me to read a word, knowing I hadn't been taught the skills to sound it out; either I recognized the whole word, or I didn't.

This was the early '80s, when phonics was being phased out in favor of the Whole Language system of reading instruction. I never did completely understand it, but I believe it was a system of reading where you were supposed to be able to identify a word in a sentence based on the words around it. It's not a very intuitive way to learn English (although not a bad way to learn Chinese necessarily, but that's another topic.)

Needless to say, this whole school of thought never really clicked for me. The situation got so bad later on that my first-

grade teacher had to inform my mother that I still couldn't read. To her credit, my mother did not panic at this news; instead, she rolled her eyes and bought me a basic phonics workbook.

She likes to say that I was reading by the end of the day, but that could be prideful exaggeration; still, whether she's fibbing or not, phonics worked. In another year's time, I would go from the classification "Can't read, poor thing!" to "reads several years above grade level for some completely mysterious reason, and please pay no attention to that non-sponsored workbook behind the curtain."

This was probably the most egregious example of Karen the student being failed by poor curriculum, but it was far from the only one. I had problems in middle school, but I only survive by pretending middle school never happened, so let's skip to high school, where I encountered the merry-go-round, *Groundhog Day*-like charm of the sequential math program.

Now when my father reminisced about his high school math courses, he used terms like algebra, geometry, and trigonometry - grand, robust concepts that even a non-mathematically inclined person like me could wrap her brain around. However, I did not get to take algebra, geometry and trigonometry: I took sequential I, sequential II and sequential III, which was all of those subjects mixed together in a blender, plus some pre-calc if your teacher was feeling particularly sadistic that day.

Instead of learning math concepts as part of larger thematic units, you learned all different kinds of random math in sequence for three years, going a little further in depth with each topic each year. In theory, this ensured that you had the opportunity to frequently review everything you had learned. In practice, you were already

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From the desk of Legislator Judi Bosworth

10th Legislative District

Parents: Help Your Teens Party Right at Graduation

Legislator Judi Bosworth (D-Great Neck) recommends that parents take the time to talk to their teens about celebrating in a fun, safe and legal manner during the upcoming graduation season. "At this time of year, when our children are celebrating important coming-of-age events, we must do everything we can to help keep them safe. It is our responsibility as parents to know what their graduation plans are and to help them understand how much we love them and want them to be safe. Alcohol and/or drug use, particularly on these nights, can cause irreparable damage that can affect them for the rest of their lives," said Leg. Bosworth.

Keeping teens safe is key. Research from Liberty Mutual Insurance and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) shows that 90 percent of teens believe their peers are more likely to drink and drive on prom night and 79 percent believe the same is true for graduation night. Yet, less than one-third of teens say that driving on prom-night and graduation night comes with a high degree of danger.

Prevention begins with a conversation. Tell your teen it's unhealthy, unsafe and illegal to drink alcohol. Research continues to show that parents do make a difference and it just may save their life or the life of another.

With the teen brain still developing and sensitive to alcohol's effects on judgment and decision-making, tell your teen about the reality and risks of underage drinking (NIAAA, April 2012):

- Their inhibitions and memory become affected - so they may say and do things they will regret and possibly will not remember doing at all.

- Their decision-making skills are also affected. They may become restless and aggressive. They may be more at risk for having an alcohol-related traffic crash, getting into fights, trashing a house, or making unwise decisions about sex.

- There is loss of physical control too: loss of balance, slurred speech, and blurred vision. Normal activities - even crossing a busy intersection - can become truly dangerous.

Graduation is a time to celebrate. But before our graduates' parties, let's take the time to talk with them about alcohol—it just may save a life. I wish all of our graduates a wonderful, happy and safe graduation.