

Hero

Not all superhero's wear a cape.

The one I know is about five foot six, hails from St, Louis and has an affinity for fixing things.

My super hero is my step dad and this afternoon our family and many friends will gather to celebrate his eightieth birthday. I think it's appropriate to thank him today for doing what super heros do – they save people.



When I was nine years old my father left his wife and five children (one of which was a newborn) and ran off with his secretary. So cliché I know but the scars of this heinous act are still carried around by his five children to this day. My young mother's life had been about being a wife and mother from the age of nineteen. Suddenly she was solely responsible for making sure her babies didn't go to bed hungry. She had to scrimp and scrape for every morsel she put on our plates. She had to get a job and leave her baby in day care back in a day when that was not the norm. We moved often and learned to make due and do without. We wore things out and handed them down. We learned to make our own fun and learned the value of working for something that you wanted. We took care of each other. We grew up too soon. Thanks to the charity of others we got by. It wasn't until years later when I found myself in a similar but not as dire situation that I could start to imagine how completely overwhelmed and terrified she must

have been. My mom needed life to cut her a break and in 1981 it finally did.

Bob Powell had recently joined our church and not long after some mutual friends introduced him to my mother. I was sixteen years old so the details of my mother's blossoming romance were not of any interest to me but I do know that the relationship advanced swiftly. Bob had a similar story. He was divorced and had two young adult daughters. He had raised them on his own teaching them everything they would need to know to be independent self sufficient women. Those girls could change a tire, do an oil change, fix a toilet and rewire an electrical outlet. I guess Mom and Bob bonded quickly over war stories from the front lines of single parenthood. Unfortunately he received a job transfer to Washington DC so on Valentines Day not terribly long after they met, he proposed to her and she accepted. By April that same year they were married.

As happy as my mother was I was angry at her good news. I was just finishing my sophomore year in high school. I had a job that I loved and my friends were my world. I had been forced to grow up quickly, go to work at 14 and help take care of my family. By the age of 16 I thought I was already a grown up. I did not appreciate this guy coming along and moving us 800 miles away from our family, our friends and our lives. When we landed in Virginia I did my level best to avoid him as much as possible. We moved in to a lovely big house and my mom was able to stay home again. Suddenly we had all we could eat and I had my own room. Still it was hard to be grateful. I went to school, I got a job and I started to settle in but I wouldn't give my parents the satisfaction of knowing I liked it here. Looking back I realize I was kind of a disrespectful brat. I got in trouble. I disregarded rules. I was counting the days until graduation so I could get out.

My feelings towards my step dad started to change during my junior year of high school thanks to what I now realize was a completely selfless act of kindness towards me. I had been casually dating a boy from church and he was taking me to a school dance. He showed up at the appointed time to pick me up but came in to the house and said "I don't think we're going to be able to go to the dance. Something is

very wrong with my car. I barely made it here." I guess my face registered how crushed I was because before he could pick up the phone to call his parents my step dad said "Why don't you drive my car?" Every head in the room spun around to look at him to see if he was serious. Bob's car was his pride and joy. He drove a Datsun 280Z. He had recently been teaching me how to drive stick shift. He felt like knowing how to drive stick was something every girl needed to have in her arsenal of skills. "Are you serious?" I asked. "Yes, but only you can drive" he said. "I don't want this joker behind the wheel of my car."

My heart began to thaw.

What kind of man lets a teenage girl drive his beloved sports car? What kind of man marries a woman with five children? What kind of man lifts an entire family out of poverty and desperation? What kind of man sells his sports car because a station wagon would be more practical? What kind of man never gives up even though at times it was not easy? What kind of man tells people he has seven children and makes no distinction for the ones he actually fathered? What kind of man has been there for me in every painful and joyful experience of my life ever since the day I drove off to the dance in his car?



A very good man.

Blood doesn't make you a dad.

Love does.

Happy birthday Bob.

I love you.

Felicia