

My Dad, My Hero

I stare through a thick, protective window, watching as a man in a lab coat carefully yet efficiently handles bottles and syringes, beakers and chemicals. As I look around, I see walls plastered with signs reading “CAUTION: Hazardous Materials.” In the next room, I notice bulky protective suits and helmets that seem more likely to belong to astronauts than local Fort Wayne workers. As I walk down the hallway, I hear the eerie click of a Geiger counter, measuring radiation levels minute by minute. Finally, the man emerges from the lab, locks the door behind him, and removes the lab coat—transforming back into the person I call “Dad.” My dad is a nuclear pharmacist, but more than that, he is my hero.

Born in Indianapolis, Indiana, my dad is a native Hoosier. He grew up in the small town of LaGrange, surrounded by cornfields and tractors, helping my grandparents manage their farm and looking after his three younger siblings. With the encouragement of his high school guidance counselor, my dad pursued his interest in chemistry, ultimately deciding to major in pharmacy at Purdue University. Within that major, he chose to enter the specialized field of nuclear pharmacy.

Unlike retail pharmacists, nuclear pharmacists work in a lab setting and handle radioactive isotopes on a daily basis. Because of this unusual job description, my dad has been patiently explaining what he does to neighbors, friends, family, and acquaintances for as long as I can remember. Yet, no matter how many times he is asked, he responds with a clear passion for the subject. His eyes gleam with enthusiasm as he dives into a detailed description full of words like “technetium-99m,” “gamma rays,” and “tracers.” In simpler terms, my father

prepares radioactive materials that are eventually used for cancer treatment or medical imaging, such as PET scans.

After graduating from Purdue in 1983, my dad decided to leave small-town life behind and took a job as a nuclear pharmacist for Syncor Pharmacy in Chicago, Illinois. Despite his inexperience with big-city life, my dad quickly adapted to his new surroundings, earning success in both his career and personal life. In 1985, he married my mother, and in 1986, he was promoted from staff pharmacist to assistant pharmacy manager. A year later, he earned another promotion, making him manager of a nuclear pharmacy in Munster, Indiana. Not long after that, my brother was born in 1989, and I followed in 1991. However, the highlight of my dad's career came in 1993 when he was asked to open a new Syncor branch in Fort Wayne, Indiana. While this offer was an excellent opportunity, my dad also knew it would be a big responsibility. Nevertheless, he was up for the adventure and decided to return to his Indiana roots and take on the challenge of opening and managing a new nuclear pharmacy. A year later, my little sister was born.

Though my father's duties increased, they did not detract from his love for the field of nuclear medicine. He worked hard to ensure the pharmacy's success in Fort Wayne, first as a member of a performance standards committee and then as part of a Kaizen team that analyzed the company's prices. Fortunately, my dad's risky relocation to Indiana paid off. The Fort Wayne branch has blossomed over the past 16 years and currently supplies radioactive materials to 40 hospitals. Consequently, my dad is responsible for managing a 6 million-dollar budget, overseeing 25 employees, and supervising a fleet of eight delivery vehicles. My father has been

the recipient of a Circle of Excellence Award, and under his leadership, the Fort Wayne pharmacy has won the Outstanding Quality Award two years in a row.

From 1983 to 2009, more than 26 years have passed since my dad started his first job as a nuclear pharmacist, but he is still enthusiastic about his career. As he says, his motivation for working is simply “doing what he enjoys in a way that allows him to spend time with those he loves.” My dad plans to continue in his job for as long as he is able—his goal being to remain open to change and growth as he learns and adapts to every challenging new situation.

Despite the success my dad has experienced in his career, he maintains that his greatest accomplishment is his family. His philosophy in life has always been “family and faith first,” and this motto is evident in every aspect of his character. My mother, brother, sister, and I know that Dad will be there whenever we need him. He has been my counselor, supporter, and friend for my whole life. Even after a busy day of work, Dad takes the time to sincerely ask about my day at school—he has always made my siblings and me one of his first priorities. He’s been to countless orchestra concerts, applauding our squeaky renditions of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” time and time again. Even more impressive, Dad took on the treacherous task of teaching me to drive, spending innumerable hours showing me the basics of turn signals and automatic transmissions. Lately, I have realized how very fortunate I am to have a person like my dad in my life. He could easily focus his time and energy into advancing even further in his career, yet he chooses instead to maintain a close, involved relationship with my family.

Moreover, my father’s compassion and concern extend beyond my family to the entire community of Fort Wayne. For more than five years, he has served as an elder of the church my family attends. As an elder, my dad is one of several church board members who share the

responsibilities of the church's administration and outreach ministry. In addition, my dad has worked with my mom to mentor couples, giving them pre-marital counseling and support. Outside of church, my dad has been a softball coach for my sister's Little League team and a member of both the American Pharmacy Association and Society of Nuclear Medicine.

In both his career and personal life, my dad has redefined the word "hero" in my dictionary. He has been a living testimony to the power of a strong work ethic, yet he has shown me that a balance must exist between one's career and one's family. He has taught me to face challenges and uncertain situations with perseverance and courage. He has overcome obstacles—moving to Chicago, a strange new city so unlike his hometown—and shown me that it's okay to venture into the unknown. He has taken risks—accepting a demanding position that would require all of his pharmaceutical expertise—and taught me that challenging yourself is necessary for growth. He has been my inspiration to pursue a degree in biology next year when I head off to college, and he has always emphasized that I should do what I love. I know my dad has made me a better person, and I can only hope that I am one day a hero to someone the way he is a hero to me.