



A Disappointing Dad

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Michael Buckley is the multiple *New York Times* bestselling author of THE SISTERS GRIMM, NERDS, and UNDERTOW series, as well KEL GILLIGAN'S DAREDEVIL STUNT SHOW. www.michaelbuckleywrites.com

Talk it Out

Read the following quote from Italian novelist, Umberto Eco then discuss:

I believe that what we become depends on what our fathers teach us at odd moments, when they aren't trying to teach us. We are formed by little scraps of wisdom.

Now discuss:

Do you agree with Umberto Eco's statement? What do you think he means by "odd little moments, when they aren't trying to teach us"? Explain your answer.

Brainstorm a list of things that you have learned from your own father or a father-figure in your life. Then brainstorm things you would hope your future child would learn from you.

Michael states that his dad lost his own father, and a brother as well, when he was young. Why do you think those deaths might help explain Michael's father's distance from the kids he later had as an adult?

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Remember a time when you taught your mother or father something about an interest of yours (for example, baseball or your favorite book), or

- imagine a time when you do so. Now describe that moment. Be sure to include dialogue and details about setting.
- Write a poem imagining what it would be like to have a father who takes no interest in you. The poem does not have to rhyme and can take any form you like. If you need a suggestion for a format, try to start with the following lines, then see where they take you:

*I wish my father knew that [fill in something about yourself here].
But he doesn't.*

*I wish my father cared that [fill in something about yourself here].
But he doesn't.*

- Create a list of at least five questions to ask one of your parents/guardians about one of their parents/guardians. Write out, in the form of an interview, your questions and the answers they give you.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY, A Disappointing Dad

I don't know why he didn't want to be involved. And it bewilders me, because I have a son and he's seven; and I am thinking about him all day long. And I go in and I watch him sleep. And I think of things that we can do together, and I think about things he should know. And like we're walking down the street or we're in some store and I hear a song and I go, "Who sings that?" I'm constantly trying to introduce my son to new things and teach him things that I love. And even going out and learning something about things he likes.

And it boggles my mind that my father didn't have that instinct for me and my brother. I don't know why he wasn't interested in us. Because, for me, Finn is the most interesting person in the whole world. And being able to influence him and learn from him and do the same thing, where he's influencing me and I'm learning from him – that's – I just don't know why he didn't jump at the opportunities. But he didn't.

There's probably lots of reasons, to be honest and fair. His father died when he was seven. And it was an unexpected death. He had a little brother who passed away when he was much younger. He had a single mom. And ... nothing I think he did ever seemed to be the thing he should do, you know? I don't think he ever found his true calling. Or even suspected what that might have been. And I think that, because he didn't have these big lofty dreams that I know I had, I suppose he took what he had and tried to make the best of it in the best possible way, even to the point where it was selfish. So if the kids got in the way of, you know, his fun, then the kids took the backseat.

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