

# The Reality of How We Were Loved; The Illusion We Should Have Been Loved More and Better



*“As long as we hold fast to our ideal of what we deserve from the world, we blind ourselves to the gifts we are receiving. We look back on our childhood and notice what could have been done for us and given to us, that we think would have made us happier. The gap between our reality and our ideal of what it should have been like attracts our attention like a magnet. But to focus on this gap is to miss most of reality. We miss the countless moments when we were perfectly cared for and attended to. We trade the reality of how we were loved for the illusion that we should have been loved more, and better. It’s an unworthy exchange that leads us to spiritual and emotional bankruptcy.”*

– Gregg Krech (from Naikan: Gratitude Grace and the Japanese Art of Self-Reflection)

**Today is the two year anniversary of my father's death and I'm honoring his life by spending some time reflecting on him and remembering his love, kindness and support.**

There are so many ways we express love and kindness towards another human being. Some of us express it through kind words and compliments. Others provide thoughtful gifts. Or we may be very physical and offer hugs, kisses and other types of physical affection. Sometimes it's just about presence – about being with someone and offering undivided attention.

**As with most things in life, we have our strengths and weaknesses in the ways we offer our love to others.**

One of my father's strengths was "hard work." When I was growing up, my father often worked seven days a week. He drove a truck for a wholesale bakery, delivering bread to supermarkets and restaurants. During a single day, he would often load more than 1,000 lbs. of bread on to his truck and then unload it



when it was delivered. I didn't appreciate how hard he worked until I did the same thing, one day per week, during my last two years of college. I was 20 years old, and by the end of my nine hour shift I was exhausted. But it wasn't until I was in my 30's that I appreciated that working hard to keep our family going was his primary way of showing his love for me. His hard work made it possible for me to have piano lessons, swimming lessons, doctor visits, books, toys, a bicycle, sports equipment and more.

**My father also showed love by "showing up." He showed up for nearly every sporting event I participated in, and there were lots of them – baseball games, basketball games, and football games. He showed up at our home on many winter mornings to pick me up in his truck and drive me to junior high school, since we were one block inside the "free bus" perimeter. He showed up to take me to piano lessons. And when I moved to Vermont, he showed up at my house in Washington D.C. to help me pack and then drive the moving truck 500 miles.**

When I had knee surgery, at the age of 21, he showed up in Pittsburgh. The surgery left me in a cast for six weeks and then on crutches for another six. He drove from Chicago to Pittsburgh to meet me at my girlfriend's home and switch cars with me. My car had a manual transmission, and I had trouble being able to shift gears during that time. So he traded cars with me, and I drove his car (with an automatic transmission) until I was off of crutches. Then he drove from Chicago to Washington, after my leg healed, to exchange cars again.



My father also showed love by paying for things. He was not a wealthy man, but from my college years until he died, he always insisted on picking up the check when we had dinner together. When we traveled together, he almost always paid for travel expenses. He always paid for gas, regardless of whose car we happened to be driving. Paying for things was one of the ways he showed that he cared.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, my father showed his love through acceptance. As a child and a teenager, we were often at odds with each other as I was strong willed and stubborn. But as an adult, he accepted and supported me in just about every decision I made: marriage, adoption, vocation, religion, money, etc . . . He didn't always think I was making wise choices (and some of them weren't). But he always allowed me to go my own way and I always knew he was behind me, ready to lend a hand if I stumbled.

My father wasn't a very physically affectionate man. He wasn't eloquent with words. He wasn't fond of saying "I love you" until he got much older. He wasn't skillful with compliments. I used to joke about the way he would start a compliment with the phrase, "I don't care what anybody says . . ." For example, "I don't care what anybody says, you make a great lasagna." It didn't exactly make you feel like a great cook. At some point I noticed a slight smile on his face when he would offer such compliments. He had a unique sense of humor.

It took me about half my life to realize how much my father loved me. And when I did, I was blown away. It's not that he was perfect. He wasn't. And I wasn't the perfect son, by a long shot. But he left behind a large legacy of small kindnesses. And he worked hard to support me. And he showed up. And he accepted me. And when I step back and reflect on all this I am overwhelmed by how much he loved me. And even though he's gone, the feeling of having been loved by him is always available to me.

And that's a beautiful legacy for any of us to aspire to.

Reprinted with permission from the Thirty Thousand Days Blog. <http://www.thirtythousanddays.org/>



## About Gregg Krech

Gregg Krech Author, *Naikan: Gratitude, Grace and the Japanese Art of Self-reflection* (2002)| Author, *A Natural Approach to Mental Wellness* (2004, 2011)| Author, *A Finger Pointing to the Moon* (2000)| Editor, *Thirty Thousand Days: A Journal for Purposeful Living* (1993-Present)| Director, *ToDo Institute* (Vermont) (1992-Present)