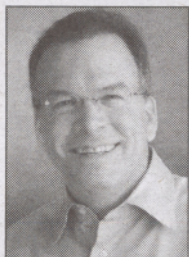


A son's lessons on Father's Day



Nick Fish is a Portland City Commissioner

BY NICK FISH
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

On this Father's Day, my thoughts turn to two fathers — Ham Fish and Joe Biden — and the lessons I learned from both.

I have never met Joe Biden, but our families share a common bond.

My father, Hamilton (Ham) Fish, Jr., served in the House of Representatives for 26 years. He was a moderate to liberal Republican from upstate New York.

Joe Biden, a liberal Democrat, served in the Senate for 36 years, representing the state of Delaware.

At a relatively young age, each was elected to federal office, and each dealt with personal tragedies that profoundly shaped their lives.

Shortly after Joe Biden was elected to the Senate in 1972, his wife Neilia and 1-year-old daughter Naomi were killed in a car accident; his two young sons, Beau and Hunter, were injured in the crash.

Biden took the oath of office at the hospital where his son Beau was recovering, and commuted to D.C. from his home in Delaware to be with his children.

Shortly after my dad was elected to the House in 1968, my mother Julia was killed in a car accident, leaving behind four children ages 10, 11, 16 and 17.

I remember vividly my father waking me in the middle of the night to deliver the awful news. It was the first time I ever saw him cry. The rest is a blur — a large crowd at a funeral service, a series of surrogate mothers, three moves in two years, a broken heart.

Everyone deals with grief differently. To grieve in the public eye is especially challenging. I never had the chance to say goodbye to my mother, or to tell her I loved her. It took me years to recover from my loss.



My father and Joe Biden somehow found the inner strength to carry on, balancing the demands of public life with the needs of a grieving family, while making many personal sacrifices.

Joe Biden would later rise to the high office of vice president; his son Beau would become attorney general of Delaware. They shared a strong and loving bond, and a bright future.

Then the sad news came last month. Beau Biden lost his battle to cancer, leaving behind a wife and two young children. My first thought was: How could this happen again to the Biden family?

President Obama spoke at Beau's funeral, and tried to make sense of it all. He described eloquently how the Bidens dealt with tragedy:

"And so, rather than use his childhood trauma as justification for a life of self-pity or self-centeredness, (Beau) ... made a very grown-up decision: He would live a life of meaning. He would live a life for others. He would ask God for broader shoulders."

The president continued: "(Beau) chased public service, like his dad, believing it to be a noble and important pursuit. From his dad, he learned how to get back up when life knocked him down."

As I read, and re-read, the president's beautiful eulogy, his words resonated with me, and brought back memories of my father.

Like Joe Biden, my father got back up when life knocked him down. He helped his children get up as well, and encouraged each of us to find our own path to service.

Dad died in July 1996 after a long battle with cancer. After we buried him next to my mother, I moved to Oregon to start a new life with my wife and daughter. Twelve years later I was elected to the Portland City Council.

Every day, in my own way, I try to honor his proud legacy of public service, and to cherish the time I have with my own family.

On this Father's Day, I am grateful for the example set by two very public fathers.

Ham and Julia Fish, Nick Fish's parents, on election night in 1968.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NICK FISH

The Taft Home



Residential Care Community

Where senior and disabled adults receive the care and respect they deserve.

Call us for more information
(503)223-2144

1337 S.W. Washington, Portland, OR 97205
www.tafthome.org

2 DAYS

after you quit smoking,
your chance of a heart attack drops.

In 3 months, your lung function improves up to 30%.
1 year after quitting your risk of heart disease is cut in half.

QUIT SMOKING TODAY. CALL: 1.800.QUIT.NOW

quitnow.net/oregon

SMOKEFREE
oregon