

SENIOR FOCUS

LEGACY

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There was a popular song in 1974 called "Cat's In The Cradle." It was a song relating the story of a man and his relationship with his son. As a young boy his son always stated that he wanted to be just like his dad. But his son grew up and dad missed the milestones in his son's life and dad would always justify it by saying he had work to do, "planes to catch and bills to pay." He would tell his son, not today. Well, his son is now a man and when dad asks about getting together his son replies "See you later" because he had things to do and places to go. Near the end of the song the father has retired and calls his son telling him he wants to see him. But the son remarks once again that he has things to do and places to go, but sure, they can get together sometime. As the song ends it occurs to the dad that, in fact, his son did grow up to be just like him!

The point the song is trying to make is that many times how a parent treated children and family in the past is how those individuals will treat that person when aged. If a person took the time to sit on the floor and play with the children, to listen to the children, attend their games or plays and just be present in the home then, when the person is older and unable to do things, the children will be there to help. There are always exceptions, of course. For example, a father or mother may not have taken the time for their children or they may have verbally or physically abused their children, yet there will be one child who will still respect their parents by doing what can be done for them in their later years.

My husband and I have lived from one end of the country to the other and have seen many examples of elderly people being ignored or abandoned by their children. The children no longer visit their parents whether at home or in a care facility. Or the children portray that they believe it is a great chore to get anything for their parents when a social worker calls to say that their mom or dad needs new socks or shirts or pants. Such attitudes and actions is not an appropriate demonstration of respecting parents.

However, further investigation reveals that when the older adults were raising their children they were just too busy to be involved in their lives since they worked 80 hour weeks. When the children were in a school play the parent had to be "someplace" and missed seeing the performance. When parent teacher conferences were scheduled the parent "forgot" all about them. I'm sure you can add to this list.

You can't undo what was done to/for you or not done to/for you in the past. But you can change the cycle of neglect and now do what you can for your parents. Your children and others are watching you. Actions DO speak louder than words. It is important, even if you did not have the best parents, to still respect them. You may not know what your parents went through as children and it could be they were only repeating what they saw and experienced in their upbringing. But you CAN start a new tradition for your children and grandchildren. Will you be remembered for the things that showed you cared or for the things you neglected? Why not leave a legacy of compassion rather than a legacy of neglect and resentment?