

Dads must meet the tough challenges of manhood

By Bruce A. Love

According to a quote attributed to Ernest Hemingway, a man must do four things to “be a man.” Hemingway probably announced his criteria after accomplishing these tasks himself. Regrettably, I do not yet qualify for manhood under the rigorous standards established by this renowned American author. However, I still have time, and so do you!

With Father’s Day just one day away, I am happy to report that many of us “dads” are able to cross one item off the list. Hemingway’s first criterion is “father a son.” I believe being a father of either gender is a noteworthy achievement, and qualifies any dad as “a man.” Fathering a child, and being a father, are not the same thing. The former is easy if biological systems function. The later is probably the most difficult task on the face of the earth. So, let’s up the ante on old Hemingway, and change his first condition to “being a father.” Whether you are a biological father actively raising your child, a foster parent, an adoptive parent, or just very involved in shaping the minds and character of our young people, I believe you meet our new stringent criterion for “being a man.”

Hemingway’s second requirement for being a man is “plant a tree.” I crossed this one off my list ages ago. Once again, Hemingway seemed to be thinking about short-term accomplishments as opposed to long-term responsibilities. I think that a tree should have to survive ten or more years, and start serving some useful purpose, such as provide appreciable shade or bear fruit. Here’s an idea: if you plant the tree with your son, you will accomplish three things. You will satisfy the manhood tree-planting requirement for you and your son, and you will build on our “being a father” criterion by sharing valuable life skills with your child. I believe the term “plant a tree” also can be a metaphor for starting something that will grow to help others in some way. If you start a club, association, or business, or you teach a class or coach a team, I think you can cross “plant a tree” off your list, as long as your efforts bear fruit of some kind.

Hemingway’s third requirement for being a man is, “write a novel.” This is one goal I have yet to accomplish in the

literal sense. But I think this criterion has another interpretation. When you think about it, living a life is like writing a novel. Each day we live is another page in the novel. Every good novel has interesting characters, settings, and plot. If we live our lives just right, we have a great read. All that’s left to do is put it down on paper for future generations, and we have ourselves a novel. Hemingway never said anything about getting published professionally. This is a break for modern day amateur writers. Using a personal computer and a word processor, we can easily “publish” our own “novel.” If you publish your memoirs to a web site, the entire world can read the novel of your life! What are you waiting for?

Hemingway’s final condition for being a man is, “fight a bull.” Ok, this one I have not done, and I am running out of time to do this. If anyone has a gentle bull that will go a few rounds with me, I’d be interested in hearing from you. I even looked online for virtual bullfighting, but came up empty. However, if we think outside the box on this one, I believe we can find our own “bull” to fight. The bull represents a powerful force that can easily destroy us. We really don’t have to fight the bull; it is something we choose to do to feel the exhilaration that comes with the act of putting everything on the line for the chance to accomplish some great goal. Your goal can be working toward a degree or diploma, accepting a difficult assignment in service of our country, beating an addiction, or accepting some other monumental challenge.

My dad and mom raised two sons and a daughter. Dad planted many trees. In addition to maples, fruit trees and pine trees, Dad coached little league, taught Sunday School, and was well-liked and respected. Dad never did any bullfighting, but he served in the U.S. Army in WWII, and saw action in the South Pacific. While my dad never wrote a novel, he told us many stories and gave us enough material to shape our lives, and record his words on paper for a great read. He was a real man!

As we celebrate Father’s Day tomorrow, let’s honor the men who have shown us what being a “real man” is all about, and challenge ourselves to be all we can be. Happy Father’s Day!

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