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The day I heard my eulogy

I'm not positive what year it was, but my best guess is 2002. I do know that it was Dec. 21, because it was my birthday. Despite any jokes to the contrary, I learned that sometimes we forget to give those we love the most the benefit of the doubt.

My daughter still loves it when I tell her how many people have called me or stopped me on the street to tell me how much they love the radio commentary she recorded for me, talking about my dad, then about me and how my dad loved the practice of law, and how I continue to do so.

She still cringes when I joke about the fact that she was taken away by an alien ship when she was 12 and not returned until she was 17, etc., etc. She gets it, but she's not crazy about it.

Anyway, the day I heard my own eulogy was one of the greatest days of my life. It occurred during that same period of time I joke about, so obviously more was going on during that phase of her life than I have admitted to.

I knew something was up because she was very excited about the fact that I was coming to school with her. What made it all the more enjoyable was the fact that it also is the school district from which I graduated a few — alright, many — years ago.

I thought I understood what was up because my wife had a look in her eyes that made me certain I was going to be surprised with a birthday candle shoved into a cupcake. I had no idea why that would be, as it really seemed out of character with other recent birthdays — kids weren't at an age of honoring such events in a parent's life — but I went along for the ride.

When I walked into my daughter's classroom, there was a lectern, a video camera and a chair right in front of lectern. She directed me to sit in that chair. Of course, I said hello to all of her classmates before dutifully sitting down as I was instructed.

In a shocking development, completely out of the blue, my daughter then walked up to the podium. I suppose I secretly expected to be asked to comment on some topic related to the law, or about having been an alumnus, and that must have been the reason why the lectern was placed there. Boy, was I wrong!

As I sat there, trying to comprehend my surroundings, my daughter suddenly evolved into a very poised young woman. She

calmly looked around the classroom, then looked directly at me and started her presentation with the words "My father..."

She went on to recite events that had happened in our lives, events I never thought she even really knew took place, presumably forced out of her conscious memory by more immediate thoughts, the common everyday needs of a teenager. Boy, was I wrong!

The long and the short of it is that she had been given an assignment for her public speaking class, the basis of which rested upon the explanation that a speech that commends the character or the services of a person is the original meaning of "eulogy," a word of Greek derivation.

That suddenly calm and sophisticated young lady recited the times that were important in her life, at which she claimed, rightly or wrongly, I had always been, and never once missed.

She said things about me that made me very proud and, quite frankly, choked me up beyond anything I can describe in this column. Besides, if I recited them, I'd sound pretty much like a jerk. The way she recited them, however, I sounded like a virtual hero — someone I wanted to meet.

So you see, one day, a young woman, one of the most important people in my life, gave me the best birthday present a father could ever wish for. I never thought she even would be cognizant of those things, let alone have the guts to say any of them in front of all of her classmates. But she did, and she did it in such a way that when she finally came to the very end and said "I love you, Daddy," I'm pretty sure that I was crying harder than she was.

Perhaps, as a small token of my appreciation, I can return just a fraction of the joy she gave me that day, when she reads this column.

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