

A Pornographer's Daughter Salutes Her Dad's Wisdom on Father's Day

LIFE LESSONS

Kristin Battista-Fraze's dad may have been in the porn business, but that didn't mean he wasn't a great father, she writes.

Kristin Battista-Fraze | Updated Jul. 13, 2017 7:35PM ET / Published Jun. 17, 2012 4:45AM ET



Courtesy of Kristen Battista-Fraze

On a day when everyone is honoring the uniqueness of their fathers, I realize my dad is just like any other dad with one exception— he's a pornographer. When people hear what he does for a living, they often say, "You don't look like your family would be in porn." I surmise that they would expect the daughter of a pornographer to be a stripper or a porn actress and not a social worker or marketing professional. And they might also imagine my dad as a sleazy man with slicked-back hair and a polyester shirt unbuttoned to reveal a hairy chest and big gold chain.

I have to say Dad doesn't look like the stereotypical pornographer portrayed in the movies but more like an accountant. He is a bald man with glasses who always wears a shirt with a front pocket so he can carry a pen. I have no idea what he might urgently need to write down, but he promptly returns any pocketless shirt he receives as a gift. He has other quirky traits, too, like he lives in Florida but hates the sun, and always wears a baseball cap or wide brim hat to shield against the sunlight. He looks like a Floridian but would deny it and protests by saying he is from West Philadelphia, even though he hasn't lived there in more than 35 years.

Although my father didn't come to career day at school to talk about his job, he was a typical dad. He cheered me on at soccer and softball games as a child even though I was the worst athlete on the team. He also encouraged my college and post-graduate education, not just by writing the checks but by moving the boxes into various apartments and delivering me safely to school. My dad enthusiastically supported my career as a social worker and marketing professional, as well as my marriage to a wonderful man from a far more conventional background. He has provided me with essential background material for my memoir, *The Pornographer's Daughter*. His unorthodox career began by distributing *Deep Throat* in the 1970s and running porn shops for the last 35 years. This has shaped many of his opinions about politics and the way he sees the world, and, as any parent would, he has passed down many lessons to me.

Lessons Learned

During my freshman year at a Catholic high school, we began learning about the pro-life message in my theology class. One evening over dinner, we discussed my latest lesson and I could tell he was very unsettled by the school's teaching method. I described the graphic movie that was shown that day and showed my parents some anti-abortion literature I had brought home. The glossy brochures had graphic, bloody fetus fragments on the covers. My mother gasped when she saw this and said, "I guess it's a private school—they can teach what they want to." A few times my father had to put his silverware down on either side of the plate and stop eating, and also shook his head in disagreement during our conversation.

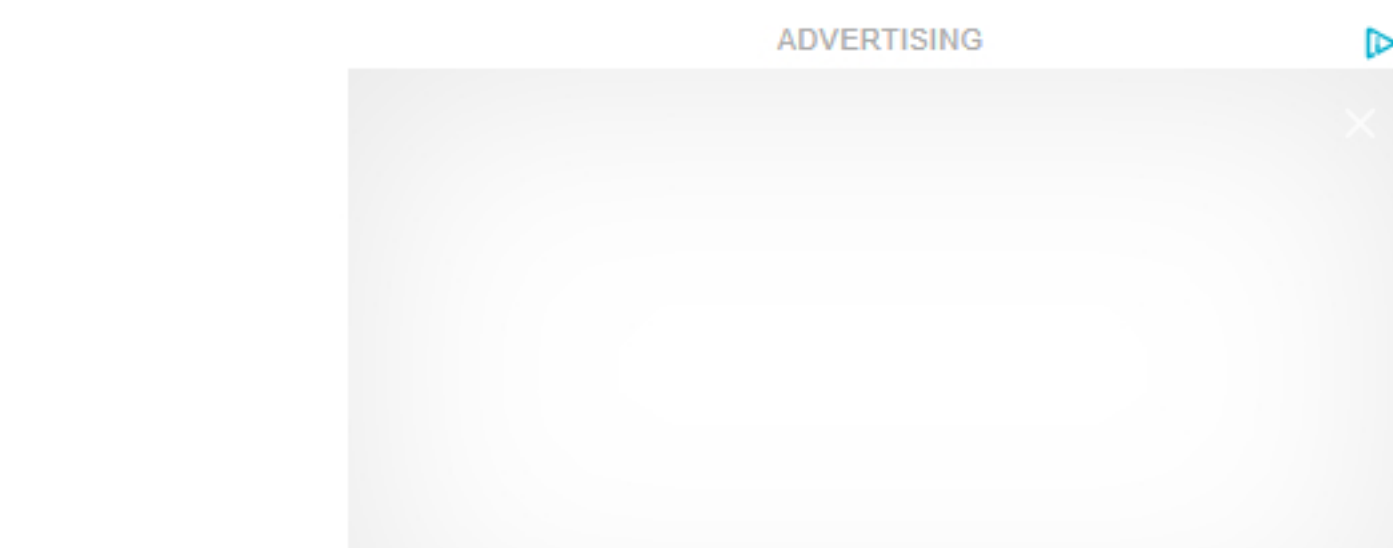


I explained, "The teacher says it's a life and that abortion kills babies. It's against God and the teachings in the Bible." My father asked earnestly, "Do you believe that?" I responded, "I'm not sure. I guess so." I was 14 years old at the time. My father responded, "It's a shame your teacher didn't tell you other aspects of the discussions about abortion so you could make an informed decision about this. When you're older, you'll understand the importance for a woman to make decisions about her body and no one really knows the answer to when life begins."

Lesson: Not only did this impress upon me the importance of a women's right to choose, but I also realized the importance of learning both sides of an issue before forming any opinions. The porn industry has always posed a challenge to conventional and religious morality, just as *Playboy* magazine often advocated for women's causes and civil rights, and in this moment my father was a reflection of the discussions that had taken place in the adult industry on this issue.

At this same Catholic high school, the girls had to dress in ugly green plaid uniform skirts and we loved to wear them as short as possible. No matter what the required hemline had to be, we always managed to dodge a very strict teacher or run into the bathroom to roll the top of our skirts to the desired short length. I had been in trouble more than once about this, and finally the principal, a strict nun, called both of my parents, who were divorced at the time, to help enforce the dress code. My father's response to her attempts was to say, "My daughter can wear her skirt anyway she wants for what I'm paying for tuition. When you have something important to tell me, then you can call." My father knew me well enough to know the short skirt behavior wasn't indicative of any larger problems. My mother on the other hand immediately took down the hem of my skirt in an effort to help me avoid detention.

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Lesson: There is a time and place to follow the rules and telling off the principal at your child's school may not work for everyone, but my dad's brazen remark taught me that character matters more than appearances. He cared more about how I performed academically and treated myself and others than he did about how I wore my uniform.

My boyfriend, now husband, Brian had plans to move in together upon relocating to Washington, D.C. from New York City. My father was visiting the city before the move and "the guys" went out for drinks. Brian came home that evening and said, "I asked your dad if he was OK about us moving in together without being engaged or married." The way he said this, I thought, this should be an interesting story. Brian continued and said my father told him, "You're asking the wrong person that question, shouldn't you be asking my daughter this?" Brian and I both laughed hysterically.

Lesson: When your children are adults, you have to trust them to make their own decisions and mistakes and to stand on their own two feet. If you have given them solid guidance and support when they were young, they will make the right call. Today, Brian and I have been happily married for 14 years.

There are many other small details that make my father unique. He's a die-hard Democrat who drives people to the polls on election day. Cooking and shopping for food are highlights of his day and a trademark behavior of his Italian heritage. He's a loyal friend, he loves his family, works hard and yells at the TV when he is watching political shows. So today, I say, Happy Father's Day to my pornographer dad and thanks for all the life lessons.