

# THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 419 Why My Dad Asked If I Played the Piano

My dad could have been one of the world's great pianists. He had the chops as they say. But he chose not to. One day he asked me if I played and he was sad with my answer. I'm Jerry Roberts and today, I'm going to reflect on a gift that wasn't exactly wasted, but I feel that's possibly how it was viewed. That's up next, on The Extra Point.

My parents divorced when I was eight and dad moved away. I didn't know much about him except for a few things my mom had told me. One of them was that he could really play the piano, and that initially attracted her to him.

He was a teen during the Depression years in America, and by then had 10 years of piano lessons, hours and hours each day. He liked it, but the driving force was my grandmother, who envisioned her son headlining Carnegie Hall in New York as a concert pianist. She was a tough woman and she wouldn't let up.

At age 18 my dad rebelled and quit playing. He was sent off to an even tougher uncle in an effort to straighten him out. It didn't last long. My father had developed a love of jazz and one day announced that he wanted to play in a band, and that didn't go over very well. He ended up leaving, getting a job playing jazz piano on trains that ran between cities in the Midwest. He was broke, didn't care, and loved what he was doing. My grandparents were angry and essentially disowned him.

I don't know how many years he worked the trains, but since the railroad was still the chosen mode of transportation in those days, I know he played for many of the big name baseball players, politicians, business people, actors, singers, and even mobsters. He said they all liked his style. Eventually, he came off the road, met my mother and then I came along.

When I left Guam in the 1980s, after 20 years of no connection with my dad, my first order

of business was to find him. I did, late one chilly winter night. He was living with the woman he said was the love of his life, a lady who also played jazz piano. It was their common bond. After playing for me for a half-hour, my dad looked at me with a serious face and asked if I'd ever had the desire to play the piano.

I told him no and I could see the disappointment in his eyes. Later, with dementia, he asked the same question a few more times and I saw the same reaction when I answered.

I came to realize that he had likely held out hope that his son would pick up the torch that he had tossed aside, and would become the pianist that he could have become. He once muttered that maybe things would have been different if he and my mom had stayed together.

A lot of us make compromises and choose to go left when everybody says we're meant to go right. We live with the consequences, with the thoughts that we coulda/woulda/shoulda, and then push our dreams off on our kids, wanting them to succeed in ways we didn't.

This is one of the key reasons I've made training and coaching the central focus of my work. I saw regret in my father's eyes, as I have in the eyes of many others. I want to help people to maximize their potential, then make good choices to leverage their talents to achieve their dreams. That way, maybe they'll never have to look back and wonder what could have been. My dad might figure that would be hitting the right notes.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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