



MARK

STRENGTHENING HIS ROLE AS A FATHER WITH HUMILITY AND PURPOSE

Mark and his wife met when she was a high school senior. They have four children—two daughters now on their own and two sons, Markus, 13, and Mason, 9. The San Antonio new home sales consultant says it was just one blessing after another.

“Being a dad is the best job. Seeing them develop—that’s your legacy. They’re part of you and you’re shaping their morals and values. I am passing on knowledge. It’s an honor, but it means responsibility, too. They’re vulnerable. You must set a good example, set the bar high, step it up. Be strong. They’re watching.”

Mark’s dad was 60 when he was born, and he had zero patience. Mark wants to break his cycle of short-tempered discipline. He mostly played outside and was involved in sports—not home, by choice, very much. Although his father was hardworking and did a lot for those less fortunate, their relationship was complex.

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“He died when I was a senior in high school, and I really had no positive role model on how to raise my children in a better way.

The cycle of what I experienced growing up is what I was programmed for. And I knew what I saw: I needed to change.”

When Mark and his wife were first married, they lived in Alice and did well. Like many families they went to the coast, fishing and barbecuing together with their kids. There was a move to San Antonio and then things began to fall apart.

"My mom died, then my wife, whom I've been with for 24 years and married to for 22, wanted a divorce. It was rough. We argued, and it kicked my butt. It messed with my self-esteem. All our efforts weren't good enough. We were in a bad place.

I was in a bad place. There was a lot of prayer. A lot of crying."

Following an incident at their house, the couple were both enrolled in a domestic violence counseling program. Mark participated through the American Indians in Texas, a United Way nonprofit partner. The professionals and friends he met there are getting him through.

The United Way-led Strong Individuals and Families Impact Council focuses on life experiences like Mark's. The ramifications are profound when traumatic events interrupt self-sufficiency: adverse childhood experiences, abuse, isolation, addiction, crime, mental illness or chronic stress.

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"Divorce changed everything -- my income, my children and my life. It affected my job and I needed to get an apartment. It worked out, but it was hard seeing everyone in "our" house except me. It felt like I had to quit being a dad cold turkey. Not having that family life hurts. You know they need to stay in their routine and their life, so I tried to stay busy and not sit there like a caged animal.

I found my identity is wrapped up in being a father. My whole world was now altered."

United Way is helping by funding partners and programs that help people like Mark on a personal level. The course in which he participated helps men in crisis, at perhaps



their lowest point, to open up. It's an important time for them to have the right people in their lives.

"I found support to help me deal with trauma, to heal, and not just with a Band-Aid, but fundamentally.

Marks says he was able to find humility and purpose again. Through coming together as a group of men with experienced, empathetic leaders who support each other, he found a brotherhood and camaraderie.

"I want to be a light for my kids. They need to be better than me. I want to be a good enough example for them to look up to. My days off are for them. My time is later because they need me now. My world was turned upside down but so was theirs."

Helping curb domestic violence and gaining skills that in the long run will mean less fatherless families, program leaders worked with Mark to help him regain self-esteem, addressing issues one-by-one. It provided him the insight to be strong for his children.

"If you're considering giving to United Way to support strong individuals and families, do it. When a group of people come together with the same goal, it's powerful.

In a negative world, United Way is the counterbalance."

To learn more about United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County's work and to hear more stories, visit uwsatx.org.