

# Always Keep Telling Me

Reader's Digest

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I had gone to see Father for one purpose. And this time, there was no backing out

*Condensed from "WHERE EAGLES SOAR"*

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**W**E HAD ALWAYS BEEN a very "proper" family, never very demonstrative. We seldom hugged, and almost never kissed. We men shook hands. Father taught us to give a firm, manly handshake and to look the other fellow in the eye while doing it.

But as my father grew old, I saw that he became far less inhibited. He was not ashamed when others saw him weep. He finally found the freedom to take my mother's hand and kiss her in front of the children and grandchildren—something we never had seen him do in his younger years.

Dad even found the freedom to put his arm around a woman other than the wife he loved. Some may

have equated his "freedom" with senility; I attributed it to maturity. Dad once told me that the older he became the more he realized he had confused spontaneity with impropriety. Life is too short not to show our genuine feelings.

As I watched my father become free and felt my own love for him growing, I, too, longed to express my affection in a more meaningful way. Yet every time I was with him and it came time to say good-by, instead of bending to kiss him I always stuck out my hand. Even the words "I love you" caught in my throat. I wanted to say them, but I was afraid to try.

Finally, I could stand it no longer. My sophistication and twisted

concepts of masculinity were choking me. One Saturday afternoon I made a special trip to my parents' home, 35 miles away. Walking into my father's study, I found him in his wheelchair, working on his ledger.

"I have come for one purpose," I said. "I want to tell you something, and then I want to do something."

Suddenly, I felt like a fool. I was 46 years old; he was 86. But I had come this far and was not going to back out.

"I love you," I said, choking up.

"Is that what you came to tell me?" he asked gently, putting his pen on the desk and placing his hands in his lap. "You didn't have to come all the way down here to tell me that. But I'm sure glad you did."

"I've wanted to say those words for years," I said. "I find it easy to write them on paper, but it has been difficult for me to say them. Perhaps I needed to say it more for me than for you."

His face grew pensive, and he nodded slowly.

"There is something else," I said.

He did not look up, but continued to stare straight ahead, nodding slowly. I bent and kissed him, first on one cheek, then the other, and on top of his bald forehead.

He reached up, took my arms in his strong hands, and pulled me down to him so he could put his arms around my neck. For long moments we remained in that awkward position. Finally he released me, and I straightened. There were tears in his eyes, and his lip quivered as he spoke.

"My father died when I was a young man back in Indiana," he said. "Shortly after, I left home to go to college, teach school and then go to France in World War I. After the war, I moved to Florida. I never returned home except for occasional visits to see my mother.

"When she grew old, I invited her to come live with us." He paused, and his face broke into a grin. "She said, 'No, I'll stay right here in this house. But I love you for asking me to come live with you. Even though I'll never do it, I hope you keep right on asking me until the day I die.'"

Looking up at me, he said, "I know you love me. But I hope you keep right on telling me—until the day I die."

Something broke loose in me that Saturday afternoon, something that had been knotted up for years. As I drove home, I felt my spirit soar. At last I was free too.

