

Published in Candy Magazine in 2013

FOUR MEN AND A LADY

Lessons learned from the four original men in my life.

No one ever tells you to purchase a small notebook where you can jot down all the lessons life throws your way. But we should have one, within reaching distance at all times, ready for sudden scribbles and note-taking, although no one really does. Instead, we do the best we can and file the snippets we learn in our mental hard drive. We take a screen shot and add a little caption before uploading to our cerebral Instagram feed.

I believe that the only lessons that truly matter, are not learned in the classroom. Instead, we pick them up from random places and bizarre situations, and of course, the people we come into contact with – some chance encounters, some tied to us by fate or destiny. We learn every day from friends, classmates, colleagues, lovers, family, and when we realize these lessons, they shape us.

But before friends, classmates, colleagues, and the love of my life, there were basically four men. Four men who have seen me through everything – diapers, knee scrapes, braces, graduations, birthdays, failures and victories. And I realized that I don't give them enough credit. I have learned countless things from them, and I thought I'd share four lessons that I have right-click-saved into my head and my heart.

MY GRANDFATHER

My Lolo is the strongest 80-something I know. He does rounds of his fishponds and farms on foot, under sun, wind and rain, and the blanket of night. He lifts heavy loads, and drives back and forth the three hours (per way!) between Calatagan, Batangas and Manila.

My Lolo is a lawyer and a businessman. I have always looked at him as a very successful man, albeit one who has weathered more than a few storms. I must admit, I learned about the finer things in life and valuing the fruit of one's hard labor, from my grandparents. At one point in their lives, I equated many things material and luxurious with them. They spoiled us, buying us the best of everything. But after losing many things – a home, a lifestyle, among others -- their perspectives and priorities have changed.

Back then, my Lolo would've asked us what we wanted him to buy us, or where we wanted to go. Today, when I see him playing with my eight-year-old cousin, I see my cousin dragging him around in their horseplay. My Lolo enjoys every minute of it. He revels in the simple moment, and I see how much he treasures these little nuggets of happiness. He never fails to take pictures to capture family outings, cajoling us even in the middle of a busy mall to stop and pose, embarrassing us as it does.

It is from my Lolo, now, that I have learned to **SAVOR THE IMPORTANT THINGS, and take lots of pictures while you're at it.** These are the things that deserve to be treasured, and you will realize one day how precious these moments are.

MY BROTHER

Two years after I was born, my first brother came into the world. The story around our house is that, I, firstborn, first *apo*, first spoiled little star in the family, in a fit of jealousy, walked circles around my parents when they brought him home, demanding through high-pitched sobs that my parents “take him back to the hospital!”

Boy, am I glad now they didn't. In the past few years, my brother who was born after me, has become an idol of mine of sorts. In many ways, he is what I aspire to be. He was always shy and introverted when we were kids, which I, the more outgoing sibling, overlooked and, quite frankly, was insensitive to. Nowadays, after studying in many places such as Ateneo, Hong Kong and even Harvard, he works with non-government organizations to champion causes close to his heart. He is one of the most unselfish and committed people I have ever known, working tirelessly, seeking nothing in return, to do what he believes is right. He has published several pieces of work, and has been involved in a handful of national issues. I am, in the most concise word I can find, proud of him.

It's hard to retain idealism. It's also difficult to be brave and selfless. There are lots of pretty, shiny things in this world that distract me every day, and even though I want to make a difference, something always gets in the way. I'm lucky that I can go home, and see my brother, and be reminded of how meaningful I

want my life to be. It is from him that every day, I remember to: **FIGHT FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN, and never look for anything in return.**

He is one of the most intelligent people I know, and with an educational background like his, he could have easily accepted a high-paying corporate job. Yet he chooses to walk another path – researching day and night, taking long, uncomfortable bus rides to faraway places, and working nonstop without knowing if there will be any happy ending in sight.

MY SECOND BROTHER

If from my first brother, I am reminded to make my life one of purpose, from my next one, I am constantly reminded to **lighten up and SMILE.**

My second brother is the third sibling in our band of four, and ever since he was a baby, he was just this bright-eyed ball of sunshine. Today, my grandmother, who's earned the right to say whatever she wants with age, claims that he's always been her favorite because he was always the cutest. "Naive" is probably not the best word to describe him, but I have always known him to retain a sense of innocence and belief in the good side of things. Some people may sneer at optimism, thinking it futile and a waste of time, but my brother has always radiated positivity. Even when he deals with problems, there is just an overwhelming sense of hopefulness and steadfastness that "things will always turn out right" from him.

Nowadays, this brother of mine tries to balance a yoga practice with his demanding job in the real estate business. He is constantly cracking jokes – sometimes in appropriate places and times – and allows himself to get lost in whatever emotion he feels at the moment. When he is excited, it's pure excitement leaking out of every pore. When he's *kilig*, he's worse than a pre-teen girl watching Bella and Edward inch closer on the screen.

Our lives are so busy, our minds so crowded, and the world moves at a mile a minute. We really do forget to just let loose, laugh and smile at times.

MY DAD

And now my dad.

I've had a rather rocky relationship with my father. I vaguely remember my mom saying I was a Daddy's Girl when I was a kid, but my family has been through so many things, with my dad at the heart of it all, that I can't really imagine myself as one. It's been a tumultuous journey for us, but right now, the clouds are starting to clear, and I continue to pray that the sun will break through.

One of my earliest memories with my dad is drinking my bottle of apple juice, sitting beside him while he was having a bottle of beer, and attempting to swap our two bottles, much to the delight and amusement of the rest of the family. It's a sweet, light-hearted moment between father and daughter, one that, in recent years, there haven't been much of.

Yet even in the most trying of times, I've always told myself that, no matter what, my dad will always be my dad. That will never change, and the bond of family, the love of family, doesn't either. No matter how broken, frustrated, angry or pained I've been, I don't think I've ever found it in me to fight that.

And now, I'm happy to say that walls have come down, and laughter punctuates conversations again. Light moments have been peppering the day to day. If there's one thing I've learned from my relationship with my father, it really is that **time heals all wounds.**

Four men and a lady. Four lessons and a lady. And really, this lady still has a lot to learn.

By Lia Cruz

Published in Candy Magazine in 2013