



A Good Man: Rediscovering My Father, Sargent Shriver

By Mark Shriver



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In this intimate portrait of an extraordinary father-son relationship, Mark K. Shriver discovers the moral principles that guided his legendary father and applies them to his own life

When Sargent "Sarge" Shriver?founder of the Peace Corps and architect of President Johnson's War on Poverty?died in 2011 after a valiant fight with Alzheimer's, thousands of tributes poured in from friends and strangers worldwide. These tributes, which extolled the daily kindness and humanity of "a good man," moved his son Mark far more than those who lauded Sarge for his big-stage, headline-making accomplishments. After a lifetime searching for the path to his father's success in the public arena, Mark instead turns to a search for the secret of his father's joy, his devotion to others, and his sense of purpose. Mark discovers notes and letters from Sarge; hears personal stories from friends and family that zero in on the three guiding principles of Sarge's life?faith, hope, and love?and recounts moments with Sarge that now take on new value and poignancy. In the process, Mark discovers much about himself, as a father, as a husband, and as a social justice advocate. *A Good Man* is an inspirational and deeply personal story about a son discovering the true meaning of his father's legacy.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Since most people are happiest doing what they are good at, it's no wonder that Sargent Shriver was always smiling. He was good in every role he filled--husband, father, friend, public servant, and visionary. And he was as inspiring as they come. Mark's poignant tribute captures the idealism and exuberance that made us all love Sarge, and reminds us to find pleasure in the simple act of living.” *?Former President Bill Clinton*

“This tender, endearing memoir is a moving portrait of a son's struggle to deal with the gradual disappearance of a beloved father through the progressive stages of Alzheimer's. It is a praiseworthy book.” *?Doris Kearns Goodwin*

“This is a deeply touching story of a famous family and the private joys and trials that came with it. Mark's love letter to his Dad is one we can all learn from.” *?Tom Brokaw*

“As founder of the Peace Corps, Sargent Shriver had the genius to change lives, mine included. With this powerful book, his son Mark shows a great man can also be a good man. What a joy to read about Sarge, the father. In a real way, he was father to everyone who ever served in the Peace Corps.” *?Chris Matthews*

“What a lovely book this is. It's funny and sad and inspiring without being insipid. Why was it, this loving son wanted to know, that everyone described his highly accomplished father, Sarge Shriver, as a ‘good man’? In the middle of the active and ambitious Kennedy and Shriver families, Mark Shriver comes to understand his father's faith in God's love anchored him and allowed him to do all that he did so well, including dealing with his own Alzheimer's. In getting to know his father better even after his death, Shriver learns some lessons useful to all of us.” *?Cokie Roberts, author of We Are Our Mothers' Daughters*

“In *A Good Man*, Mark Shriver gives a rich personal account of growing up with a father whose boundless optimism and life of public service made a profound difference for millions of people. Read it and come away, like Mark, reenergized and re-inspired to follow Sargent Shriver's extraordinary example.” *?Marian Wright Edelman, President, Children's Defense Fund*

“Asking around, in order to write about Sarge Shriver, I could find no one with a bad word to say about him. This book tells why. The mystery of goodness is deeper than the mystery of evil.” *?Garry Wills*

About the Author

Mark K. Shriver is the senior vice president of U.S. Programs at Save the Children in Washington, D.C., and a former Maryland state legislator. Shriver also started the Choice Program and served on the coalition to create the National Commission on Children and Disasters following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. He lives with his wife and three children in Maryland.

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Introduction

I was anxious and my heart was pounding as Dad and I drove east on Route 50 toward the Chesapeake Bay. We were running late—not unheard of in my family but unacceptable to the hunting guides of Maryland's Eastern Shore, who always insisted on a predawn rendezvous. Dad was doing his best to make up for lost time by obliterating the speed limit, but we were still behind. As we slowed to pay the toll, I could feel the cool autumn air and already see the streaks of sunrise on the horizon—and we still had forty minutes to go.

These hunting trips were a ritual for us, but my postcollege life—a new job, new commitments, maybe even new priorities—was starting to disrupt the regularity of our father-son reunions. And as the hum from the tires changed pitch when we began to cross the giant steel bridge that traverses the Chesapeake, I grew more irritated with Dad.

He knew that I was working grueling hours at a nonprofit I'd started in Baltimore and that it was hard for me to get away from those responsibilities. And as a lifelong hunter and Marylander, he knew the birds started moving early, and was well aware of the guides' protocol. Nonetheless, he'd been close to a half hour late.

We ascended the bridge's incline in silence, I quietly stewing and Dad lost in his own thoughts. By the time we got to the midway point of the four-mile-long steel structure, the full expanse of the choppy bay below and the low-lying shore ahead were beginning to be illuminated by the morning sun.

The birds will already be flying, I thought to myself. I was growing more annoyed just as Dad, staring out at the same daybreak, suddenly broke the silence, his thoughts far from that day's hunt. "Look at that!" he cried, awestruck. "I can't wait to meet God. I can't wait to meet the Creator who made such a beautiful sunrise!"

Staring out the side window I mumbled a sarcastic response: "Yeah, it's beautiful, Dad. Thanks for pointing it out."

Moments later, as we reached the final expanse of the bridge, it felt as if we were driving straight into the rising sun, massive and reddish yellow over the Eastern Shore, waiting to swallow us up at the end of our crossing.

I looked over at Dad, his face awash in the bright light. He was staring straight into the sun in a state of awe, eyes wide and unblinking. I could tell he was repeating to himself over and over what he'd just exclaimed aloud: I can't wait to meet the Creator who made such a beautiful sunrise... I can't wait to meet God...

We finally made it to the ragged cornfield, a bit behind schedule but not so late as to cause any real problems. Dad was in a typically buoyant mood all morning. He chatted incessantly with our two guides in the goose blind, asking about their lives and families and cracking jokes and becoming fast friends in no time, as only he could. And when the geese finally came in close, he couldn't contain his excitement, and he whooped and cheered us on—causing the first gaggle we saw to reverse course and fly off to safety.

Our attempts to get him to shush fell on deaf ears. He kept talking and laughing, at one point breaking out a Snickers bar, taking a hearty bite, and sincerely reacting as if it were a rare delicacy. "This is absolutely terrific!" he half-whispered. "Who wants to try a bite?!" Our guides shook with laughter, which only made his smile broader.

Somehow we managed, despite Dad's antics, to get a few geese that morning. I don't think Dad pulled the trigger once, though, preferring instead to watch and congratulate everyone else with a slap on the back. "My God!" he'd shout. "What a fantastic shot! You are a magnificent waterfowl hunter!" His mood was contagious, and everyone—me included—had a wonderful time.

But I was still anxious. No longer because of his late arrival but because of a contradiction I'd never been

able to figure out about my father, one that had been demonstrated to me so starkly in the span of a few hours. His infectious cheer that morning stood in glaring contrast to his startling comment on the bridge earlier: "I can't wait to meet God." I knew Dad's faith was unshakable, that he went to daily Mass without fail, and that his great loves in life were God and my mom. But how could someone so full of life be so ready for death? Not fearful of it but almost longing for it? How could he, quite literally, be excited to die?

He was seventy-three, but you'd never know it. He possessed the energy of a teenager, he looked half his age, and his remarkably full and active life had shown no sign of slowing down. As he had throughout so much of his life, he was getting important things done—still traveling the world, meeting prime ministers and presidents, working tirelessly and effectively to open the doors of freedom and opportunity for people who had historically been denied those things. He was constantly surrounded by his children and their growing families, he was more helplessly in love with his wife of thirty-five years than ever before, and everywhere he went he saw old friends and made new ones. He had his health, financial security, and, at this point in his life, the freedom and ability to do whatever he chose.

And yet he could stare into the sun and tell his fourth-born child that he couldn't wait to leave it all behind. I simply couldn't balance the two extremes: why was my dad, a guy so filled with vitality, looking forward to his own death?

Fast-forward twenty-two years. My mom, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, had died a year earlier, on August 11, 2009, and my dad was engaged in a heroic but losing battle with Alzheimer's. His doctor had told my siblings and me that, at ninety-four, Dad would probably not live more than another twelve to eighteen months. When we related this to Dad's lawyer, Bob Corcoran, he reminded us that, some thirty years earlier, Dad had written a letter that he'd asked Bob to hold until his death. We thought that, given all the decisions that had had to be made in a tight time frame after Mom's death, we should know whether Dad had left specific instructions about his wake, funeral, burial site, and so on.

So in August 2010, Bob sent us the letter, which landed at the family home in Hyannis Port like a stealth rocket amid the chaos of five children, four in-laws, nineteen grandchildren, and Dad himself. Everyone was running in different directions, playing tennis and baseball and sailing.

I noticed an open FedEx envelope on the counter and asked my brother Timmy whether the letter was in it. He said yes, that he'd opened it and read it, then left it for the others. I read it, quickly, and was moved by its beauty and thoughtfulness, but shortly after I finished, my kids pulled me away. I set the letter aside, determined to go back to it in more serene moments. That serenity never came.

Three months later, Dad celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday in style. We had a party for him at our house. Grandkids ran all around and took turns sitting on Dad's lap. We laughed and sang. Dad smiled and shouted out a few words of joy. He opened his presents and gobbled up his cake and ice cream. It was a great night, but he was clearly slipping. The letter crossed my mind—I have to find a quiet time to really read it, I thought.

The rest of November and December were jam-packed with Thanksgiving and Christmas and family visits. Work was as crazy as ever—I was running Save the Children's U.S. Programs and on the road at least two days a week, pitching prospective donors, lobbying state and federal elected officials, and seeing the kids in our programs. My own kids' sporting events consumed the weekend—we were busy doing everything we could to keep up with the Joneses.

Even though Dad lived less than three miles from us, I didn't see him as much as I wanted to, or should have, because, well, life with three kids and a wife, a job requiring lots of travel, and other commitments spread me too thin. And there was, of course, Alzheimer's. For almost ten years I'd been in charge of Dad's finances and

medical care. Each small step in his decline became another devastation for me, from taking away his car keys to hiring an assistant and then full-time providers; from explaining Mom's death to him to moving him out of their home. Our visits together could still be enchanting, especially when my kids were with me, but it was painful to see the brightest, most inquisitive, most joyful person I knew struggle to piece together short sentences. When Dad smiled and told the kids or me that he loved us or that we were wonderful, it made me happy—but it also made me miss him even more.

So, in early January, as I packed for a flight to Los Angeles for a Save the Children event, I remembered to take the letter with me. Dad's doctor, on our last call, had made it pretty clear that Dad was not going to live to see ninety-six. He had just reentered the hospital for the second time in a month. I didn't think he was going to die in the next few days, but I wanted to read the letter again and jot down a few thoughts in case I had to give a eulogy.

I had a window seat, and as the plane took off from Dulles International Airport, we headed east, toward the Chesapeake Bay. I realized the pilot was following air traffic control's direction before banking south and then heading west. But he sure seemed to be taking his time doing it.

Then I looked out the window, and the memory smacked me in the face. There was the Bay Bridge, there was the hearty, glowing sun, and there were Dad and I driving that morning so many years ago.

I pulled out the letter and started to read. Maybe it was because I knew his death was so imminent, or maybe it was sitting alone in an airplane away from my family; whatever it was, the letter overwhelmed me. He had written it in 1979, at the age of sixty-four. Why would a man so relatively young and vigorous be thinking about death—telling us the mechanics of his burial, his intended preparations in heaven for Mom and even for our eventual a...

Users Review

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Nellie Kim:

Book is to be different for every single grade. Book for children until finally adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important usually. The book A Good Man: Rediscovering My Father, Sargent Shriver was making you to know about other know-how and of course you can take more information. It is extremely advantages for you. The reserve A Good Man: Rediscovering My Father, Sargent Shriver is not only giving you much more new information but also to become your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your own personal spend time to read your publication. Try to make relationship with all the book A Good Man: Rediscovering My Father, Sargent Shriver. You never experience lose out for everything should you read some books.

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