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## Thank You, Dad

Eric F. Spina  
*University of Dayton*, [efspina@udayton.edu](mailto:efspina@udayton.edu)

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# Thank You, Dad : University of Dayton, Ohio

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## President's Blog: From the Heart

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Friday December 20, 2019

## Thank You, Dad

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By Eric F. Spina

I have often been accused of being sentimental.

In my defense, Italian Catholics are known to be a bit emotional. My eyes well up watching movies, dropping my kids off at college and thinking about what Karen means to me. I plead guilty, unapologetically.

I also get emotional when I think about how my parents sacrificed, worked so hard and strived to set a good example for me as spouses, parents, Christians and Americans. While I have tried many times to articulate to my parents the profound depth of my gratitude, I always felt like I missed the mark. After all, what can you say when someone has given you everything?

It's not a secret that part of my job as president is to raise money to support our incredible students, extraordinary faculty and staff, and the mission and identity of our Catholic, Marianist university. The generosity of our alumni, parents and friends has moved me, and it is certainly making a difference for the quality and vitality of UD. In gifts large and small, Karen and I have been inspired by the stories of why people give to UD, what they are trying to accomplish and who they are honoring through their gift.

The University of Dayton is our home, too. So when we decided to make our first major gift, the why (because we love UD) and the what (student support) were obvious.

And then the sentimental Italian Catholic side of me kicked in: I wanted to honor my father in a way that reflects his heart, tenacity and his very essence.

Now 94, my dad has had an impact on the lives of countless people, especially me. He was a sickly child of immigrants who grew up dirt poor in the Great Depression, fought bravely in the European theater of World War II, helped to build this country up as a member of the Greatest Generation, and dedicated himself to educating thousands of children as a biology teacher and middle school administrator in Buffalo, New York.

Karen and our children, Kaitlyn and Emery, embraced the idea. After all, they see the extraordinary goodness of my father, the way he has dedicated his life to serving others, his humility and humanity, his love of God, and his care for others. And we all see his impact in the world around him. How fitting, we all thought, to create a scholarship program at our beloved UD that will ensure — forever — that deserving students who might otherwise struggle to afford UD walk this amazing University as “Joseph P. Spina Scholars.”

How blessed we are to be able to honor our daily inspiration in this way at the University we love.

Thank you, Dad.

*(This essay also appears in the winter 2019-2020 [University of Dayton Magazine](#).)*