Life’s Hidden Experiences

In the poem “Not Bad Dad, Not Bad,” we get the message that the dad wasn’t the greatest parent in the eyes of his child “You wouldn’t win any medals, Dad/but you wouldn’t drown” (Levi ll. 7-8). You get the feeling that the dad is not the typical “hero” in the eyes of his child, or else maybe he would win medals. At the end of the poem, though, we can see that the child has grown to realize that his/her dad has tried the best he could, “I always thought you were moving too slowly to save me,/when you were moving as fast as you can” (ll. 15-16). It’s not always about being the ideal “hero” from the comic books, but about the lessons that you learn from that person that cause them to become your ideal “hero” in real life.

We see in the first stanza that Levi uses the father’s swimming as a relation to the whole poem. He relates the poem to the swimming to represent the distance that lies between the child and the father through the water. We see a sense of humor that seems quite insulting to the father “The funny way you breathe, your mouth cocked” (l. 3). We also see right after “as though you’re yawning” (l. 4). We get the sense that the dad was somewhat laid back and lazy from the simple simile of him yawning. But if we look at it from a different perspective, we see that the father was also struggling, “slicing the water with each stroke” (l. 2). By the end of the poem not only do we see that the father was struggling, but the child does also.

In the second stanza, Levi is saying that the father wasn’t the worst father, but he also wasn’t the best “You’re neither fantastic nor miserable” (l. 5). “You wouldn’t win any medals,
Dad/but you wouldn’t drown” (ll. 7-8) shows and also reiterates how he wasn’t fantastic or miserable. He may not have conquered the best through his struggle, but he did conquer to stay above water and not drown.

In the third stanza, there is a turning point in the poem. The author starts to question himself and his own actions. “I think how differently everything might have been” (l. 9). Levi then continues and questions his perceptions and how they could have made a difference in the relationship with his father, “had I judged yourr loving/like I judged your sidestroke” (ll. 10-11). This comparison is made because the author seems to have the perspective that his/her father is a decent swimmer. Maybe if the child would have thought that about the father as the role of being a parent, there could have been a difference made in the way he/she viewed the loving of his/her father. We can see from a few of these shorts lines that Levi’s words are “very truthful and honest to life” (Fulton para.1). Levi takes this honest perspective in the poem, which lead up to the turning point, just as maturity is a turning point in every human’s life.

By the fourth stanza we see that the author reveals his/her final true feelings towards the dad. We also see that the author has grown to mature and see things from more than one perspective. “But I always thought I drowning” (l. 13). We see the author’s perspective and were how he/she was feeling. He/she also goes one to say “in that icy ocean between us” (l. 14). This shows the distance that the author felt towards the father. He/she felt as though the distance and the space between them was keeping him/her from succeeding in life. “I always thought you were moving too slow to save me” (l. 15). This shows that he/she felt as though they couldn’t be helped with the problems or the struggles that they had in life. “When you were moving as fast as you can” (l. 16). This one line in particular shows how everything in life came together for the child. Once the child was able to realize that the father had done everything he could, the child
was able to move on from the past and learn from what an ideal comic “hero” is vs. a real ideal “hero” in life. The child realizes that through the struggles, his dad was still there through it all.

To understand and relate to what Levi says, you don’t have to have a hero. You don’t have to have a present or loving dad or a mom. You just need to be able to be mature enough to look through the glass at a different angle and see what the other person sees through their eyes. You may find that not all lessons in life can be learnt by words, but some must be experienced by actions.
Works Cited

   <http://chloeveng1.edublogs.org/>.