



NEWS

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CONTACT: GARY WOSK/JIM SMART
MTA MEDIA RELATIONS
(213) 922-2712/922-2700
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Ward Cleaver Move On Over

FATHER'S DAY HAS SPECIAL MEANING FOR SONS WORKING SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH MINER DADS ON METRO RED LINE SUBWAY

Television sitcom dads they could never be confused with, however, the sons who work right alongside their miner dads in the muck 1,000 feet below the surface of the earth in North Hollywood building MTA's Metro Red Line subway tunnels couldn't care less.

On Father's Day, June 15, it won't matter one iota that dear old dad isn't exactly like Robert Young in "Father Knows Best" or Bill Cosby. He'll receive the same amount of love, respect and attention all dads, regardless of occupation, receive on this special occasion. Perhaps he won't receive silk ties or argyle socks, but a new pair of goggles or gloves will be given with just as much affection.

The main thing is, on Father's Day, mining dads and sons will be able to take a break from their grueling jobs, remove the earplugs and spend a day together under the warm sunshine.

Mining, it's not the type of life pops had in mind for junior - for it is still one of the most hazardous and transient occupations a person can choose. Many a miner dad has hovered over his son's crib and prayed the infant did not follow in his footsteps.

Ultimately, the desire to be like their hard-working dads for centuries has proven stronger than the power of a father's prayer.

The fact is not lost on Metro Red Line miner Jim Lamb. Hardly a day passes when he doesn't regret his two sons' decision to enter the same field.

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Rarer still is the moment when their welfare is not foremost in his thoughts.

The Lambs are one of a number of father-and-son miner teams helping to build the Metro Red Line subway in North Hollywood.

Concerned as he is about his children's safety, Jim Lamb, 52, confesses working with them in the tunnels has made his life far more tolerable and has strengthened bonds.

"It's better than being down there all alone and not knowing anyone," rationalized Jim Lamb on working with Mike and Kevin. "I'm thrilled to have them around but I do worry about them quite a bit."

The Utah-raised sons believe working alongside their dad for six years has lessened some of the loneliness that results from not seeing spouses and children for long periods of time.

"It's a job, but being around the family definitely makes it more enjoyable," says Kevin, 26, confident one day he'll become a professional home builder. The sons admit they worry about their father's well-being just as much.

"It seems like he's been doing this forever and would know when something is not safe, but we still get a little nervous," admits 22-year-old Mike. "Caring, though, is what family is all about and we're sure pop doesn't mind us being concerned about his welfare."

As Jim tells it, he actually did try to discourage his sons from following in his footsteps, much in the same way his own dad did. Instead, Mike and Kevin wound up leaving school early and neither expresses an interest in giving academics one last chance.

Occasionally, "The Lambs Show" does temporarily disband when Jim or one of the sons become the designated job hunting scout.

"We usually follow each other around. The person who finds a job first then helps the other two get hired," Kevin says.

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Physical demands and certain occupational hazards notwithstanding, the Lambs believe the good pay and opportunity to tour the country makes their hard life worthwhile.

"I guess it's not all that bad," reflects Jim. "We all enjoy it. However it's backbreaking and one day, when the aches and pains catch up, we'll probably regret it."

The Montreal-born La Frenieres, Jean-Marc, 56, and his son Dennis, 32, have worked together for two years.

A 36-year mining veteran, Jean-Marc became the first member in his family to opt for the underground. "My dad said I had to do something," he said with a distinctive French accent. "If you cannot play professional hockey," he said, "then you've got to get a job."

Similar to Jim Lamb, Jean-Marc's plea for his son to choose a mainstream lifestyle also fell on deaf ears.

Dennis La Frenieres fell victim to the mining bug following a short stint as a Sheraton International maitre d' and an attempt at college. Ironically, he views the tunnels as an extended campus and his father as the professor.

"I believe having an old-timer next to you is the best way to learn," Dennis says.

Jean-Marc, whose wife of 33 years, Marcelle, has stayed behind in Quebec, likes the father-son arrangement, even though co-existing in a trailer can become a little testy at times. "So far, so good," Jean-Marc appraised with his fingers crossed.

PHOTO

Dad Jim Lamb, 52, with two of his sons, Mike and Kevin, take a quick break from Metro Red Line subway tunneling duties 1,000 feet below the surface of the earth in North Hollywood.