

The Square Flashlight

As parents, we spend a lot of time imparting into our children. Some of it is intentional, and some of it is just an overflow of what is important to us. Kathleen and I thought the following excerpt was interesting about how a father's passion about something, even something silly, left an undeniable impression on his daughter—even decades later. It is written by Reeve Lindbergh, the daughter of the famous aviator, Charles Lindbergh.

He...had a normal-looking flashlight with an ugly hexagonal head, to which feature he drew our attention every time he put the flashlight down on a flat surface.

“You see that?” He would point. “It doesn't move.” We saw. The flashlight lay there on the shelf, or the table, or the floor, exactly as he had placed it. It didn't move a bit. Nor did we, as he fixed us with his penetrating, instructive blue eyes.

“It doesn't roll off the table,” he would say, looking at us searchingly, challenging someone to contradict him. Nobody did.

“Why aren't all flashlights made like this one?” he wondered aloud. None of us would hazard a guess.

“Cylinders!” He explained irritably. “You buy a flashlight, nine times out of ten it comes in a cylindrical shape. Now, a cylinder will always roll. A cylinder was *made* to roll. And rolling is fine, for a rolling pin. But you put down a cylindrical flashlight in the dark, near a place where you're working, so you can use two hands, and what's it going to do? It's going to roll away from you, of course! Off the shelf, under the car... what good is that?

No good at all, we knew. And we knew what he would say next too.

“All they would have to do is change the shape of the head. Not the whole flashlight, just the head. The whole problem would be solved. What's the matter with these people? Pentagon, hexagonal, even a square, for heaven's sake. Just the head...”

He would shake his own head in frustration, lamenting the shortsightedness of invisible engineers.

After reading this, I wonder if I will ever pick up a flashlight without thinking about this story. I also wonder what impressions and lessons my own children will be left with.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 NIV