

An old regret:
analyzing "those
winter sundays



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Robert Hayden described the relationship between his father and younger self in his poem "Those Winter Sundays." Robert Hayden grew up in a poor neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. Since his parents left him with family friends, he grew up with that family and didn't know his real name until he was forty years old. Hayden also taught at a couple universities and published several of his collections of poetry throughout his lifetime; written retrospectively, this particular poem is about his "adopted father" and the relationship between the two of them. Hayden, the speaker of the poem, regrets how he treated his father as he grew up. Despite the father's hard work and efforts to show his love, Hayden failed to appreciate and recognize this man's gestures.

Hayden's father endeavored to be the diligent caretaker that every family desires. In the poem, the speaker explains that "Sundays too my father got up early" (1). This has implied that the father woke up early for work or to take care of business every day. Even on a worldly known day of rest, he awoke at dawn to be sure everything is completed that is required for that day. His father also worked often, and it is safe to assume that he gets up quite early for that as well. Hayden explains that he gets up before the house is warmed and "then with cracked hands that ached / from labor in the weekday weather made / banked fires blaze..."(3-5). Even after having several days of drudgery and pain in his hands, the father awoke to make the fire, allowing the house to be warm before his family leaves their slumber. It is evident, in these stark terms, that Hayden's father cherished his family and showed them that love through providing.

The household as a whole often failed to thank the father for his efforts and care. In the poem, the speaker points out how much the father does for them in the first stanza. He ended that stanza with " No one ever thanked him" (5). This shows in literal terms that no one cared to thank him. The father worked hard to provide and loved them but was never recognized for what he did. Hayden also described his situation on Sunday mornings with " I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking. / When the rooms were warm, he'd call, / and slowly I would rise and dress" (6-8). He knew that his father got up early to warm the house for the family, but he did not appreciate what was done. It was written that he continually was " speaking indifferently to him," despite the father treating Hayden special (10). The father made the house warm and polished his shoes and worked hard all week but it was never recognized from Hayden or the rest of the family.

When looking back to the past, Hayden regrets the way he treated his father. He wrote this poem to acknowledge that and wishes he had recognized the love his father provided. In the poem he writes that he always treated him poorly and it is implied that he was not appreciative of his motives. In the poem, regret emerges in Hayden's final words: " What did I know, What did I know / of love's austere and lonely offices" (13-14). He chose those words to show that he wishes he could change his ignorance from the past. The word austere shows the dark somber that his father may have felt from never being thanked. If Hayden could go back to his younger self, he would have treated his father as special and been grateful for what he had done for him and the rest of the family.

Unfortunately, Hayden can not reverse the distant relationship he caused with his father, but he instead tells readers this story. He wants to prevent others from having the same issues with their own parents. It is vital to recognize when people put forth effort, express gratitude toward them, and accept others' way of showing love. There are people few and far between who strive to provide for their family and friends. It is apparent that Hayden wants us to learn from his mistakes and listen to the advice he gives through the subtleties of " Those Winter Sundays."

Hayden, Robert. " Those Winter Sundays." Making Literature Matter: An Anthology for Readers and Writers. Sixth Edition. edited by John Schilb and John Clifford. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015. p. 263.