

Thoughts on Father's Day

by Richard Ballo



"You are the worst father there is," shouts Nick, my 12 year old son.

My son is ranting and raving about the injustices he suffers at my rules. Rules that I ranted and raved about when I was his age. I smile as I acknowledge that he is like me. Did my father have the same thoughts? When I was a teenage at the family dinner table I looked up at my father and I was shocked. Shocked with the revelation that I was like him.

During my twenties I never thought about fatherhood. I knew I wanted children but I never thought about the meaning of being a father. When I married I moved into the house where my wife and her father lived. Then we had our first child, Victor. I can vividly remember the moment I first began to seriously think about fatherhood.

I was walking, cradling, my three week old, crying son in my arms. Carl, my father in law, came into the room.

"Oh give him to me," he said grabbing Victor from my arms.

What type of father do I want to be? This question popped into my head. Do I shrink back and let my father-in-law take my child and be his father? Or do I step up and take control of my child? The answer was that I needed to take control of the situation, my son, and other future children and be a father.

My father in law never took my son from my arms again. The answer was to offer my son to Carl. Sometimes he

would say yes, and sometimes he would say no. By offering him Victor, Carl felt connected and important to the family.

Being a father has taught me to be brave and overcome my fear of embarrassment.

I needed to do the manly chore of buying a new lawnmower. So off I set for the mall with the double stroller filled with the growing family of two boys. I placed the lawn mower box on top of the shopping cart. I had the shopping cart with a huge box on it, two toddlers in a double wide stroller, and my car was at the opposite end of the mall. Did my father ever have to go through this? With my left hand pushing the stroller and my right hand pulling the shopping cart, I smiled and walked through the mall out to my car. I survived.

When I married I chose my father to be my best man. He chose to be a father and he stood by me through the good times and the bad to help me become a man. I wanted to let him know I loved him until the day he died.

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Being a father is not all fun and games, or one-sided.

I've taught my kids that a rocking chair can be a roller coaster, a table cloth a tent. We go to ball games and musicals. The boys have taught me patience, to face my fears, and to laugh.

Being a father is about the small things that happen every day and at the same time what it will mean to them and me in 20 years. Will I raise sons who will turn into fathers that will laugh and play with their children? Will they cherish the short time they have together? Will they have patience when their sons rail against them? Will I raise good-hearted men who will treat me well when I am old and frail?

"Dad, I love you," says Nick later that same evening.

I smile and give him a hug.

Richard Ballo is a widower, writer, and single father raising his two sons in Naples. He teaches the course *Redirecting Children's Behavior*. He is looking forward to spending the summer with his sons.