

## Father's Day Thoughts

Five years have passed since our only child Julia's trip to Heaven. It is true that time does heal some of the pain of being separated from her. But Fathers' Day can continue to be challenging especially when it occurs in the same month as the anniversary of our daughter's last day on earth.

On the first Fathers' Day after Julia died, I remember thinking that if the person who is the reason that I am called a father is no longer present, how can I even think of calling myself a Father? A deep sadness had overcome me, and although I had faith that Julia was with her Father in Heaven, I believed that I no longer was linked to her. Later that year, when another father I had just met asked me if I had any children, I said "No!" I immediately felt ashamed of my answer. I had denied Julia's life.

In the second year after Julia died, I struggled to find any meaning on Fathers' Day. My father had died four months before. I remember thinking that Fathers' Day can be just like any other day, and it need not be given any special status.

But as the years continue to pass, I have learned to not take personally this mystery of having one's child leave this world before me. Putting my ego aside, I now know that although the person who called me "Dad" is not here with us, she continues to influence me to be a good father. Julia's eternal love and our Father's eternal love have conquered all of my doubts and misgivings. I also have the continued love and support of Julia's mom - my wife Mary - and of all of you in the Alive Alone and The Compassionate Friends communities to help me realize that fatherhood is forever.

In closing, I send the following letter from my heart after reflecting upon a past Father's Day greeting from my daughter Julia:

Dear Julia,

*I want to thank you again for that last Fathers' Day card that you gave me. It reminds me so much of you, your artwork, your sense of humor, and your love. I can imagine you searching for the perfect Father's Day card for me. I know that you wanted it to be special. You wanted it to make me realize it was something that you selected just for me, because you loved me. Thank you!*

*Of course, you, who as your friends said "could make a masterpiece out of colored pencils," couldn't just give me a regular off-the-shelf greeting card. You had to embellish it. You added some more colors and some squiggly lines. You also picked a good "punch line."*

*I must now admit that when I saw the picture of the Dad on the card, I knew that it would end something like this. But I enjoyed the anticipation, and I enjoyed knowing that you had quite a chuckle while you were reading the card. You always were ready with a good joke, especially when you needed to cheer up your Mom and me, as well as yourself.*

When I read the card that first time and every time since then, I knew that when you were reciting all of those different ways that you loved me, you really meant it. And when I came to the end and you "back-tracked" with "well, maybe not as many times as the hairs on your head!" I knew that indeed you had given me a very special Fathers' Day gift! Thank you!

Love,

Dad

Jeffrey P. Petrino

**In Loving Memory of Julia Kenney Teresa Petrino, August 8, 1984 - June 9, 1999**