

Thoughts on Father's Day

To many of us Fathers who are now childless, the meaning, thoughts, and "feel" of Father's Day have certainly changed. When the Day was initially observed in Spokane, Washington in June, 1910, it was set aside to acknowledge the sacrifices that one Father made in raising six children when his wife died giving birth to the sixth child. He raised all six children. A Father living for his children. That's what we used to do. That's what I used to do. That's what we wish we could do now....but we can't because our child/children died. Or can we?

When your child was alive, Father's Day was that special day when you were celebrated as the provider, the disciplinarian, the mentor, installer of values, and all-around good guy that your child looked up to. In the dynamics of any family unit the role of today's Father can vary. Traditionally the Father was the rock and the anchor of the family unit. Many times this Father may be the Grandfather, an uncle, a stepfather, or any male who filled the role of a Father figure. But whether you were the biological Father or Father "designate", this was your day to bask in the love and attention of your child and family.

But then, the unthinkable happens. Your child is gone. Father's Day is changed forever. Even the days leading up to Father's Day can be filled with angst and emptiness. What do you do? How can you cope? Will it always be like this? Now, as a bereaved parent, you find yourself questioning all kinds of things-the meaning of life and death, relationships of all kinds, religion and philosophy. The life long process of healing has begun.

The cycle of healing the grief is on going. It changes with time but it never ends. Generally, men share what they do and not what they feel. They do not find it easy to ask for help. They try to escape or suppress their grief and pain. The consequences of this can be daunting and far-reaching. One of the cornerstones of any healing process is bringing feelings to the surface where they can be talked about, addressed, and understood. Finding someone to talk freely and share with such as another bereaved father can be very beneficial-especially during Father's Day week.

Remember that our child/children gave meaning to our lives that no one can take away. Are you still a Father? You bet you are and always will be. Can we still live for our child? Absolutely! Even though the longing for your child's presence will always be there, it's how you respond that is the key to making progress in your grief journey. The reinvestment activity of sharing with a newly bereaved Father is at the core of any healing process and serves the bottom line of assimilating your child's death into your life. Father's Day is different now but by sharing and helping other grieving Fathers you stay connected and your child lives on in your heart.

Jim O'Connor,

Ryan's Dad