



Kids 'n' Dad Father's Day Essay 2012: On Hope and Being Dad

On Mon. June 4th my daughter and her husband became parents for the first time as they welcomed Mollie Elizabeth formally into their family. The preparation and anticipation is now the real thing and they now have a new identity as mom and dad, forever more.

Each of us can likely recall those emotional first moments and the commitment that each of us made as new parents to that precious, little person that we soon held in our arms. Like most of you I still remember the rush of love and joy colliding with the beginning of worry about whether I would be the kind of father that my child needed.

Then there was less time to worry, only the reality of providing the best start possible...night time feedings, sleep deprivation, and changing diapers.

Our Mollie will be two weeks old on Father's Day and thus so will my son-in-law's life as Mollie's dad. I have no doubt that Mollie and he will grow together and that she will always feel and know that his love will be her companion.

As I write these words this grandpa is eagerly anticipating his first walk with his newest granddaughter. She won't remember, but it will be the first of our many joyful memories, memories that grandparents create everywhere we are found.

In our office at Kids 'n' Dad I have a tattered poster given to me by my father when I was eight years old. It shows a youngster playing first base, dreaming about becoming a major leaguer. Sixty years later it continues to be a reminder of his lifelong support that made it possible to navigate the worst of times- the 'crisis of a separation with children'. I was truly fortunate to have him on my side for over 50 years.

Unfortunately my dad was lost to us during that difficult 'crisis'.

Father's Day can be a very difficult time for many separated families. This past year Kids 'n' Dad lost one of its founding clients/friends to a car accident. He was a deeply committed father and in his short years with his son created many memories that will be part of his son's life forever. He was a gentle and loving dad.

Father's Day for a separated dad may be very different than being a dad in an intact family. Most separated dads have experienced the fear of losing their child and the reality

of interrupted parenting. They have come face to face with darkness and despair on too many occasions. Yet from that despair I believe that many of us have become more caring and loving fathers. The difficulty is that one must survive the journey and that is not a certainty.

A few months ago I received an email from a client from several years past. Despair and darkness had surely been part of his travels. Early in his email he expressed anger at the help that I had provided years ago. His criticism was that I had been too hopeful and as such I had not prepared him for what took place.

His words came at a time when I was working with some wonderful men/fathers who were suffering through interrupted or lost parenting through no fault of their own. I tend to hand out hope in small doses because I know the system is unpredictable at best and frighteningly unjust at worst. But the question remained- should hope and optimism be a small part of what we provide with the reality check?

Father's Day for this writer is Family Day. It is a time to celebrate the day that I became a father and the joy that we have made it through the craziness that can go on. At one time it was only 'hope' that sustained me. I tried to do what was necessary to give hope a chance but hope was what allowed me to fend off the darkness and despair.

Before Christmas a headline story was about a dad by the name of Joe Chisholm. The mother in a custody dispute had abducted his 2-year-old daughter over eighteen years earlier. Joe Chisholm had done everything to find his daughter; but only now was the mother found. Joe Chisholm now has the 'hope' that by doing the right things there will be an opportunity for father and daughter to rebuild a life together.

My hope is that all the good dads that have entered my life these past years will find the strength and the path to an involved, caring relationship with their child, whatever their age. For some there is only hope to sustain that target but I have seen hope turn to a possibility to a reality in my own life and the life of other dads.

To my son-in-law, dad to Mollie Elizabeth, put aside any worries about being a good dad. I know that you will be a wonderful, loving parent. My hope is that I will have many years left as grandpa to enjoy the two of you in play and in laughter.

To all a hopeful and loving Father's Day! Kids 'n' Dad do go hand in hand!

Barry Lillie

In memory of Mark Hipwell
In memory of my dad and gramps

