



On Being a Dad and Grandpa

I have recently stumbled through my 71st birthday headed toward Father's Day, a day that for some years is filled with a mixture of gratefulness, vulnerability and loss.

I am a separated dad and our journey is far too common!

Becoming a dad is transformational for men. It changes everything. It gives a purpose, a new priority to life that had been previously absent. Fathers recall the moment when they became dad and the love and commitment made at that time to their child through whatever.

I became a father in my own unique way through the courageous decision of a young woman through an infant adoption. I vividly recall our social worker placing our son in my arms. Ten minutes later she returned to ask if we wanted to keep him. I still laugh at the question- she didn't seem to understand that he became my son, through whatever, the moment she placed him in my arms.

Every father has their own similar and unique pathway to becoming dad.

Last winter I was touched by a very personal interview in the Toronto Sun with Toronto Raptor guard Kyle Lowry. He spoke about the change in his life brought on by being a dad to his son Carter (now three years old)

The following are excerpts from the Tor. Sun article by Ernest Doroszuk:

#1

"I like to see him (Carter) before the game. It makes me whole. I tell him I love him. He tells me good luck. We have a talk. You've got a good thing like that going. You have that in your life, what have you got to be mad about? You go out and do your job with ease."

#2

"But...fatherhood that changed everything. He's done more for me than I've done for him. He's a bigger influence on my life. It made me more of a man. It made me more of a grown up. It made me more mature. It made me understand that life is bigger than just basketball..."

I recall that the adoption process was a time of anxiety, scrutiny and fear. Would we make the list of approved parents? Power rested in the perspective of the social worker and her mandate to ensure the best interests of that child. It was a difficult process but one that you necessarily endured. Push back against the intrusiveness and judgment was not a viable option. My son and later my daughter had not yet been placed in my arms.

Curiously the birth of my youngest daughter had no such intrusiveness or scrutiny as she was placed in my arms by a caring nurse in the birthing room.

The next many years no one questioned whether I was a full parenting partner or quite frankly whether I was the best of parents or the worst of parents or somewhere in between.

The common bond of separated fathers commences almost unwittingly the moment that the intimate relationship breaks down. It is a return in some ways to the scrutiny of the social worker EXCEPT that the children are your children NOT the children of birth mothers or social workers or lawyers, judges or the Canadian Bar Association. No one said to Kyle Lowry or the hundreds of fathers that have graced our office that their role in parenting is disposable- something your children can do with or without.

I have been reminded of that vulnerability time and time again as I watch separating dads attempt to navigate a community of post separation services that are not committed to, nor really believe in the vital importance of a dad in the life of a child. In some ways the scourge of fatherlessness is a consequence of this basic starting point, especially the professionals (divorce industry).

“My boys’ dad is not an unpleasant obstacle; he’s an integral part of their lives.” (Jennifer Fink, a Wisconsin mother from Building Boys)

This Wisconsin mother fought a determined battle in Court in an attempt to minimize any participation by dad in the children’s lives. A Wisconsin family court justice ‘insisted’ that Wisconsin presumption of shared parenting legislation applied here. The boys would have their father as an ‘integral’ part of their lives, forever.

Just over a year ago the Parliament of Canada rejected (private member’s Bill 560) a presumption of shared parenting. In effect this vote was about the rejection of a dad as an equal parenting partner. It did not ensure 50/50 parenting time. It was intended to reinforce the ‘belief’ that both parents should have an involved, loving and enduring role in their children’s lives and the lives of their children’s children.

What was most discouraging about this vote was the indifference of the other so called community partners in creating positive outcomes for families. They remained on the sidelines, too often content with the failed status quo and their stake in the present system.

As many of you know I had unexpected quadruple bypass surgery last August. I grieved for some time that I would not see this Father’s Day. I experienced in my childhood years (I didn’t know it at the time) the commitment and love of a father and gramps. Fatherhood was the most important part of their lives- a game changer. They were imperfect parents; they never took a formal parenting course; they struggled with their own life baggage like everyone. But they gave the most important gift- the gift that I knew that I was supported and loved forever. It is the gift that I hope that I have given my children and grandchildren.

My oldest granddaughter is now seventeen. I often drive her or take her to this and that. I have been in her life for those seventeen years. When she thanks me for the simple thing such as driving her to dance I often have to sit in my car for a few moments with tears in my eyes. It seems crazy! But this is the separated dad's common experience. We know that it might not have happened and in truth what we did to make it happen. It simply is and we cherish it.

I am a fortunate dad and grandfather-not a perfect one. I have no scrutiny now for my failings except myself. My children and I found ourselves back to each other. Many families have found that reconnection to still be elusive and Father's Day is less than it should be for our community. It is as if there is an asterisk beside our name if we have a failed intimate relationship. Didn't we tell you that involved fatherhood was conditional?

I want to celebrate all the good dads, grandparents and stepdads that have graced Kids n Dad this past year. I learn about your love for your children through whatever. It is Ok to be an imperfect parent- everyone is. Don't beat yourself up. Remember the gifts of character that you have given and those gifts that remain to be given,

In closing I offer a short true story about grandparents that I have known over some years. Their son, like too many fathers has found himself estranged from his children for many years. This resulted in the grandparents also suffering (grieving) the same fate as their son.

They have recently had limited contact through social media with the now grown grandchildren.

In their update over coffee, they turned to me and said simply. We could give up our hope to be with our grandchildren if only we knew that they would find their way back to their father and he to them.

As Kyle Lowry stated: But ...fatherhood that changed everything!

Barry Lillie (son, father, grandpa)