

## **FATHER'S DAY! REMEMBERING & APPRECIATING DADS**

I was very fortunate to have a kind and loving father who was very present in my life as I was growing up. I know that you were not all as fortunate as me, but I am sure that some of you were. A father who loves his children and is present in their lives can make a tremendous difference. I have heard too many stories and seen the interactions within too many families to believe that all fathers were as good as mine, but I have also seen many men who really love their children, are engaged in their lives, and work hard to help them to grow up in ways that are healthy. Father's Day wasn't a really big deal for my dad, nor is it for me. It is another Hallmark holiday, seemingly invented to sell greeting cards! Even so, it provides an opportunity for us to remember and reflect upon the role of fathers and father figures in our lives.

My Dad: Morris Jerome Klein (Morrie to, well, everyone) He grew up in Chicago, was raised Jewish but never Bar Mitzvah'd because the family was too poor after his dad was killed when he was an infant. He volunteered to fight in World War II, joining the Illinois National Guard when at first he was rejected for flat feet and then switching to active duty in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. He entered the war in a Glider around D-Day then went on to fight at the Battle of the Bulge. But he never talked about fighting, only about the people he met. He was a draftsman who went on to get his Bachelor's Degree from night school at IIT on the GI Bill after he married mom. He didn't finish until 1962.

The memories of Dad come flooding back every once in a while. He has been gone since the Spring of '91, felled by a massive heart attack, way too soon after he retired. But the memories are there still, they always will be there, and they are good memories, treasured memories of special times with a gentleman, a Gentle Man.

Dad was rarely gruff, only occasionally exasperated or rushed, almost always kind and gentle and attentive, a good listener, not that he didn't talk but he wasn't a big talker, always more interested in what others were doing and yet he had his projects, endless projects, always something to work on down in the basement, or out in the garage.

Dad liked to go places with the family, to drive down to visit the aquarium or the Field Museum or the Museum of Science and Industry or the Arboretum, or to drive over to Indiana to visit Aunt Margaret and Uncle Duane, or up to Minneapolis to see grandma and grandpa Jarvis, or to get on the train to see the country and visit some of mom's other siblings and our cousins further away.

Dad liked to hike with mom and my brother and me, take walks through nature in the woods or along the beach. He really liked seeing the animals that might pop up. We went camping some summers and on scout weekends and church retreats. Dad also helped chaperone some of our Scout trips and campouts.

When times were hard Dad made it better. He was a kidder and liked puns a little too much, but he had a good sense of humor and was good humored. It was easy to be with Dad, he was good company, not that mom wasn't but it was different with Dad, no judgment, more curiosity, lots of love. Mom was tougher, the Disciplinarian. Dad was always an easy touch for a few bucks, car keys, or permission to do something, concerned but open to our adventuring!

Jane and her dad (R. Paul Bechle)

Many of you met my ex-spouse, The Rev. Jane Bechle, when she spoke at my installation. Jane usually has something to say, so I invited her to share a few words about her dad. (OK, to be honest, I didn't have much of a choice!) But, either way, here's Jane!

Thanks Jane! I guess that gives you an idea how different Dads can be!

## The rest of the story:

I wanted to be supportive to my kids in the ways my dad was. I was there both times when Terri, my first wife, was pregnant and I was there in the room when my kids were born. I tried to be there for my kids as they were growing up, but after their mother and I split up when Aaron was 11 months old and Jessica was 3, it was often a challenge. Their mother and I always had joint custody, but once they started school they were mostly living with Terri during the school year and with me during the summer. While we all lived in Montana, it was easier to pick up the kids for the weekend or the short holidays, but when I moved to Oakland for 9 months to study, Terri moved to Phoenix. After Jane and I married, I moved to join her and her daughter, Jenn, in New Jersey, and visits with Jessica and Aaron took a lot more effort for about 6 years, until we moved to Southern California and it was only a 6 hour drive to Phoenix. The kids went back and forth all along, visiting as often as we could afford or manage, but mostly Jess and Aaron were with their mother during the elementary school years (except for one year in New Jersey and Pennsylvania we mostly all would rather forget!) After Jessica's freshman year in High School and with Aaron in Junior High, after a legal battle we switched primary custody periods and they joined us for the school year through adolescence.

Jane's daughter, Jenn, who was 11 when Jane and I married and was always with Jane except for short visits to her dad every year or two, so that I became her main father figure, had started college in New York when we moved to California so (except for that one year) we didn't have all the kids together for more than the weeks of summer or shorter holidays. After High School, Jessica and Aaron both ended up back in Phoenix where they still live. Jane's daughter, Jenn remained in New York after college and only recently relocated to LA with her husband.

Being a parent isn't easy, no matter how good your intentions. There are always things to worry about, things you don't expect. Once when the kids had just come to stay with me when Aaron was three, he suddenly started having problems and it turned out that he needed his appendix out. Since his mother is a nurse, at that time working at a hospital in Great Falls, it would have been more convenient if it had happened when he was with her but she drove up and met us at the hospital in Havre! Then a few years later, on a visit to Chicago he jumped into a ditch full of broken glass and needed to be stitched up at the nearest ER. Aaron was really the kind of kid who quietly did his own thing and mostly kept to himself, but other than sibling squabbles, life with the girls was usually a bit less dramatic (except for that first summer when we incorrectly thought they might be able to share a room!)

Even though at the time it may seem like time is standing still, the years of active parenting are over so quickly, that looking back it seems like just the blink of an eye! It is really hard to believe that Aaron, my youngest, will be 31 in about a month. The fourth grandchild I can claim (Jessica's 1<sup>st</sup> baby, Lucas Walker Pantle) should be born in late July or early August.

I took my kids camping in Sequoia and on family vacations and trips to visit relatives. I played with them and helped them with homework at least some of the time! I introduced my kids to church camps first as a Methodist and then as a UU. I helped them appreciate the natural world and care for animals and be respectful to others, though Jess and Aaron still get into some serious arguments. Jessica and Jenn have discovered they have lots in common, and actually amazingly like each other, as do their husbands.

I have discovered that Father's Day is as much a time for fathers to reflect on their successes and failures with their kids as for kids to appreciate at least the good intentions of their fathers. Few fathers are perfect, and few kids succeed in always making their dads happy. We are all just human after all!

I guess when it comes down to it, Father's Day is a good day to celebrate the passing of generations, to remember and appreciate those fathers and father figures who have passed from this earthly life as well as a time to reflect on the meaning of fatherhood for those of us who are fathers or are living with fathers! Recognizing of course, that we males are all flawed creatures, we continue to do the best that we can to love those who are entrusted to our care, attempt to educate, feed, and listen to our children and other children who might look up to us, and partner in this life that we share!

While the fathers in some species might eat their young, we are commissioned to a higher purpose, that of passing along what we have learned about human fatherhood. This is a great responsibility, and one that should not be taken lightly. In this age in which all knowledge and wisdom can be accessed through the sacred portals of Google, there remain many secrets and special sacred wisdom that can only be passed down from Grandfathers to sons and grandsons (and daughters and granddaughters) within each family! May this father's day be a day for special sharing between fathers, children, and grandchildren and may there be cake and ice cream and other sacred foods commensurate with this sharing of the wisdom of generations!

Remember to call your fathers and father figures if you can, or to think of them if they are beyond this plane! Have a happy Father's Day!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!