

## Forever

As a father I have stood by my children, often with not much more to offer them than my hope. I'm convinced that even though I wanted to give them more most of the time, my hope was all they ever needed. And one way I expressed it was by being there.

I'm sure they took my presence at such times for granted, expecting that of course Dad would be present. I felt the same way about my father. I knew he would always be there for me until one day he was no more. As adults, I can't say my father and I were very close. We didn't have similar interests. He didn't want to be my friend. He wanted to be my father. I just wanted to be myself, of course.

I think my son and I have a similar relationship, although we're probably more sensitive to each other and we've enjoyed days working closely together on projects around his house or mine. But we're individuals following our own paths. I stood next to him at a time of unimaginable loss, unable to do anything to help him. His life was his to live, and no amount of fatherly compassion or caring could change that.

My daughter, too, has her own life, and now a family. Though she bristles at hearing it, I like to joke that she's now owned by another man. I remember sitting in an ER waiting room, hoping to hear good test results on the afternoon they rushed her to the hospital. She was in the capable hands of doctors and a professional staff at a regional medical center. She was safe and I knew her husband would later care for her and wait on her when they returned home. Luckily, the emergency was not too serious and she was soon home feeling relatively comfortable.

My son-in-law's large family quickly mobilized

and soon my daughter's house was teeming with cooks and cleaners and babysitters and whatever else was needed while she recovered. I told the oldest sister of the clan that I was also ready to help out with any and all chores. The woman sort of looked over my shoulder, smiled wanly and was quiet. She had no doubt assessed my capabilities. So I guessed I wouldn't be called to active duty very soon. I'd be able to stand around looking patriarchal and not wear myself out.

In reality, there has never been much I could do for either of my children when they met tough times. I'm not a doctor. I'm not their spouse. I'm an adequate babysitter, but I can't cook anything more complicated than hot dogs. I can't even lift much anymore, but I remember throwing one or the other of them up on my shoulders years ago and carrying the little kid around the park all morning. Just like I'll carry them in my heart ... forever. I'm their father.

My children deserve all of me ... my love, my prayers, and eventually ... if there's any left ... my money. There probably won't be much of it and I haven't always been terrific at providing either of the first two. But that doesn't negate the perfectly reasonable claim they have on me. And my heart.

I brought my daughter and her brother into this world ... with the able assistance of my wife, of course ... and I will never stop being in some way responsible to them.

When years ago I fell in love with the woman who would fill in the blanks of my life without insisting I change very much, I never thought about having children. And yet, just as naturally as all of my ancestors, I became a father. In my case, the father of two children who I can add to the short list of those who own my heart. What a loss it would be for me to not love them as much as I can. Forever.

*David Griffin* copyright 2007/2016

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