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Forum

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Father knows Best

By Robert J. O'Connell

My Father was a creative person. With a little thought and planning he could solve most family problems as they arose. Several creative solutions come to mind.

One involved my name. I was born an under weight sickly baby in a Catholic hospital. The nuns were concerned that I would not survive and convinced my Mother that I should be baptized quickly. As the first born male heir, my father wanted me to be named after him. Robert James O'Connell Jr. My Mother wanted me named Robert Paul O'Connell, perhaps commemorating her early years spent in Texas. After registering his choice at the County Court House my Father returned to the hospital to learn that my Mother had had the Nuns baptize me with her choice. For the next seventeen years I was Bobby Paul. When I was about to be

confirmed at eleven I took my Fathers middle name as my confirmation name. Then I thought I was named Robert Paul James O'Connell. Dad never blinked.

After joining the Navy at seventeen, Bobby Paul was required to produce a certified copy of his birth certificate. None was forthcoming in the family archives so I took my three dollars to pay for a copy to the bureau of vital statistics. There I learned that Bobby Paul did not exist but that Robert James Jr. did. When this fact was brought to his attention, my Father only shrugged. The Navy clerk was quite upset to have to retype all the forms. I was not comfortable being Robert James James.

A second creative solution involved one of my sisters. Ann was a little over a year younger than I. My Mother and all of my three sisters were often at odds with each other. Mostly because my Mother had to stay in control of the kitchen and actually all of the house. Rather than spend the time teaching them her way of doing things she preferred to excluded them from various chores and then to complain often about their lack of help. As a result of the ensuing conflict, Ann was anxious to leave home.

At the time, Ann and I were dating a brother and sister of our acquaintance. Both of them had marriage on the mind. I declined this opportunity just turning sixteen, but Ann and Steve decided that they would get married. They quickly learned that this would not be so easy. When they applied for a marriage license the clerk gently explained that they were too young. 14 and 17 respectively. So they then mistakenly believed that they only needed to get their parents

permission. After revealing these tentative plans we all learned that parental permission, should it be given, was still not enough.

After a rather heated family discussion in which all of the negatives about such an action were thoroughly discussed, my sister played her ace card. She told my Father that he had two choices, accept the fact and allow them to be married or deal with the resulting illegitimate baby that she planned on having should the marriage not materialize. Both of my Parents liked Steve and thought that except for their age they would be a good match.

So, being presented with this dilemma my father set to finding a solution. After some phone calls and thought he came up with one. Explaining that because neither the state nor the church thought them old enough he had determined that another venue would be required. He had a childhood friend who was now a Justice of the Peace in a neighboring town and he was able to perform the ceremony the following weekend. At the appointed time all parties, in their finest Sunday dress repaired to the JP's office in Liverpool where the papers were signed and the words were spoken, Ann and Steve moved to their new apartment and embarked on a happy life with each other and shortly began to procreate.

Thirty years later my sister and Steve decided that it would be a good thing for them to renew their marriage vows. The local priest asked to see a copy of their original marriage license. They did not have one among their family papers. The Pastor explained that a suitable copy could be obtained from the marriage

records office in the Syracuse court house. No record could be found there, so Ann reasoned that it must be in the JP's office in Liverpool. By this time both the JP and my Father had passed on. His widow was kind enough to take us to the cellar of his home where all the old files were kept. There they found their file, but no license. After studying the file for a short time the widow stated that of course the papers were never filed in the Court House since they were both too young to be married legally. Upon hearing this my sister wailed "you mean all my children are bastards". After receiving an affirmative nod several choice things about the deceased were uttered.

After a blood test and applying for a marriage license Ann and Steve renewed their marriage vows, legalizing their whole extended family. My mother only smiled when the subject of my Father's duplicity was mentioned. Ann and Steve remained married for another twenty years until her untimely passing. Her two daughters married young as did their daughters. I don't know how many nieces and nephews I have, but I can recognize them all. They have the same look around the eyes and smile like my Father, The Problem Solver.

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