



FATHERS - T O - B E

Fathers make a world of difference

'Just Wait Until Your Father Gets Home'

Does reading that title give you the creeps, a knot in your gut and a shot of adrenalin or does it generate joyful anticipation?

It was a crisp summer's morning on the farm. There was dew on the meadow, a blackbird boisterously announcing the dawn from the fallen willow tree and the promise of great adventure for the day. When I was a child summer holidays were a full three months long and made space for many cumulative and memorable escapades.

My brothers and I were headed for the barns, fields and forest to spend our day as young boys do in such a setting; fishing, exploration and make believe. However, between breakfast and our departure one of my brothers, probably best I do not recall which one, pulled a fast one, an unforgivable transgression in my mother's view. Time has erased the memory of his exact disobedience but not the repercussion. Whatever it was he had done got laid at my feet.

Somehow, I was to blame even though I was nowhere near the particular event, and completely innocent. Nevertheless, the pledge of retribution my mother evoked was familiar and formidable, "*Just wait until your father gets home*". That statement from my mother had spoiled many an otherwise sunny day for us kids as we knew all too well what it meant. The remainder such days would typically be overshadowed with the fear of what was to come. However on this particular occasion I took charge.

I then did what any 8 year old boy in possession of a red bicycle and his self respect would do; I ran away from home. I peddled hard and fast, fuelled by my rage at having been blamed for something I was innocent of and the anticipation of the impending wrath of my father.

Our house was at the end of a mile long gravel lane which was an interior road on the large farm. When I reached the county road however I had a dilemma. To the right, and a seven mile bike ride away, was the small town where my father worked and my grandparents and many family friends lived; but no allies to be sure. To the left was the seemingly endless asphalt to nowhere. Where to go, what to do?

I took the only alternative apparent to me. I hid in the ditch across the road behind the row of mailboxes in the tall grass and weeds. I don't recall how many hours I laid there, conflicted about the events of the day and the looming outcome. What I do recall is, after a protracted amount of time, seeing my father's approaching car and the fear I felt in my heart. Later, as darkness fell, I was faced with only one option, to cycle home. Upon my arrival my angry dad carried out the sentence, as promised by my mother, but with an extra measure for running away and trying to avoid my punishment. I pleaded innocence, to no avail.

This was an era of what was called 'corporal punishment' or spanking; rather than child abuse, which I think it really was. It was an abuse of trust, an abuse of power, an abuse of the father/child relationship. Discipline, dispensed in this manner, also teaches violence and bullying as a way to resolve life's issues. My parents, as most parents, did the best they knew how. They were doing what had been done to them, and generations before them. Too often parents are in reaction mode with their children. This can be due to their own childhood wounds and/or the result of the weight of daily responsibility, time pressures etc.

The summers of my youth hold many memories for me, yet few quite as vivid as this incident. It was a wound for me, a transgression of my spirit. Anytime emotion is added to an event in our lives memories are more indelible. This goes for the 'good' ones and the 'bad' ones. That is how our mind/brain/body works. I have sought counselling over the years and overcome such hurts.

Our culture rarely affords opportunities for parents to be educated/prepared for their role of childrearing. *Which of our educational goals as a society could possibly be more important?* Most of us muddle through parenting and either fall back to the default setting, the one we were raised by as my parents did, or we summarily reject that model and chase the pendulum 180 degrees in the opposite direction, more the approach I took with my children.

We are fortunate today for the brain and developmental research on the roots of violence by James Prescott PhD, the writings of Joseph Chilton Pearce (Magical Child) and the awareness Frederic Leboyer brought (Birth without Violence) and many others. We now understand that the roots of violence have an ancestry in the womb, at birth and in early childhood. It is no coincidence that virtually all violent criminals have a foundation of violence built under them.

Parents wanting an improved model for their role today have profound, new guideposts to follow. Books like Heart to Heart Parenting by Robin Grille, Raising Our Children, Raising Ourselves by Naomi Aldort and What Every Parent Needs to Know by Margot Sunderland have brilliant revelations, information and guidance on what we have learned, and can change, about ourselves and what it takes to raise balanced, loving and peaceful children and future parents/adults.

Works like these address the developmental needs of babies/children, which are emotion based. We experience ourselves as emotion way before and at deeper levels than we experience ourselves as physical or intellectual. The outcomes of those early events establish our view of relationships, belonging and safety. Essentially, Who am I?

To more specifically address the title of this article, *Just Wait Until Your Father Gets Home*, mothers, fathers and their children deserve better than this. This old form is an archaic, demoralising and soul destroying approach of putting misguided and misnamed discipline in the midst of a precious father/child relationship. Trustfully it will fall by the wayside and be replaced with more loving and equitable methods of contact between parents and their children.

What if we tried a new and different emphasis on the very same phrase? Mothers could exclaim to her children with joyful anticipation, "*Just wait until your father gets home*"... for more love, more connection, more adventure and more of all the good stuff fathers and their children can give to and receive from each other.

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