

A Christmas tribute to America's grandfathers

NOTE: For those of you looking for another hard-hitting article on America's troubles, you will be disappointed. This time we are taking on an emotional issue, to which only grandfathers and grandmothers can relate. But if you are not now a grandfather or a grandmother, one day you will be and then you will be able to appreciate the story we are about to tell.

The morning of July 25, 1996 did not start out nor end as an ordinary day. In fact, that very day turned out to be the termination of two allied business ventures that went sour from the gross negligence of my two partners. At that moment, I was neither feeling grateful or thankful. I was a little over a year away from my 60th birthday. Mustering up the courage to start over and face the aftermath of a failing business entity was a daunting task. The loss of those two businesses sucked the very life out of me. On that day, I wasn't sure I had the energy, much less the desire to continue.

But something else happened that day, a "something" that changed my life and altered it in a way that I could have never imagined. Because you see, a living, breathing, pure and loving creature entered the world on that day.

A year or so before, my son of thirty odd years finally found the love of his life and were married at a family ceremony. I was even honored to play my guitar and sing the "Wedding Song" during the event. The product of that union was the most beautiful, adorable human creature I have ever seen. On that fateful morning of July 25, 1996, my grandson was born.

Now I have heard all of the stories from other aging parents

about becoming a grandfather and I have to admit to a little “so what” attitude. I love my own two children, now a man of 52 and a woman 42, both highly successful in their own right. I deeply love my wife of now 54 years, in a very special way. But there was no way that I was ready for the almost immediate, spectacular attachment to my grandson on that fateful day. Why does he touch me so?

We were very fortunate to be only 15 minutes from my son’s home so we became, with great relish I might add, the baby sitter of first resort. My wife and I were only too willing to give whatever time was available to our beautiful grandson. Did I mention his name was Preston?

From the very first time we came in contact, it was clear that a special bond was forming. I’d lay with him on the ground and talk to him in low tones. Or I’d play my guitar and sing to him. As he grew, I played with him in any way possible. He would smile and coo. I would laugh and hold him. When he seemed a little troubled just prior to going to bed or he couldn’t sleep and was restless, I would hold him close to me and hum a lullaby or talk softly to him about anything. He would lay his head on my shoulder and cling to me with his tiny arms.

When he finally began crawling we would have crawling races. My wife has several photographs showing our posteriors heading away from the camera. It’s no wonder that most of my pants had holes in the knees. And I’d keep asking myself, why does he touch me?

I’m not a religious man by any means and I don’t take much stock in the biblical connections to human love. I take no stock in the “original sin” or repentance, as I could never believe that a precious little baby is “guilty” of anything. Nevertheless, I believe strongly in the nuclear family because it makes pragmatic sense to have a father and a mother who love each other and pass that love on to their offspring.

There is no substitute for soft, gentle love when building character in a young human being. Yes, discipline is important but not as much so as unbounded love.

A baby is probably the most helpless creature on the face of the earth. Even newborn animals seem more prepared to suffer the rigors of their environment than a human child. And human offspring remain helpless for much longer than the creatures with which they share this earth. Without the love, caring and nurturing of their parents there is literally no chance of survival. Even if a newborn has parents and those parents are not capable, for whatever reason, of delivering that love, caring and nurturing, the child of this loveless union has little chance to survive normally.

Even knowing all this, why does he touch me? I'm not his father. Is it because he was so free with his love for me? Was it the constant hugs? Was it the giggles of contentment and glee when we would play hide-and-seek, or peek-a-boo? Was it because of his excited attention when I would read to him? Was it because his face would literally light up when he would see me? Or could it be a biological sort of thing? You know, seed of my seed. Even if it were so, it is only part of the equation. In the case of Preston and me, it appears to be something much deeper.

When he became a little more mobile, I would sit him on my knee and play the piano for him. I'd marvel at his attempt to mimic my hand movements. I would try to teach him "single finger" playing but he would grace the piano with his two fists instead. It made more noise that way. When he came to visit, first he would crawl then run immediately to the piano. To sit on grandpa's lap and play the piano must have been a kind of joy for him.

Maybe it's because love, freely given in both directions, undemanding and non-judgmental, becomes the critical mass for a different, deeper kind of love. Or maybe there is a special

grandfather – grandson love that can only be felt when you become a grandfather.

Whenever he came to visit, I would take special attention to take him around our home and show him things like a tree, a leaf, a unique hole in a rock, a bug, a bird, or the kitty. I pushed the bird feeder and he seemed fascinated as it swayed back and forth on its suspending rope. I showed him all of the colors of the different flowers and we would feel and touch the grass, and the fence, and the tree bark, and the hard surface of a rock, and the cement. We'd stop at the strawberry plant and sample the sweet rich taste of a ripe strawberry. I'd look up and point at the blue sky and I'd say "sky" and he would say "sky" back. At night, during the summer, we'd lie back on the patio lounge chair in the warm evening, looking up at the darkening sky and the emerging stars and I'd tell him stories.

I'd take him inside my car and let him hold the steering wheel in his hands. Then we would call his grandmother on the car phone. She's in the house, not 50 feet away. Then, grandma was "ga-gi". I was "ga-ga". He knew who we were and we knew who we were and loving every minute of it. Soon we will be known as grandma and grandpa. But we will never forget "ga-gi" and "ga-ga".

This little guy even brought my wife and I closer together. Having sustained a severe business reversal, Preston made life a little more bearable, a little more tolerable. Maybe because of him, I did not lose my courage or my energy to forge on into a new business and I did. Later, I would start the National Association of Rural Landowners, now a nationally known organization that plays an advocacy role for the government-besieged American rural landowner.

I remember experiencing the joy of family on Preston's first birthday. His second Christmas was only a month away then. We couldn't wait to see him again. He brought an indescribable

kind of joy to our lives. This all-too-brief time in his life will pass on to a new phase, but we will never forget how a tiny, smiling human baby came into our lives and changed us forever.

New life in any form is a promise and a continuance. They are the sun that brings the welcoming light to the dawn. They are the refreshing sound of a river as it makes its way to the sea. They are as the soft wind in the trees in summer. They are the explosion of flowers in the spring. They are as the gentle drifting of new snow as it dresses the ground for winter.

Preston, appearing out of nowhere, became my promise, my continuance. Why does he touch me so? Shall it be the miracle I'll never know?

He was 14 months when I wrote this story. He's 20 now and in his second year in college. In those 20 years we have forged a special kind of intellectual bond and we talk every week on the phone.

A few years after Preston's birth, our second grandson was born and not too long after that, we were blessed with a granddaughter from our daughter and her husband. Each brought us a new kind of joy and each was special in their own right, as each individual is special in their own way.

I remember my own father being in failing health. He was ill and tired and suffering from acute diabetes and heart trouble. But he said to me one day, "all I really want to do is to see my grandchildren and watch them grow up." He never really got that chance. One night he visited our young son and he seemed almost euphoric and full of life. He died the next day just prior to his 62 Birthday. My daughter was born just four months before his death and he never got to know her.

For all of the ups and downs that life can throw at you, they all seem to melt away when a grandson or granddaughter enters

your life. My wife and I consider our selves blessed beyond our dreams with two loving and successful children and three beautiful grandchildren that have added a special kind of irreplaceable richness to our lives. We have sympathy for those who have not been so blessed.

Even though my perspective is as a grandfather, in no way am I trying to demean or ignore the role of grandmothers in this Christmas tribute to grandfathers. A grandmother in a grandchild's life is just as important as a grandfather and maybe even more so. Parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren are the very essence of life and happiness on planet earth and no doubt the grand scheme of a loving creator. During this special Christmas season, it is our privilege to honor the grandfathers (and the grandmothers) of America and the special experience and the all-important contributions they give freely to their grandchildren.

We wish all of our readers a very joyous Merry Christmas and an especially prosperous and happy New Year and we further wish all you grandfathers and grandmothers the opportunity and pleasure to experience the great joy we have, with your grandchildren.

Until next year then, when we return to continue our weekly column of information, inspiration and opinion, as we take on the many important issues facing every American.

If you LIKED this article you are welcome to share a comment or your own experience with a grandchild.

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