

WANTED: DADS AND MOMS

by Tom Amato

Have you ever wondered what's in the heart of the angry child who lashes out at the world around them or one who cowers into a world of hermit-like solitude and loneliness? Were they simply born that way, or did factors produce this violent or reclusive reaction? It is our belief that there is a very good chance that somewhere in their youth or childhood their tender hearts were damaged. It is also our belief that as parents, teachers, and passionate community members we can fill the role of "emotion cardiologist" to mend that broken heart.

Two striking examples illustrate potential "heart breakers." However before we share them, a disclaimer. First, the examples are intended to stimulate thought, not guilt, shame, or lay a "trip." Second, although fathers are the focal characters, mothers, teachers, or anyone tied to the life a child can have the same effect.

The first example comes from a story that our chairman, Mark Pacini, found in The Hidden Value of a Man, by Gary Smalley and John Trent, within a heading entitled "A Child's Heart Is Within a Man's Reach." A 40-year-old man who had come for counseling told this story.

"I was just 12 when my Boy Scout troop planned a father-son camp-out. I was thrilled and could hardly wait to rush home and give my father all the information. I wanted so much to show him all I'd learned in scouting, and I was so proud when he said he'd go with me.

The Friday of the camp-out finally came and I had all my gear out on the porch, ready to stuff it in his car the moment he arrived. We were to meet at the local school and car pool at 5:00 P.M., but Dad didn't get home until 7:00 P.M.

I was frantic, but he told me not to worry. We could still get up very early and join the others.

First thing in the morning, I was up and had everything in the car a half hour early, all ready for us to catch up with my friends and their fathers. He had said we'd leave at 7:00, but he never got up until 9:30.

When he saw me standing out front with the camping gear, he finally explained that he had a bad back and couldn't sleep on the ground. He hoped I'd understand and that I'd be a 'big boy' about it. . .but could I please get my things out of his car, because he had several 'commitments' he had to keep.

Just about the hardest thing I've ever done was to go to the car and take out my sleeping bag, cooking stove, pup tent, and supplies. And then—while I was putting my stuff away and he thought I was out of sight—I watched my father walk out to the garage, sling his golf clubs over his shoulder, throw them into the trunk, and drive away to keep his 'commitment.'

That's when I realized my father never meant to go with me to the campout. He just didn't have the guts to tell me."

"How do you bring back a boy's joy and the sparkle in his eyes after they've been carelessly quenched?"

"That "boy" is now a man in counseling. His father is dead, but memories of a hurtful past have affected him and his own family *for years*. Is that not incredible power?"

And the second example comes from the lyrics of Harry Chapin entitled "Cats In The Cradle."

A child arrived just the other day
He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away,
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it, and as he grew,
He said, "I'm gonna be like you, dad,
You know I'm gonna be like you."

And the cat's in the cradle, and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon
When you comin' home, dad?" "I don't know when,

But we'll have a good time then, son
You know we'll have a good time then."

My son turned ten just the other day,
He said, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play.
Can you teach me to throw? I said, "Not today,
I got a lot to do. He said, "That's okay."
And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed,
He said, I'm gonna be like him, yeah.
You know I'm gonna be like him."

And the cat's in the cradle, and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you comin' home, dad?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then."

Well he came from college just the other day,
So much like a man I just had to say,
"Son I'm proud of you. Can you sit for a while?"
He shook his head, and said, with a smile
"What I'd really like, dad, is to borrow the car keys.
See ya later. Can I have them please?"

And the cat's in the cradle, and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon.
"When you comin' home, son?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then, dad.
You know we'll have a good time then."

I've long since retired and my son's moved away.
I called him up just the other day.
I said, I'd like to see you, if you don't mind,"
He said, "I'd love to, dad, if I could find the time.
You see my new job's a hassle, and the kids got the flu,
But it's been sure nice talkin' to you, dad.
Sure nice talkin' to you."
And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me,
He'd grown up just like me.
My boy was just like me.

And the cat's in the cradle, and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man in the moon
"When you comin' home, son?" "I don't know when,
But we'll get together then, dad
You know we'll have a good time then."

I can remember reading this poem in the 70's before my children were even born. In the blink of an eye, my son is 31 and my daughter 29. **Workaholics beware.** When I was told that this would happen in the blink of an eye, it meant a "blink of an eye." Tomorrow is never good enough - our children need us **TODAY.**

There are t-shirts that read, "Anyone can be a father or mother, but it takes someone special to be a daddy or mommy." **PLEASE PASS THE WORD, "DADS" AND "MOMS" EQUIPPED WITH UNCONDITIONAL LOVE WANTED AND NEEDED MORE THAN EVER. REWARD - THE MAKING OF A RESILIENT CHILD.**