

COMMENT

FATHER’S DAY

A great dad in Hamilton

A father-son relationship like no other

BERNIE DOBRUCKI

What does it take to be among the world’s greatest dads?

To answer that question, picture yourself as a sports fanatic, someone who lives and breathes sports. If you can put yourself in that picture, the answer is easy.

The perfect dad would buy you season’s tickets to the Ticats, score you a private box at FirstOntario Centre to watch the Bulldogs. He’ll take you to any game at McMaster you want, be it football, volleyball or basketball. Buy you a baseball team and make you president, just because you like to keep score. And launch a sports website, because he knows you’re a whiz with sports trivia.

“Impossible, there’s not a dad in the world that would do all that!” Sorry, you’d be wrong if that’s what you thought. Because there is a dad who has done all that. What’s more, he’s lived in this city his entire life. His name is Gary Molinaro.

Gary’s a great father to all three of his kids, but what makes him a shoe-in to be on the list of world’s best dads is the relationship he has with his son John Paul (J.P.).

Life for J.P. didn’t start out well. He came into the world with the odds stacked against him. J.P. would never do the things other kids do. But as so often happens in life, bad and good tend to balance out. In J.P.’s case, life handed him a lemon in the form of a disability and, to try to make amends, gave him Gary for a dad.

J.P. lucked out in the dad department. But then again, anyone who has seen the two of them together would say they’re lucky to have each other.

For John Paul, Gary is the most important person in his life and the subject of virtually every other sentence. For Gary, John Paul is his best buddy, the one person he always makes time for. You wouldn’t know Gary is a business owner with a company to run. For Gary, no business deal is more important than J.P.

In a typical week, Gary takes J.P. to more sporting events than most of us attend in a year. Often, they’ll attend several games in a single day. Of course, it’s all because of J.P. Most guys like sports, as does Gary. But for J.P. it’s a passion, his only passion. It’s the reason he looks forward to waking up every day.

As a youngster, John Paul, like many autistic kids, struggled for something to latch on to, something that would help him make sense of the world. Sports would become J.P.’s obsession and salvation.

Gary, bless his heart, realizing J.P. will never hit a ball, throw a football or lace up a pair of skates, made the commitment to give his son every chance in the world to experience his passion in the only way he could — as a spectator and fan. Making life meaningful for his only son was Gary’s way to take a sad situation and make it the best he could.

And that’s why the two of them are fixtures at Hamilton sporting events. If you attended a game in this city in this century, chances are you’ve seen or rubbed shoulders with Gary and J.P.

For them, it doesn’t matter what game they’re watching. What matters is they’re there together. If you’re lucky to be in stands within earshot, you’ll find that the game’s commentary is often more entertaining than the game itself, particularly when they direct the commentary at each other. It’s even funnier when you understand that underneath the sniping, bickering and sarcastic put-downs is a bond unlike any other father/son relationship.

We can only guess what J.P. sees when he looks at his dad. Probably someone that resembles Gordie Howe, Wayne Gretzky and Sidney Crosby rolled into one.

If they handed out a trophy for best dad, Gary would walk away with it every year. His son J.P. would gladly be there to hand it to him. And I’m laughing already at what he might say to needle his dad.

Full disclosure: I’m proud to call Gary my brother-in-law. John Paul (J.P.) is my cherished nephew, who has a form of autism called Asperger Syndrome.

Bernie Dobrucki is a writer who works in Toronto

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WORDS OF WISDOM

Things my father told me

Money, credit cards and ink poisoning ... I’m glad I listened to my old man



PAUL BENEDETTI

Tomorrow is Father’s Day and I’m sure my kids are busy right now completely forgetting that.

I don’t blame them. My father used to say that all these days were invented by department stores to get people to go out and spend money on gifts they don’t want for people they might not even like. National Boss’s Day come to mind.

He was particularly unimpressed by Father’s Day during which he would reluctantly accept our gifts with lines like, “If I wanted soap on a rope, I’d have bought soap on a rope” and other similar pleasantries. (Did anyone really want soap on a rope?)

Anyway, all of that got me thinking about my dad.

He died eight years ago this August and for one reason or another, I think about him pretty much every day. I often recall the things he told us, at the dinner table or while we were out fishing together or just driving

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in the car. He wasn’t big on fatherly advice in any kind of formal way, but a few things he said have stayed with me. Particularly, “If you don’t stop horsing around in the back seat, I’m going to come back there and...”

Here are a few of my dad’s words of wisdom.

1. “Get a government job. Nobody ever gets fired and the pension is great.”
- I used to scoff at this as a young man, but there have been many days when I wished I’d taken his advice. Two of my younger — and smarter — siblings did and they’ll be soon sipping mojitos on the beach while I’m looking at Freedom 95.
2. “You can only spend so much money on wine and women, but gambling is a bottomless pit.”
- Odd advice from the man who taught us how to play poker, who bought the odd lottery ticket and who enjoyed going to the casino now and again. But he was always careful, and when I read stories about people frittering away their life savings or embezzling funds from work to pour into slot machines, I remember his advice.
3. “Don’t write on yourself. You’ll get ink poisoning and die.”
- This was always followed by, “I had a friend once who...” He would use this for all manner of calamity or dangerous activity. Growing up, we thought my dad had more dead friends than anyone on Earth. Then we realized that the friend — he usually called him “Pinko Pallino” — was the same guy who had, apparently, died a hundred different ways. Pinko had expired from ink poisoning, gone blind after staring at the sun and, of course, drowned while swimming after eating. I have tried the same gambit with my kids around smoking, getting a tat-

too and driving a motorcycle — with mixed results. And I think they’re on to Pinko Pallino.

4. “Never tell people what you make. Half will think you’re bragging and the other half will think you’re lying.”
- To that I would add: And most people don’t really care.
5. “Never book a one-week vacation. Always take two.”
- With one week, he’d say, by the time you really relax, you have to start thinking about leaving.
6. “It’s not what you make. It’s what you spend.”
- Everyone thinks a few thousand more will solve everything. It never does.
7. “Credit cards. If you don’t have the money now, you won’t have it in 30 days. Use them only in emergencies.”
- Ah, if only I’d listened to that one.
8. “Everyone thinks their homemade wine is great. It’s not.”
9. “If you have something to do, do it today and get it off your mind.”
- Words to live by.
10. “Bite off a little more than you can chew. And swallow hard.”
- This is what he told me in 1989 when I went to him scared witless about buying our first house. He was right, of course. Although with interest rates running over 15 per cent, I often needed a stiff drink to get it down.
- To his list, I would add one more.
- “Listen to your old man.”
- I’m glad I did.

Paul Benedetti lives in Hamilton with his wife and three children. Hint: He does not need soap on a rope.

LOSS AND HEALING

A world where beautiful, terrible live side by side

We remember our losses, and sometimes there might even be healing in remembering



THOMAS FROESE

It was my daughter’s first teenage birthday party and the family van was full of giggling girls.

The verdict on the Tim Bosma trial wasn’t in, not yet, when we pulled into the bowling ally across from Carmen’s banquet hall and I said, “Tim Bosma’s funeral was in that hall. And his wedding, too.”

Silence fell. One girl said it was terrible what happened to Tim. Then my barely 13-year-old asked, “Why would they have his wedding and funeral at the same place?”

It was the most suitable, I said, before the girls went into their bowling party and before we later drove home in the opposite direction, but not before something had changed: a moment that came through time.

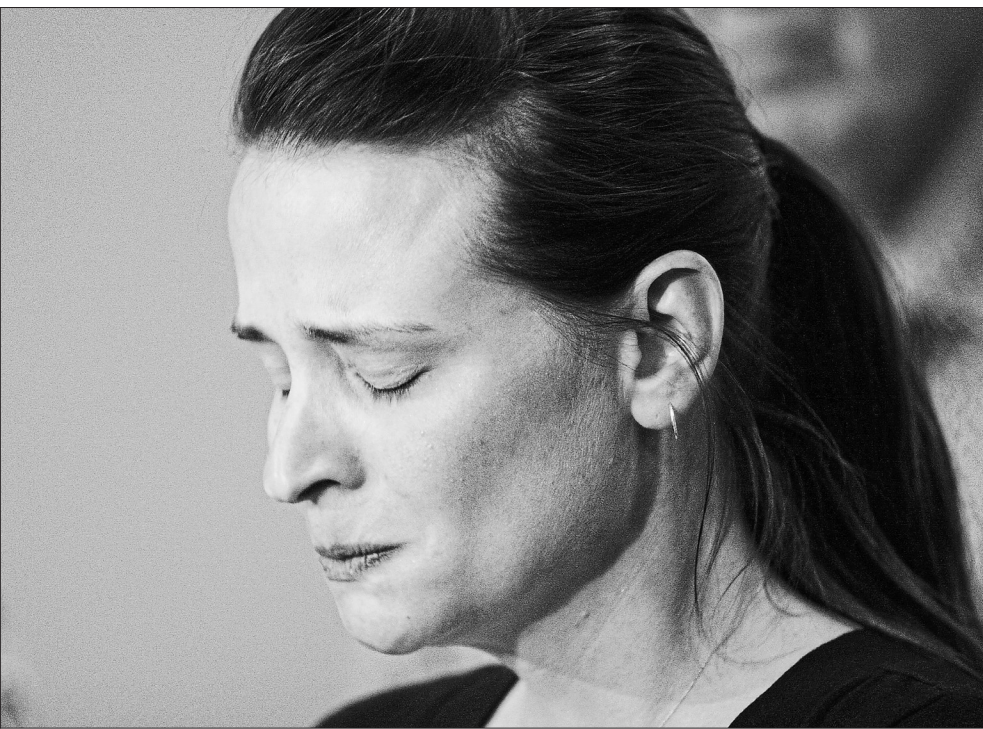
I had been at that memorial service three years earlier, that gathering of a thousand faces plus the microphones and lights and cameras that brought it to thousands more, that day when Sharlene, the beautiful and broken wife, said what she did.

She stood up and walked to the podium and bravely held it together, and then some, when she talked about the devil, how he, the liar and thief, knocked on her door one day to take her beloved Tim, even as she shared the secret (that’s no secret, really) of the imperfect husband and father.

Tim would leave his socks laying around, she said, and she’d get after him about it, this irritating nuisance. But God, oh God, how she now wished that just once more she could walk into a room to see those socks, how she’d trade the world for this precious reminder of her husband’s presence.

This is not to say that men need now throw their socks everywhere to celebrate

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DAVE CHIDLEY, THE CANADIAN PRESS

Sharlene Bosma stood up and walked to the podium at the memorial service and bravely held it together, and then some, when she talked about the devil, how he, the liar and thief, knocked on her door one day to take her beloved Tim.

their flaws. (My 10-year-old son is getting a head start.)

It is to say that this Father’s Day, like any day, there are imperfect men out there even as there are imperfect days, painful and hellish days even, the sort that words can’t put a finger on, days that, strangely, can mix with the best of times.

This is the paradox of this world, a place of weddings and funerals both, where wine is served in joy and where wine is served in drunken grief, this strange place where beautiful and terrible things live side-by-side, in the same building at times, under the same roof when that’s the only place big enough, really, to pour out what’s so bitter and sweet at once.

What Sharlene Bosma showed during that memorial service was something of this, even as the body of Tim Bosma’s family and closest friends have shown remarkable courage since then, during the long and painful trial that’s marked this community.

They know that this sort of loss will never, can never, leave anyone the same, that it will either destroy you with anger or transform you, somehow, with new priorities and new directions, new things that get knit inside your very innards, like a child in the womb being made and remade in fear and wonder.

My own giggling kids are old enough to

see their own father’s imperfections and inconsistencies, even as they’re old enough to think of the devil, that enigma so easily presented as a joke with his horns and pitchfork and ridiculous red tights.

But what if there’s something else, something bigger and darker and more hideous and less human than anyone cares to imagine? Evil, after all, is simply the word live spelled backwards. Evil gets its way when up becomes down, light becomes darkness, truth become lies, and so forth. There’s a great reversal and, it stands to reason, a great reverser.

Choose to think what you will about this, but what nobody can choose is to forget their own painful losses. We each remember.

Sometimes remembering is just realizing that you can lose someone you love deeply, even to the cold pit of the grave, only to find that you still see their face and hear their voice and, sometimes, feel their very presence as you walk into your day.

In this, you’ll always carry something of them with you. In this, on the better days, there might even be healing in the remembering. For you. And for others also.

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