It’s a happy-enough moment of me and the children in this photo from Father’s Day 10 years ago. But today’s thoughts are about grieving as much as anything.

Because it was just another morning with the sun established in the sky when the children’s mother, leaving the house, said what she did. “All our fathers,” is all she said. Her eyes welled up while she hugged me. Her broken voice hung in the air. And I prayed one of those helpless prayers of resignation.

It was last week. A phone text had just come from a friend with a dying father. With his family, our friend had just said goodbye at his dad’s bedside, giving him permission to let go, to go home. That father was gone, dead, shortly later. Only memories, like scattered leaves, remain.

My wife’s own father, doesn’t even have memories. Fewer and fewer, anyway. It’s creeping dementia. The day before our friend’s text, we – the children and their mother and myself – had watched a family video from a couple decades ago. There he is, onscreen, my father-in-law, stable and sturdy, talking to his own frail, bedridden father. His voice, clear and strong, is a voice that his loved ones would be forgiven for not remembering, themselves, anymore.

The day before that, we had travelled to my own ailing father, so old that I can barely imagine what I’ve been sorting through recently, some old black-and-whites from when he was far younger than me. They’re for his upcoming 90th.

All our fathers.

All our fathers in Canada total 8.6 million men: biological fathers, stepfathers and adoptive fathers. We’re men who are imperfect enough, but most of us, I’ll suggest, are also enjoyable and endearing enough. We’re old dads and new dads, bearded dads and working dads, winking dads and dads at home who are significantly more involved in the daily needs of child care and housework compared to the era of our own fathers.

Many of us are “I love you,” dads, doing our best with what we have, often asking for little in return, just a good hug with an honest “I love you, Dad” reciprocated. Many of us also appreciate if you remember that we’re rather vulnerable in these matters of life and death, more Vulnerableman than Superman.

In 1950, Canadian men lived, on average, to 65. Now that’s 80. Many live longer than that. So today’s children, and children of those children, have longer to watch how their fathers breathe and move and have their being though the slow march of time.

No doubt, some children, especially when growing up, might curse their fathers as much as anything: “All our \*&\*#!! fathers!” The zeitgeist doesn’t help when it perpetuates stereotypes of the complete idiot dad, or, at least, the emotionally disconnected and incompetent dad.

So, in our time, it’s easy enough to push our dads aside. In Canada, for example, only 13 per cent of children of divorced parents are in shared custody with both their moms and dads.

Even so, we so dearly and desperately need our dads. Our fathers. Study after study shows that children who have dads involved at home have fewer emotional and behavioral issues, and, later, better adult relationships. Children in fatherless homes, conversely, often struggle with staying in school, with their identity, with poverty, drug use and breaking the law.

In the U.S., where at least one in four homes have no dad, the Brookings Institution suggests that this culturally embedded fatherlessness is, in fact, an issue that’s larger than the economy, education, the environment, health care, infrastructure, and all the way down the list. Because virtually all societal breakdown falls, in way or another, under the umbrella of fatherless homes.

So let’s celebrate this weekend. Most dads are worth celebrating. But let’s grieve with some honesty also.

This 10-year-old photo will become 20 years old, then 30, then nothing but a faded memory, older and older until it eventually withers and blows away. This is grieving a personal loss.

This other grieving, though, relates to a different loss, this larger loss, a loss of faith in fatherhood itself.

So, please, God, help us with them. All our fathers. Are there many things in this world more important for us to ask?

**Thomas Froese writes about fatherhood, travel and life. Find him at** [**www.thomasfroese.com**](http://www.thomasfroese.com)