

REFLECTIONS ON BEING DAD

The loss of a loving husband and father left a void to be filled. The children's initial reactions at ages five and eight on that terrible day were only the first. There would be a life filled with reactions at different ages as they grew up with the legacy of a suicide loss. Attempting to counteract the desertion that we all felt, I set myself to the task of "being dad" as well as fulfilling my role as mother.

The children's adaptation to having one parent was always complicated by the reality of how their father died. The fact of the suicide was always present and always made the death "different". It was a stretch for me to think I could fill two roles and sometimes my attempts at "being dad" magnified the void rather than filled it.

My remarriage after five years created more problems than it solved. A substitute dad was not the solution. A situation that can work out well for many people was a disaster for us. When the marriage ended, I re-doubled my efforts to fill the dad role. I saw the children as victims of a series of bad decisions on my part.

As we all matured and developed, there were many instances in which we clung together. There were situations that found us holding each other at arms length, struggling individually to make decisions. Sometimes it felt like we were only surviving but often we were thriving. Wherever we were in our journey we could always, with the support of many other people, celebrate each others joys and successes

. There were many times when the absence of dad was glaring. Special occasions and events, and even ordinary days can leave us longing for what might have been. It is something that is part of the process of grieving a loss. The absence makes each event different, yet we are still here and we have the opportunity to live life.

When looking back I realize that expectations I had of myself to "be dad" were self imposed. My children did not ask that of me. Performing "dad duties" did not make me dad. They truly needed me to be their mom and to teach them survival skills through example and honesty. Much of my struggle was of my own creation. They wanted me to "have a life" as they were developing in their lives.

Now as I am able to observe my children as adults, raising their own children, it pleases me to know that we all had the patience to get where we are. We have all had an opportunity to sort out the valuable parts of our legacy. I see them having some of the best characteristics of their father. What a nice legacy that is. They have learned to adapt to change over and over again.

All of us should be proud of the fact that we have survived. The feeling at times that we might not be able to survive is common to those of us who have had a suicide loss. The reality is that we are all still here. Thriving is up to each of us after we sort through our history and legacy. We finally accept the history as history and the legacy as legacy. We can cling to what is valuable and dismiss what does not serve us well. We can address issues rather than ignore them.

I have learned that I did not have to "be dad". I only had to be "me". Being ourselves is what we truly have to offer. Surviving and thriving is the result.