

A Father's Reflection

On December 12, 1987, I stood by my new born son as he struggled for almost eight minutes to take his first breath. On October 31, 2007, I was by his side when he took his last. These two moments and the time in between spark some reflections which may touch the gift of a father's relationship to a child. I share them with a deep sense of gratitude for my son Danny and hope that all fathers will treasure whatever moments they have to be at their children's sides.

Danny's life and death have helped me to appreciate my own life and not to fear the end of it. While Danny's almost twenty years were special for me, his last three were a testament to the depth of his spirit, love of those who touched his life in major or minor ways, and beacons of hope for all who must face life's harshest challenges.

On December 8, 2004, the doctor told Danny that he had a large tumor in the right front of his brain. This vibrant junior in high school, who was about to turn 17, took the news in stride and asked me: "How are you doing Poppy?" a phrase he would repeat many times over the next almost three years, along with: "Follow my lead." And how he led! He was a leader in smiling in adversity. His smile brought ones from older patients at the radiation clinic and Cancer centers, as well as the younger ones in the pediatric wards of the hospitals where he had three craniotomies and stays in between. Danny seemed to smile though cancer, which is true because he smiled throughout his short life.

Another theme of Danny's life was his love of music. As he would say: "music is my life." Through his music, spirit, and love of others, his life continues. His poetry also reflects his appreciation of others. One of his poems, given to me on my birthday in 2006, is a gift that any father would treasure, as I do:

**From when I was young
You taught me to sing
Through tongue
Through heart
Through all of me.
I see now
That such a lesson
Is a gift of your spirit
Lacking any comparison.**

**You lighten my burden
Of life and struggle,
Because of which, I know you to care
Like no other individual.**

**My wish is
that when I grow old
To carry with me
all that you've told
To resemble you
From all perspectives
And to have your heart
From which to love with.**

**Hear this when I say
That you are a blessing in my life
Every single day.**

**Love,
Danny**

“You lighten my burden of life and struggle...” A father helps a child face life's challenges, lighten the burden of these challenges by sharing them, loving the child through them, and affirming the relationship that develops along the way.

My wish for every father is that they be a blessing in their children's lives every single day and always appreciate the blessings their sons and daughters are in theirs.

Frank Riley
June,2008