

## TO MY DAD WITH LOVE

*Writer's Note: This is a reprint of a column I wrote 15 years ago and have published every year since. It is my way of honoring my Father who died 55 years ago. Every other day of the year, I honor him privately by holding him in my heart. On Father's Day, I want to honor him openly.*

I heard the ruckus out back and peered out my back door. The twins across the alley were playing tennis with their Dad.

These little girls, age 5, were all decked out in their tennis skirts, denim baseball caps on backwards, and rainbow-colored over-sized rackets. Everything matched, even their nonexistent backhands.

Dad was full of energy. He tossed ball after ball to each child and raced to retrieve them. In the rare event that contact was made and the ball popped softly off the racket, Dad cheered his little darling and the child did a spastic little victory dance.

I was howling in my kitchen. Visions of my own daughters danced in my head. My heart was full and overflowed out my eyes.

What a wonderful time of life when the children are small and how lucky these two little sweeties are to have such a loving and attentive Daddy. How wonderful for Dad that he is comfortable enough with his softer, feminine side to be openly involved and affectionate with his daughters.

I, too, was a very lucky little girl. My own father was loving and attentive.

He was my best friend for the first 10 years of my life. Every day, I listened for the sound of his whistling which heralded that he was home from work for the day and we could go out and play. We ran races, high jumped, hit baseballs, played tennis, walked on

stilts, and rode bikes together. I learned to be an athlete, to try my best, to compete and feel good about it, and to enjoy the physical experience of working my body. These parts of myself that I discovered and developed with my Dad have held me in good stead ever since.

When I look in the mirror, it is his face I see.

Some years ago, I found an old photograph. He was seated on a round ottoman in front of a venetian blind and I was sitting on his lap. It must have been taken shortly before he died because I look about 9 or 10. It had faded over the years and was in very poor condition.

I was very touched by this photo and took it to be restored.

In the early 1990's, the process of restoration was to meticulously reproduce the photo by hand. The restoration people tried and tried again and again. And although I could look at each feature individually and agree that it was an accurate representation, when it all came together, the whole didn't look like him to me.

The picture of my father that I carry in my mind is seen through the eyes of my inner child. And what she sees and feels is an adoring presence with eyes so full of love that no restoration could possibly recapture it.

In the end, I did not complete the project. It could never reproduce what I wanted. I paid the fees as agreed and let it be.

The picture of my Dad that I carry inside of me is real even though it can't be seen by others. And as long as he lives in me, reflected in the choices I make of men who are loving and good, then he lives on indeed.

What I didn't know then and I do know now is that I, too, gave my Dad a gift. Every time he hugged or kissed me or held me when I cried, he healed the little boy inside of him.

And that is no small gift.

And so to all Dads, on this day and every day, know that you are precious to your children. And know that they are precious to you.