

Fatherhood Is Not for Wimps

By Karl Zinsmeister

MEN sometimes fear that when they enter fatherhood they will have to acquire a difficult and foreign set of skills. But fathers needn't remake themselves or put on masks to succeed in family life—normal male traits are useful in the home. A child doesn't need two mothers.

Many commentators call for a "new," highly sensitive kind of father. Feminist Letty Cottin Pogrebin, for instance, devotes a whole chapter in her book *Family Politics* to celebrating men like the fellow from Albuquerque who "loves being a father so much that he wanted to share his enthusiasm with a father-to-be. He gave his best pal a baby shower at which men friends gathered to toast the forthcoming baby with good will, good food, and a rap session about father feelings."

I'm sorry, but efforts like that are going nowhere fast with most fathers. There is nothing wrong with emotional sensitivity, but we oughtn't expect fathers to act like mothers. When New Age types hold up the Albuquerque model of fathering as something to be emulated, they only scare average men away from responsible fatherly duties.

Fathers will bring their basic natures to the family just as mothers will bring theirs. If actress Ali McGraw actually thinks she is going to get her wish for a husband "brave enough to say 'I feel fragile and inadequate right now, and I'd like some time to myself to cry,'" well, let's hope she has a very affectionate cat. It's unrealistic to expect that most men will ever act this way, and destructive to suggest they should.

Modern fatherhood is already too much of a goofy, ineffectual, surrendering sort of role. More sofa's-edge dithering is the last thing we need. Instead, we ought to be reassuring young men that there are authentic, active forms of fatherhood that go well with traditional masculine imperatives and interests. And we don't have to invent any "new models of behavior" for



them to emulate. Men becoming fathers should be allowed to follow their male instincts, which now have few other outlets. For many men fatherhood is the last natural, deeply male niche left to them, and ought to be embraced as such.

Living in cramped cities, wearing pressed clothes, laboring in chatty, confining, rule-bound bureaucracies, cut off from nature, increasingly passive and powerless as individuals—males today are primally thwarted in many ways. Where are modern men now to find the vigorous autonomy of their classic roles of wilderness tamer, knight, shepherd, hunter, warrior, chief, tender of the earth, monk, or even “head of household”? Most men do, however, still have the opportunity to be fathers. And as co-leaders of their own small tribe they have a chance to make a difference, to create a micro-world where they really matter.

In their pre-fatherhood and post-fatherhood phase, contemporary men can be somewhat comical, at times even pitiful, to behold—self-engrossed and pleasure focused, terribly interested in toys and games of all sorts, obsessed with physical decline, sensitive of ego, existentially insecure. Whether mirror-gazing, self-expounding bachelor or golfball-chipping retiree, the little boy in many men is never too far from the surface. Fathers are of course not wholly different from men of other types or phases, but because they have a “project” and are surrounded by palpable reminders of their immediate personal importance and social responsibility, they tend to be less uncertain, and silly, than many of their modern counterparts.

A man’s residence in his family is a billboard-sized tribute to his willingness to accept the consequences of his actions. And in the drives to provide, protect, exemplify, teach, judge, discipline, and comfort there are goals and fulfillments aplenty. Most men become even more aware of their distinctive maleness after becoming a father than they were before, and they ought to be encouraged to revel in that feeling—and then take up the serious responsibilities that go hand in hand with it.

“Good heavens,” I can hear critics howling, “he’s calling for a return of the Neanderthals.” Stoked by kneejerk academic attacks on “patriarchy,” opponents of traditional fatherhood continually fume that the only thing men want to do is lord it over others.

There is such a thing as male domestic tyranny, and I am not defending such households. But what most men wish to do for their families is not to control and manipulate but to secure and support, in love and justice. When men are thwarted from filling those instinctual leadership roles they actually become more rather than less likely (in their frustrated impotence) to resort to petty power-mongering and violence. Fathers granted a measure of social respect and personal authority will be far saner, fairer, and gentler than men denied leadership roles altogether.

That is the message of the classic Lorraine Hansberry play *A Raisin in the Sun*. At one point, Mama, the family matriarch, up-

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braids her daughter for humiliating her brother Walter, the senior “man of the house,” during his moment of weakness. “What you tell him a minute ago? That he wasn’t a man?” chides Mama in a powerful speech. “Child, when do you think is the time to love somebody the most; when they done good and made things easy for everybody? Well then, you ain’t through learning—because that ain’t the time at all. It’s when he’s at his lowest and can’t believe in hisself ’cause the world done whipped him so.”

Mama also prods Walter’s honor. When their African-American family must face a climactic showdown with a hostile neighbor, she quietly defers to Walter as the household’s representative, and then insists that Walter’s son should witness the proceedings. “Travis, you stay right here. And you make him understand what you doing, Walter Lee. You teach him good. Like Willy Harris taught you. You show where our five generations done come to. Go ahead, son.” In the end, the previously wavering Walter stands up for the family honor in a moment of crowning courage. Bursting with joy afterwards, Mama confides to Walter’s wife, “he finally come into his manhood today, didn’t he?”

It’s because they don’t have the elemental satisfaction of proudly sustaining a clan that so many underclass men today resort instead to pointless “provings” of their manhood through bravado and bluster. The most elemental male creed is, “I shield and support, therefore I am.” Men not involved in shielding and supporting find other ways to prove their existence: “I hurt, therefore I am,” is one twisted alternative. The graffiti boy’s proof is, “I deface, therefore I am.” The gangbanger reasons, “I kill, therefore I am.” The street libertine says, “I impregnate, therefore I am.” At the other end of the economic spectrum, too, there are now rows upon rows of rich hedonists who can only babble, “I feel pleasure, therefore I am.” And contrary to feminist claims, these are all expressions of a *stunted*—not an exaggerated—masculinity.

It is true that masculine nature needs to be carefully bounded. Biological factors work against male monogamy, child nurture, and full family participation. Men have an innate tendency to flee from their sexual effects. The family may be a natural environment for females, but it’s relatively artificial for males.

That’s why novelist Franz Kafka said the bravest thing a man can do is to marry and have children. Being a good father requires great self-mastery. It also takes cultural reinforcement—men have *always* had to be won over, or prodded, into taking up their family responsibilities. The good family man represents a triumph of mind and morals over raw nature.

Civilizations don’t achieve this without continuing effort. Young men have to be led—by their own fathers, and by the fatherhood-reinforcing rituals of civilized culture—into be-

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coming responsible progenitors. So long as fatherhood remains an expected and honored state, however, the conversion to family provider occurs fairly readily, and brings real fulfillment to the young male. "Rather than seeming to intrude on his freedom, the state of fatherhood will grant him a special dignity, an identity," writes psychiatrist David Gutmann.

It's when a culture stops upholding the paternal rituals, rules, and rewards that fathering withers. Today, we're no longer sure we're willing to make the social compromises necessary for good fathering. Some people have actually convinced themselves families can do fine without fathers. They're wrong. Wherever men are not lured or corralled into concerning themselves with their children and mates, decent human society rapidly fades.

And men themselves are among the first to pay the price. Outside the family, men are enormously vulnerable. They suffer

far higher rates of homicide, suicide, accidents, disease, and mental problems, as well as *causing* vastly disproportionate amounts of crime, sexual violence, terrorism, and military adventurism. Anthropological studies reveal that the less fathers are connected to families, the more violent a culture tends to be. Men outside families are also much less economically productive—statistically more likely to be out of work and unwilling to work as long and hard.

It is fruitless to hope for easy "solutions" to the problems of underproductive, frequently dangerous males drifting outside of families. As the distinguished sociologist Alice Rossi puts it, "the machine cultures of the West have shown no inventiveness in developing new social institutions capable of providing individual loyalty and social integration to replace the bonds of the family." Alternate ways of restraining male energies simply don't exist.

Yet take these very same marauding men and link them to wives and children in webs of responsibility, and they can live

THE DANGER OF UNISEX FATHERHOOD

By Christine Vollmer

It is an unequivocal fact that societies today, to the degree they weaken the marriage bond and allow fathers to be absent, are causing their own destruction. What is less obvious is *why* societies are tolerating the destruction of the family.

If I were to put it all into one word, I think it would be *unisex*—the confusion that exists about the differences between men and women and their tasks in life. That confusion has become much more acute since childbearing ceased to be considered a gift from God and became first optional, then unpopular. In a world where children are an option rather than a reason for living and working, the vital differences between men and women become much less meaningful, and of course, less necessary.

But beyond fertility, man senses a need for a real woman in order to be more man, and woman senses the need for a real man in order to be more woman. And if this were not so, there would be very little literature!

The essential differences between men and women, which any child with two parents instinctively feels, are obscured in a world dedicated to proving that men and women make equally good professionals, a world where more and more individuals have not had the full experience of mother and father in harmonious contrast.

As the work of fathers has taken them further and further from home, and fewer citizens have had personal experience of fatherhood, the world has lost touch with fatherliness to the point of sometimes declaring it unnecessary or nonexistent, or even harmful. But the security that a child receives from the perceived strength and wisdom of a father is immeasurable (at least by current technology, although the neurological effect may soon be detectable as so many other influences are being discovered at that level).

Children also need mothers of course. As we all know and have experienced, but is now being proven by the most fascinating studies, the mother's unique and instinctive

approach is vital for a child's correct development, physical and emotional. The tones of a mother's voice, her particular ways of interacting, and other distinctive womanly traits are now proven to have an effect on the baby's brain development that a man, or even a group of women, cannot achieve. Mothers are also essential for mediating, softening, and explaining the rougher aspects of the world as the child encounters them. Not infrequently, these rougher aspects are clashes with the law-giving capacity of their father!

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Fathers who wash dishes, bathe babies, and do heavy work in the home are no less fatherly and no less masculine for it. In fact, the strength, kindness, and support which are central fatherly attributes are often well shown in this beautiful way by modern fathers. The problem occurs when new roles interfere with the father's natural influence as law-giver for his children.

In some views, "new" fathers are supposed to provide only comforts to their children. Authoritative fatherhood as it has existed since the beginning of mankind, inscribed in human nature and described all through Scripture, is no longer tolerated. I would plead that it once again become our conviction that men be encouraged to be masculine fathers, in the model of our heavenly Father: the intensely loving provider and law-giver, exacting and forgiving. And that women once again be reassured that being a mother—the intense, tender, courageous, and compassionate mediator of a child's first impressions, relations, and experiences—is inexpressibly rewarding and worthwhile.

Vive la différence is an understatement. Without *la différence*, life itself, as well as civilization, is in danger.

—Christine Vollmer heads the Latin American Alliance for the Family. This is adapted from a talk she gave to the Pontifical Council for the Family in Rome, June 1999.

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radically different lives. It is not so much that their natures change as that they acquire new ends. G. K. Chesterton once wrote that "The watch-dog fights while the wild dog often runs away. Of the husband, as of the house-dog, it may often be said that he has been tamed into ferocity."

A hint as to how this makeover may take place was provided by animal behaviorist Konrad Lorenz. He showed that family loyalty is closely linked to aggressive impulses—that rituals of courting, friendship, mating, and greeting are often very slightly modified versions of battle behaviors, triumph dances, and other "characteristic motor patterns of aggression." What is taking place when animals establish loyal bonds to each other, then, is a redirection of aggressive energies into socially productive ends. In psychoanalyst Selma Fraiberg's summary, "aggression is made over in the service of love."

There is another, darker implication to all of this: Ritualized family formation is more than our ladder to cultural success—it is also our main bulwark against anarchistic interpersonal violence, specifically male violence. "Where there are no human bonds there is no motive for the regulation and control of aggressive urges," explains Fraiberg. As the number of men operating outside family commitments rises, therefore, the social tempest in our streets and schools grows grimmer.

In prior eras, the vast majority of men were routinely won over into productive family life. By what forgotten means did earlier generations achieve this?

Studies of paternal involvement among both humans and nonhuman primates show that a few critical factors make all the difference. One precondition is monogamy. Indeed, one of the very few places other than among humans that extensive paternal care exists is among the small number of monogamous primates and birds. A related precondition is certainty of birth—studies show that men take care of their children if they're sure they are the father and are recognized as such. A final factor is female encouragement for fathering efforts. Few fathers will get involved unless they have the support of the mother, and that rarely occurs unless the mother and father share the same household.

In other words, the magic ingredients needed to tie men to their children are the ancient ones: Sexual restraint and enduring marriage.

Since mothers, so vulnerable to male desertion, are especially dependent on the maintenance of strong family disciplines, it's astonishing that women would ever collaborate in weakening the nuclear family. And historically, women did no such thing. There has been a change, however, over the last 30 years. The sexual revolution, feminist proselytizing, and the expansion of government entitlements have weakened the case for sexual restraint and male responsibility. By abandoning much of their traditional effort at braking sexual behavior and moving instead toward the "every person for himself" position that has long been the sexual creed of selfish males, women have unleashed a new cruelty in our homes and communities.

Changed laws have also damped down responsible fatherhood. In her much-trumpeted book *Backlash*, feminist Susan Faludi noted gleefully that biological fathers increasingly lack "much of a say at all in the reproductive process." The easy availability of abortion without any limits has completely altered the incentives facing a man who learns he has impregnated a woman out of wedlock. The longstanding sense that a father has a moral obligation to stick with the mother and provide for his child is being

replaced by a utilitarian selfishness that washes the father's hands of obligation. "If she wants to carry the child to term instead of getting rid of it when she has the chance," goes the thinking, "then raising the kid is her problem."

Even married husbands have no legal right today to be notified of their wives' pregnancies or abortions, much less to have any influence on the decisions made about them. Current law makes it impossible for a father to intervene on his child's behalf if the pregnant mother is abusing drugs or alcohol. Reproduction has been completely privatized as a female choice, a female right—a female problem. Writer Nancy Pearcey describes this as "a blind spot of the feminist movement," which isolates women "at just that point where male responsibility needs to be jolted."

Author Cathy Young notes that the insistence on absolute female autonomy in all reproductive matters discourages fatherly involvement. She observes that women today can, and do, get men to impregnate them unawares. She quotes a single mother's explanation of why she conceived her baby without seeking the father's consent: "It didn't matter what he wanted because I knew what I wanted."

Young notes that fathers of all sorts now face public attitudes and legal policies that suggest they are simply not important. Judges sometimes make it difficult for fathers to remain involved with their children after divorce, for instance. This is no way to get men more involved in their children's lives. "Is it fair or realistic," asks Young, "for women to say to men: The child you conceive is none of your business if that's what I decide, but you have to care for it if that's what I expect?"

Feminist Barbara Ehrenreich blandly urges that we "accept" father disappearance "as a historical *fait accompli* and begin to act on its economic consequences for women"—by which she means we should increase welfare spending for single mothers. This is a disastrous miscalculation of the long-term tolerability of father flight, and of its reversibility. Ehrenreich also misunderstands the causes of what she characterizes as "the male revolt." In truth, the turn away from fatherhood is not just a "revolt" by men but a push-pull phenomenon, with age-old male wanderlust being released and fed by ill-advised social changes that downgraded fatherly roles. This was done; much of it can be undone.

And it should be—because meekly accommodating male absence from the family would amount to a permanent surrender to social misery and chaos. Ehrenreich herself seems aware of the risks when she worries aloud: "Are we acquiescing to a future in which men will always be transients in the lives of

women and never fully members of the human family?" Her final conclusion, though, reeks of fatalism and surrender: Women, she argues, should live independently on state-guaranteed incomes because the state is less bothersome than hard-to-manage men. (She has company in this opinion. When actress Michelle Pfeiffer announced her decision to stay single while becoming a mother, she explained, "I don't want some guy in my life forever who's going to be driving me nuts.")

Here we face the core issue: The heart of today's fatherhood breakdown isn't between fathers and children. It is between fathers and mothers. Quite simply, too many men and women are at sword's points. The damaging flight of men from families, and from their children, is to a considerable degree just a side effect of the breakdown in comity and long-term commitment between men and women.

It's true, as Ehrenreich and Pfeiffer say, that establishing a permanent cooperative life with a member of the opposite sex can bring much bother and frustrating compromise. In the past, however, people have accepted this as the necessary price of devotion, lasting love, and civilized existence. Today's wide acceptance of fleeting sexual trysts against a prevailing background of sexual separatism represents a very new pattern. And one that can't last. For as journalist Paul Taylor has written, no matter how much we spend on welfare transfers, child support, crime control, Head Start, and the like, "at the end of the day, unless the whole society also learns how to revalue marriage and restigmatize broken relations between mothers and fathers, none of the rest will matter much. The empirical evidence is in: When marriage atrophies, so does fatherhood. And so does society."

I've argued that men will participate in family life only insofar as they are confident they will be allowed to do so in comfortably male ways. Unrealistic domestic expectations leave men frustrated and uncooperative. As they become alienated they make themselves scarce, and over-burdened women and needy children are left behind. I suggest a more humane and practical path:

- Accept that in most families, particularly when the children are young, women will be the child-rearing masters and men the seconds-in-command.

- Use social sanctions and encouragements to lean hard on those seconds-in-command to make sure they do not become shirkers and slackers.

- Work creatively to reconcile child-rearing realities with the aspirations of contemporary women for wider social opportunities and higher status. (Of which the largest part, in my opinion, should be a forceful campaign stressing that individuals engaged in conscientiously training our next generation are not wasting those years, but are actually making gigantic social contributions.)

- Above all, learn to accept, work within, and then enjoy the powerful, cruel, delightful impulses that make up our unmeltable human nature. If we will reject artificial sex roles while avoiding self-indulgence, we can carve out comfortably natural male and female roles even in this modern era. Fathers and mothers who take up their awesome childrearing duties as distinct, overlapping, interdependent partners will find success and happiness within easy reach.



STEIN continued from page 30.

workshop, now covered with gauzy white snow. We went under the snowfall as it poured down by the city lights. Tommy and Alex ran ahead in the snow, maybe along with another friend or two—in Sandpoint, little boys travel in packs. The boys made snowballs and tossed them at each other with indifferent results. Every so often, Alex, a bigger boy, would pack together a truly immense snowball and gesticulate menacingly towards Tommy Stein. Tommy would hide behind me and say, "You can't hit me. *When I'm touching Daddy, it's a safe zone.*" It is magic every time I hear him say that.

There are some nights of fatherhood that cannot be explained, only described. One was the first night Tommy and I marched through the snow of Sandpoint, across the bridge over Sand Creek, along First Street, past the Elks and the Eagles, past the closed-down candy store, past the Sandpoint Bagel Shop, past the loggers eating at Connie's, down deserted sidewalks, with the snow making a white halo behind the street lamps. Tommy would hold my hand for a minute, then run on ahead, make snowballs, and throw them at me. I would occasionally scoop up snow and throw one back. Tommy hid behind trees,

behind cars in the used car lot, in alleys, and then came out and bombarded me with his white missiles.

After a while, he was tired and leaned on me as he walked and asked me to wrap him inside my jacket. By the time we got to the Safeway and then the Gas-n-Go for lottery tickets, we were both intoxicated from the cold and the beauty and from having ourselves to ourselves in the snow. I think that's the best walk I have ever taken in my life. I felt as if I had been admitted into one of those snowstorms inside a glass ball, and that Tommy and I would live forever throwing snowballs at each other under the street lamps of a small North Idaho town. As I say, some days of fatherhood are too magical to be explained.



The Army Knows Best

Turning a Criminal into a Cop

By Ray Wisher

Detective Goliszeski squeezed a little farther down into the seat of his black unmarked Crown Victoria as he watched the two dark silhouettes slip by at 4:00 a.m. He was parked on a side street in a residential neighborhood that had been hit by home and auto burglaries for the past several months. A frustrated police department had ordered a select group of detectives and officers to take care of

this problem. Tony was one of the first to be chosen because of his outstanding record.

Tough and unyielding, Goliszeski has the respect of both his peers and the scum he pursues. Stocky in build and ramrod straight, with thick dark hair and a salt-and-pepper goatee covering his square jaw, "Tony G." looks every bit the Russian Cossack general. In fact, the dirtbags always refer to him as "that Russian cop." If Tony G. puts his sights on you, you had better pay the bills, turn out the lights, call up Mommy and tell her you loved her, because you are done.

The two dark figures slipping back from their late-night crimes were in his sights, though they didn't know it. Maybe the hair on the back of their young necks raised a little, but they probably dismissed it as a passing breeze.

Tony G. watched as the two, loaded down with booty, passed so close to his car he could have reached out and slapped one. Across the street I was kneeling down in the short grass of a field. I had spotted the two climbing

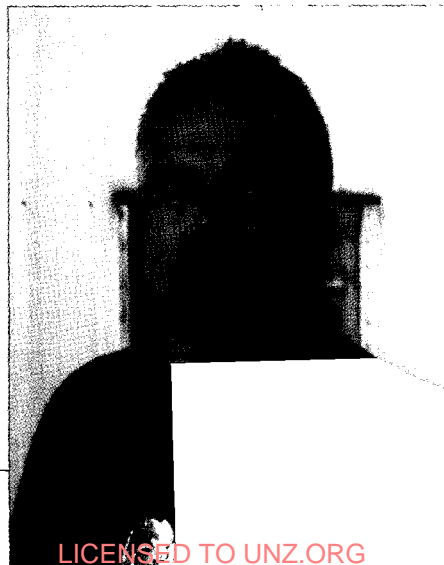
out of their window a half-hour earlier and called in the others. Tony G. had parked to the west of the suspect's house. Mike had set up south.

Suddenly, I heard Tony over the radio. He said they had just passed him and he was taking them down. I watched as Tony's blue strobes lit up and the car took off. I sprinted for the lights. It was a race to the house. Mike moved in from the other side. The two suspects were at a dead run, illuminated only by the blue strobes of Tony G.'s black car, which looked like a weird UFO flying low across the fields after the two running suspects.

His car bounced violently across the grass field as he yanked it in behind the fleeing suspects.

He sensed the pure panic they were feeling. He knew it intimately. He thought about another teen and another time.

Growing up in New York City, Tony G. had spent a good deal of his young life getting into trouble, despite his loving mother's pleas. She worked two jobs to keep a decent apartment for him and his



"That Russian cop"