

Dan Naumovich: Raise the bar, fathers

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It's no accident that Father's Day trails Mother's Day by a month. It was probably little more than an afterthought when it first wormed its way onto the calendar. Even today, the June holiday lacks the gravitas and sentimentality of the May celebration.

Mother's Day has a more storied history that dates back to the feast of Matronalia, the goddess of childbirth. Given that mothers must endure nine months of pregnancy and then grit their way through delivery, which I understand can sting a bit, it's certainly understandable that the early Romans saw fit to get all bacchanalian over maternity.

Father's Day, on the other hand, was cooked up in West Virginia back in 1908 by Dr. Robert Thomas Webb. If Wikipedia is to be believed, those early Father's Days were generally thought of as a joke holiday, an ironic gesture akin to presenting the town drunk with the Carrie Nation Award.

It strikes me as patently unfair that men are considered second-class parents simply for having the biological misfortune of not being able to tend to the kids while they're gestating. Yet, such perceptions exist.

Look at the gifts parents receive on their special days. Moms receive jewelry set with precious birth stones, as a symbol of their heartfelt love for their children. Men get golf clubs, electronics and other toys symbolizing that, at heart, they're still children.

Of course, there is some truth in that stereotype, and perhaps nurturing doesn't come as naturally to our half of the species. But it is something we're working on. Many fathers have entered an age of enlightenment when it comes to parenting.

Take my dad, for example. His fried chicken and chili alone are enough to merit a national day of recognition. Throw in his devotion to family, on-call handyman services and tireless work ethic, and now we're talking first-ballot enshrinement into the Pater Familias Hall of Fame. For such men, all the bounty of Lowe's and Menard's should be laid at their feet on this day.

As much as I'd like to think that I'm following in those footsteps, I realize I'm in no position to rest on my laurels, or my chocolate-chip pancakes. Those of us in the thick of child-rearing still need to prove our skeptic wrong.

Which is why I propose that Father's Day not just be a day of beer and barbecue — but one of reflection. Will our children remember us as a loving parent who attended not just the ball games, but the dance recitals as well? Or will we be vaguely recollected as the crotchety guy who made himself scarce during their loud, formative years?

There's a lot riding on the answers to those questions. If we expect the Ghost of Father's Day Future to project a scene showing our grown children rolling out a 60,000-BTU, stainless-steel gas grill with a red bow on top,

then we'd better not shirk our duties in the present.

So today, as I've done in years past, I'll pass on being treated like a king and take the kids to the water park. There, I'll join other dads who are trying to shake the image of a second-class parent. We'll form an unspoken bond of solidarity, while being careful not to make physical contact with each other on the Lazy River.

Sure, moms will probably always be celebrated more in song, post-game interviews and tattoos. Hallmark estimates that about 52 million more greeting cards are given on Mother's Day than Father's Day.

Yet, I can't complain because my kids have already given me much more than I've given them. Today is a good day to remember that.

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