

## THE WORD FATHERS LONG TO HEAR

Regular readers know our daughter Jenny, who died unexpectedly in October 1995. So in honor of Father's Day, I share this brief essay about her that I prepared for a writing contest.

And to that I add a few journal snippets from Father's Days past.

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On Friday we made another expedition to Deal Cemetery in Ladelle to decorate Jenny's grave.

I miss Jenny and often feel sadness because I'll never see her again in this life. She was, after all, one-third of my small flock, and I sometimes feel wronged over what seems to be her untimely death. Instead of being discouraged, however, I must learn to thank God for the 22 memorable years He gave us together.

Blind and profoundly retarded from birth, Jenny could see only with the eyes of her heart. But the future holds a particular hope, one expressed in the epitaph (from the Bible's book of John) we had inscribed on her tombstone. When we finally stand face to face in heaven, I fully expect her to lovingly repeat those same words back to me.

But this time they will be more than mere symbols carved in cold, lifeless granite. Coming from the lips of one who never spoke a single word in her entire 22 years, I expect them to ring with the warm sweetness of all that heaven holds: "I once was blind, but now I see." I anticipate that day and the healing it will bring.

And soon after the echoes of joy over newfound sight have died away, I expect--and even hope for--the pleasure of one word thus far denied me despite my desires and prayers to hear it. For with Jenny's sight will come recognition of an intent face, one perceived but until then unseen. And then will come the one word fathers long to hear: "Daddy!"

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(1987) I received many nice presents for Father's Day: swim suit, shorts and shirt, cap, framed picture that Barrett (age 6) had drawn, book, three tapes of music and some money from Jen. To be loved is a great reward, and I'm grateful.

(1993) I've had a wonderful Father's Day breakfast. Mary and Jen gave me two missionary books to read to Barrett (age 12), and he gave me a knife just like his. I am so blessed.

(1995) I had a wonderful surprise present for Father's Day--a Super Leatherman Tool. Because of the cost, I wouldn't have bought one for myself, but Mary and Barrett (age 14) got one for me. And Barrett said in church that I was flexible, spending time with him and Jenny. So much here goes undone, but my time of opportunity with my children is rapidly vanishing.

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Times change. Diapers and infant seats quickly give way to jeans and training wheels and cars and college and independence.... and beyond.

But Father's Day reminds me that the sometimes-rocky transition from breadwinner and trainer to counselor and friend is both necessary and non-optional.