

WITNESSING THE REBIRTH OF HERITAGE

"Now you know that Saturday morning is when we go to the lumber company, don't you? They have gum and candy machines, so we'll need to take our money." Thus spoke the young man to his tiny three-day-old son--and our first grandchild.

In bygone years, whenever I'd yell, "Let's go to the lumber company," Barrett's response was predictable. Rustling, scuffling and scratching sounds would emanate from his room, and he'd eventually emerge with a pocket of loose change. Though we tried to moderate his sugar intake, trips to the lumber company fell under a different dispensation. When men go to the lumber company together, ordinary rules of conduct are temporarily set aside.

Regrettably, the day inevitably came--somewhere between ages 10 and 12, I believe--that he no longer wanted to go with me. Instead of telling me outright, however, he complained to Mary. "Why does Dad keep talking about the lumber company? I really don't want to go."

Mary broke the news to me as gently as she could, initiating me into a new phase of fatherhood. I passed into another phase this past Friday as I heard Barrett tenderly introduce his new son, Jackson Barrett, to the once-familiar but long-dormant lumber company mantra.

He shared another revelation as well. "Brandi and I were wondering last night how our parents could have kept loving us even when we talked back. Now we understand that you were remembering this." And as if I didn't understand already, he held up little Jackson so I could see his face. But what he doesn't yet realize is that countless other precious memories spawned over the next few years will eventually swell into a tsunami.

Jackson Barrett entered the world with a unique heritage few babies enjoy: to be brought into the light by the same skilled hands that had delivered his father. I well remember that anxious evening 26 years ago when Dr. Orman Simmons sat on the end of Mary's hospital bed just prior to Barrett's birth. Though terribly busy, he spent an hour comforting and encouraging, providing assurances that this new baby would not suffer with brain damage as his sister older Jenny had. He said, "You have prayed for me, haven't you? You'd better."

But a more compelling thought grips me today. Teaching is not so much what we say, but how we live out the ordinary moments of our brief times with our children. And in time the day comes when they begin to replay the tapes of episodes, both good and bad, we may have considered insignificant.

Saturday morning is when we go to the lumber company. And I trust that before many years expire, we three men, pockets stuffed with loose change, will journey to one together. The older two will watch with wonder as the little one excitedly plunks his coins into the slot, tugs at the lever--and gapes as goodies clatter down the chute. And we'll have witnessed the rebirth of heritage.

MY CHILDREN

I watch the golden grains of sand
Now sifting slowly through my hand:
They are my times with my children.

And as they each fall into place,
Upon the ground their patterns trace,
I see the lives of my children.

Thus one by one they mold and make
The shape and course young lives will take
In my few days with my children.

Eventually the grains are gone
And leave behind a haunting song:
Have I been true to my children?

So while I hold them in my hand,
Those precious golden grains of sand,
I'll give my all for my children.

(James McAlister © 2000)