



Fatherhood: An Overlapping Generational Journey

ATTILA VINCZER



A father gives his account of the birth of his first son and subsequent birth of a second son. His wife's abusive behavior toward the sons forced him to divorce her. The author describes his natural responses to becoming aware of fatherhood. The interactions between father and sons are described against the backdrop of the author's relationship with his own father and mother.

Keywords: fathering, child abuse, generational continuity, divorce, male studies

All of the great things I have accomplished in life, combined, pale in comparison to the value I place on my two boys, Steven and Ryan. Fatherhood for me has been a life-long journey, unbeknownst to me until recently as I reflected on this wondrous trail. I consider myself extremely lucky that I have had the distinct pleasure of raising my boys, fully immersed in this task, my greatest responsibility in life.

In actuality, fatherhood is a life-long affair consisting of three unique stages, the last two stages overlapping. It begins the moment you start learning in essence to be a father. Then comes being a dad and teaching my boys to be a father themselves. These are the overlapping stages. As you raise your son, you are also instilling the qualities of being a father in him. This is a serious and invaluable task of every dad.

Take a journey with me to a time decades before my boys were born. I will be 50 years old this year, but I can still recall vividly when I was a young child gravitating toward my father and grandfather. I was always curious what they were doing and relentlessly asked my dad's dad questions about how things were when he was a kid. It would not have occurred to me then, but I was absorbing everything they were doing and telling me. I was learning and preparing to be a man and potentially a father. I loved my father and grandfather. They were the world to me. My mother also played an important role in my childhood. She nurtured me. She taught me to be kind and gentle while my father showed me how to be strong and resilient. A balance resulted between strength and beauty that included wisdom and prudence. It was all very important to me, including watching my mother and father love each other and care about each other. Everything around me was molding my character, my being. One day I would realize I was copying their good examples.

I was stubborn, determined and inquisitive. I distinctly remember one day my mother telling me, "Attila, you can achieve more with your mind than brute force!" It made me angry to hear that, because I was absolutely determined, but it did sink in because to this day I remember that lesson and realize the most powerful thing in the universe is a focused mind.

We lived on the coast of the Adriatic in the former Yugoslavia. Our home was always busy with friends and relatives visiting and spending their summer holidays with us. You would often catch me milling around the kitchen where I would enjoy being allowed to lick a bowl of batter clean and got lucky with an early sampling of the cookies being baked or given a carrot to snack on. We had no junk food in our home. I was subliminally absorbing social skills as I watched and listened to the women talk and carry on their work in the home. My mother was very kind and gentle. She could soothe my deepest afflictions better than anyone else in the world. But if I stepped out of line, she could be stern! I knew when she meant business. I can still see that serious look in her eye. What I remember more than anything is that calming, beautiful smile that could put my mind at ease in a single heartbeat.

Dad moved from Szabadka, where I was born, when I was merely nine months old. Szabadka was near the Hungary-Yugoslavia border. Today it is part of Serbia after Yugoslavia was dissolved. The air quality in Szabadka was very poor due to the sulphuric acid that a local factory spewed into

the atmosphere. This seriously affected my breathing. Without hesitation Dad uprooted his family and home, moving us down to the Adriatic ocean where he was told the air was going to help with my respiratory difficulty. Dad left a very well paying job at Aurometal where about 200 people worked directly beneath him. The well being of his children was most important to him, much more important than the security of his very well paid position. The decisions my father made would eventually contribute to the decisions I make as a father with my own sons.

We lived in the foothills of a mountain. Nature abounded. I still remember the sound at nighttime abuzz with insects of the night. I also remember the howling of the wolves! Dad would open the windows in the bedrooms at night and I was sure the wolves would find their way in. Frozen in bed, terrified, I ran over to the window and closed it and ran right back to bed. Dad would come in to check on us and open the window again. He eventually realized I was closing the window. I told him I was scared of the dark! Together we walked over to the window and he said, "Look, there is nothing out there." He put my mind at ease and I calmly went back to sleep.

I always wanted to be around my dad. I wanted to do the things he was doing. I would take a ride in his Mini to a business meeting even though the meetings seemed to last an eternity. I would tag along to watch him train in Shotokan Martial Arts. Our family would go to the beach on special occasions. Dad taught me how to swim and lectured me about the dangers of the ocean. He always spoke about things as he gently passed on his wisdom in his role as a father.

It was rare, but one night I had difficulty breathing. In fact it felt like I could not breath at all. I was in shock and I thought I would die. Dad was right there to help me. He put his arm on my shoulder and we walked to the door for fresh air. He spoke to me and told me to relax and calmly take breaths of air. Dad made me feel safe. I listened to him and in fact my breathing relaxed and I was able to return back to sleep. This moment would play an important role later on in life when my father needed my help. I recalled that time that my dad literally saved my life and I in turn saved his a number of times without hesitation.

I said that fatherhood is a journey consisting of three stages. Growing up was in the first stage of learning about fatherhood, preparing to one day be a father, if I chose to have children. I was very fortunate that, unlike today, my family was intact. Next year Mom and Dad will be celebrating 60 years of marriage. I still see them love each other and treat each other with respect. This is important as I remember my great grandparents who were also together and close even when they were nearly 100 years old! What I was seeing was generationally intact families. Boys of today, sadly, do not have the very crucial involvement of their dads due to the increasing number of homes that are broken. We live in a society where dads are often merely visitors in their lives. This is very unhealthy. It saddens me that other boys and girls do not have what I had in my childhood and even in my adult life, a mother and a father together.

When I was in my early 20's I was ready to settle down, get married and start a family. It did not happen until about ten years later. I delved deep into starting a business within my father's shop. Boy did I learn about friction between a father and a son as I began to form my own wisdom and was foolish enough to not accept or admit that Dad had a lot to offer. I was becoming my own independent, unique person.

Throughout my life I dreamed of having children. It was often on my mind and I was quite ready to find the right woman and take on the responsibility of being a dad the way I saw my own father raise my two brothers and me. One day I met a very beautiful woman at a friend's birthday party. She was so stunningly gorgeous that I was utterly mesmerized by her. Her beauty was paralyzingly attractive. We began dating and I soon fell in love. We got married and our first son, Steven, was on his way.

My life dream of becoming a father was now slowly becoming a reality. I was aglow with excitement as I watched my wife's belly grow, knowing my son or daughter was developing to one day meet me. Captivated by this miracle I began wondering what my child would look like. Would it be a boy or a girl. What would my child look like? What would be the color of the hair and eyes. It was all so deeply moving to me. What began to occur to me is I was truly on the way to becoming a father and, one day, my child would learn to say "Dad." That thought, of a new human being, my own child to call me Dad was enchanting in a very special way. I couldn't wait for the day I would hear my child call me Dad. It would seal and authenticate my new position in life.

I went with my wife to all the doctor's appointments and to see our baby's heart beating during the first ultrasound was stunning to me. I could see that my child was truly there and growing. This was actually happening. I was going to be a dad!

I often put my ear to her belly in hopes of hearing a beating heart. One day, not only did I hear his beating heart, I got an elbow or a foot right in the side of my face. Wow! I actually heard his beating heart, fast and steady, and felt his moving body. This was so amazing to me. But this baby did not want to leave the comfort of his mommy. Steven was now nearly three weeks late. I was at the ready to take on the task of rushing my wife to the hospital when I got that all-important call. Earlier we took parenting classes together and had prepared everything as we were taught. Only one other father was in our group. I learned a lot about what a mom is going through and what I could do to help during the pregnancy and at birth.

The doctor decided to admit Mom to the hospital. I got everything ready. Music, snacks and a bottle of champagne. We arrived and Mom was brought into the delivery room. The doctors checked her out and the nurses were at the ready. They broke her water and induced labor. The baby was not positioned right so a doctor performed an inversion to turn the baby head down. I was nervous and pumped, wanting to see this baby born, but knowing a lot of things still needed to happen. It was clear in my mind that certain things could go wrong and I was ready to do what I could and needed to help out. I dug my heels in and was ready for the 24-hour haul if need be. Nurses kept checking Mom and the baby's vitals. She begins dilating and I was waiting excitedly. My child would be born in mere hours! The anticipation was hard to bear.

Then all of the sudden I saw a worried look on the nurse's face. The doctor was called in and they told us that the baby was in distress as it passed meconium. We were told that the baby would have to be delivered by C-Section. Mom and baby were rushed away. I was told to suit up and I hurriedly get ready. I was asked to sit in the hall before I was allowed to go into the operating room. At this time, within a short few minutes as I sat on a chair outside the OR watching nurses and doctors rushing back and forth, I realized that many babies were born here. But a chilling thought crossed

my mind that it does happen that babies and even mothers die at birth. I contemplated every scenario including ending up having to raise this baby on my own if, God forbid, something should happen to my wife. This was reality, a harsh reality, that led me to pray, asking God to ensure that both Mom and baby would be safe. I shook my head, cleared my mind and was allowed to enter the operating room. Sitting beside my wife, I held her hand, soothing her afflictions and calming her every way I could, reassuring her everything would be OK.

The bed was now jerking as the surgeon did her job extracting our child. I had my camera at the ready and was told they would let me know when I could snap a photograph of our baby. I was also going to be allowed to cut the umbilical chord. She signaled me as she lifted up our baby boy who took his first breath and let us know the full strength of his lungs. Steven was finally born! I was fully immersed in emotions of joy and concern. The surgeon literally climbed atop of the operating table. I could see beads of sweat on her forehead, clearly stressed and a very concerned look in her eyes. The room was abuzz with medical people rushing around. I saw how everything that is meant to be inside was resting on mom's open tummy. What I heard next, made me realize something was seriously wrong! She said, "Get me Doctor so and so stat!" "We are sorry; he is not answering his page," was the reply. She then bellowed out another order: "Then get me so and so immediately! I don't care if you need to drive to his house, get him here now!"

A doctor casually walked into a very intensely stressed out operating room. Relieved, the surgeon said, "Thank you for responding so quickly to your page, doctor." "In fact," he said, "I was just passing by and decided to poke my head in to see what is going on." He never even got the page. It seems my prayer was answered. This to me was a miracle, for what I did not know until later was that my wife was hemorrhaging to death and there were only two surgeons who were able to stop this kind of bleeding. One was not responding while the other one had just casually strolled in. I was told that within minutes my wife would have perished had one of the surgeons not been there to perform their surgical skill. I missed my chance to cut the umbilical chord, but most importantly, my wife and our new baby boy, Steven, were both safe. I was so grateful we were in the hands of doctors who made this double miracle of birth and saving the life of my wife happen.

I decided to get a private room so that I could stay at the side of my wife who had just undergone serious surgery. We were told baby Steven had his umbilical chord wrapped between his legs and around his neck. No wonder he was unable to descend for a natural birth. Other than the parenting classes I took for eight weeks, I had no clue about babies. I can build things, fix things, run a business and such, but I did not train to be around babies. But something inside of me changed me. Instinctively, I took on the job of picking baby Steven up when he cried. He was either hungry, needed to be changed, or was tired. So I would pass the baby over to Mom to feed and I was taught how to properly change a diaper and wrap the baby up, nice and tight. I walked the halls with him and could hear the nurses and other mothers mention what a great dad I was and how I naturally knew to sway with the baby as I walked. This action mimics the swaying of Mom when the baby was still in her womb. It comforts the baby. I had no idea what I was doing, but somehow instinctively it seemed right.

Before we left the hospital, the nurse called me over to get consent for her to take a blood sample from baby Steven. I agreed and she walked over to Steven who is barely two days old and sleeping soundly. The nurse unwrapped him and pricked his heel and blood rushed out. The screech-

ing cry that followed made me nearly jump through the glass and jump all over that nurse for hurting my son! I said, "No, no, no!" But she was just doing her job and I began to do mine, protecting my son from harm.

We got home and the emergency surgery had left my wife in a very compromised state. It was difficult for her to get out of bed. I decided to take time off work to help Mom. It turned out to be three months before my wife got well enough that I could go back to work. We worked as a team. When the baby cried, I got up, got Steven out of the crib and brought him to Mom to feed. I would burp him, change a diaper if needed, and lull him back to sleep. My son was finally home. I began to deeply bond with this baby and in many ways am thankful that I had a chance to be involved in duties that were usually reserved more exclusively for Mom. I was delighted and took every chance I could to help and be involved.



I remember whispering to my wife, “You know you are stuck with me for at least 20 years.” I was joking and serious at the same time. It was my view, now that we have a child, this child will need the both of us together for at least 20 years.

Steven grew and learned to do all the things that every parent enjoys seeing a baby experiencing. Simple things that are so important, like baby being able to roll over, sit up, smile. The big ones are when baby learns to crawl, stands up, and takes that very first step. These milestones are such a big deal to a mother and a father. I had been dreaming about this for a very long time--the day my son would say “Dad.” And there I was holding Steven, and he said “Dada.” The tears in my eyes welled up and I could not control my emotion of joy. In fact it is bringing tears to my eyes as I write about it. Finally, my son spoke to me in words. Actually, he had been speaking to me all along in a silent way, in a way that only a father and son know how to communicate—a certain look, a smile, or just a simple tap on the shoulder or arm.

Exactly two years to the day our second son, Ryan, would be born. Because of the previous serious complications, Ryan would need to be born by C-section as well. This time, everything went very well. Equally excited, I was at in awe at the second miracle of my life, the birth of my second son. I hoped for a son so Steven would have a brother to play with. My wish came true, but I would have been just as happy if it were a girl. I was allowed to walk over and cut Ryan’s umbilical chord—not an easy snip, I tell you! That is one tough chord. Ryan was a beautiful baby just like Steven. He had long fingers and gripped my index finger with firm strength that surprised me, coming from a baby that just emerged to the world.

My life dream was to have two boys and two girls. I am missing out on raising a daughter, which I am sure would have some similarities to raising my sons, but there would be difference that I just will never know. I can only contemplate them.

Our new home was under construction and my brother was good enough to allow us to move into his house I helped him buy. Rooms were very small and we got situated in a room with two couches. Because I can sleep without moving much, baby Ryan would rest on my chest as we slept. The moment he was hungry, I would wake Mom. She would feed him and again, just like with Steven, I would burp him and change his diaper as needed. The boys grew faster than I could imagine and Ryan did all the things that Steven did. I recall every first step, first tooth and the day he said Dada, just like Steven.

There was no doubt I was a father, committed for many years to come. I knew that the baby and toddler stages were a lot of work, but easier than what would come years down the road. This father was fully committed and hoped that my boys would be easier on me than I was on my parents. I began to realize and regret many of the trials and tribulations I cause my own father. I began to pray that karma would spare me. Relishing every new day and year, Steven and Ryan grew bigger and developed handsomely. To me, everything they did was important no matter how trivial. It was important to me to give them my time. I wanted them to feel they were the important thing in the world to their dad.

What was also happening is I was slowly teaching my boys to be a father. This is the important

overlap of the last two stages of fatherhood I mentioned earlier. Being a father is not only to nurture and teach a child to grow up to be a productive self-sufficient adult. It is also to teach them, by example, by my parenting, how to be a good father. This, in my view, is a crucial duty of a father. What concerns me is that the majority of boys are growing up without a dad, due to divorce and broken homes that have become far too fashionable. In my view, it is a horrible social mistake that needs to change.

The worst day of my life was when I learned that my sons were being abused and ill treated. I will not get into any details here and now about this very dark and very sad time in my life. What became known to me is that I had to do everything I could to ensure my children were safe and free of any harm. My mother had previously noticed that Mom was displaying ill behaviour with the boys, particularly with Steven. Regrettably, I did not believe her. I could not comprehend that a mother could harm a child. It just couldn't be. Sadly it was true. I made every effort to work with my wife to deal with her issues, to no avail. I was prepared to sacrifice my life and remain in a difficult and turbulent marriage to ensure my children had a mother and a father for those 20 years I mentioned.

After six months, however, it became clear to me that I would need to embark on a path I never, ever thought would happen to me. Divorce was inevitable and I served my wife with the notice of divorce. I thought I would manage this in a professional manner, like any other business transaction. Boy, was I wrong. Why? Because I began to experience what women do in divorce. Everything was hurled at me. False sexual allegations, calling CAS (Children's Aid Society) on me and employing her entire crew of female family and friends to destroy me and my need to keep our children safe from her wrath. It was a messy divorce, but eventually, I ended up with care and control of the children. Both Steven and Ryan were deeply hurt by the fact Mom and Dad were no longer together. This broke my heart, but I could see no other way to protect my children from harm.

Eight years have passed since then and both Steven and Ryan are doing very well. They are maturing into teenagers and doing all the things young boys like to do. I love them very much, unconditionally. Together we have endured a lot. All three of us have learned a lot. I never thought I would be a single father raising my boys. This thought only crossed my mind once when I sat in that hallway as Steven's mother was being prepped in the operating room. Nobody had prepared me for this stage in my life, a stage I thought would never happen to me or my children.

Being a single father from the time Ryan was three and Steven was five years old has been a life altering change. I find it interesting that I have adapted and am sensitive to qualities that only a mother can best bestow to her children. For example, I used to be able to sleep through anything, whereas now, the slightest sound from my children will awaken me. One thing is for certain, that no matter what I do, I can never be or replace a mother for my children. I also believe that a mother could never replace what a father is to his children. What I have learned with certainty is that children desperately desire to have a loving mother and a loving father. More important, they desire to see their mom and dad love and care about each other.

Regrettably, over half the children in Canada and the United States are growing up without a dad in their lives on any substantial meaningful level. This condition is one that is very unhealthy

and is causing many children to be sad and angry and distressed. My eyes have been opened up to this and that is the primary reason I advocate for the rights of children and families.

Some distinct moments that can never be effaced from the memory of this father. The moment Ryan and Steven were born and when they said Dada for the very first time. Or when one said: “Dad, I wish you could be my mother.” Or: “You are the best dad in the world.” Steven tells me he loves me throughout the day and whenever he greets me, coming or going. Ryan will say, “I love you” and will top my response with, “I love you more.” I can never win at this! One day while having lunch with the boys at the Crow’s Nest in Newmarket, a complete stranger with his son walked over to our table and said, “I can tell you deeply love your children”—and walked away. To this day I do not understand what I did or what he saw to draw that conclusion. He was right.

Fatherhood is a progressive science, a science that often defies the laws of physics. It is dynamic with unpredictable twists and turns. A father must be ready for anything and must adapt quickly, sometimes adapting long-term for whatever reason.

A friend and martial arts mentor, Leo Casetto, one day after training said to me: “Enjoy it. It will go fast.” I thought how fast could it go? Boy do I now understand what he meant. Nearly 14 years have gone by, seemingly in a heartbeat. It seemed he said that just yesterday. I love being a father and to me it is one of the most fulfilling accomplishments in my life.



Attila Vinczer holds an executive position and an advisory role at, Canada Court Watch, National Coalition For Men, A Voice For Men, The Premier Canadian Mint, The Canadian Maltese Charitable Service Trust, Friends of Protection for Men, New Male Studies and Canadian Association for Equality. He is currently penning two books, *Navigating the Minefield of Divorce* and *An Affidavit of Divorce*. He is also in the preliminary stages of developing two documentaries, one about his experience in Family and Criminal Court and the other re-enacting tragic stories of abused men.

NEW MALE STUDIES: AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL (NMS) IS AN OPEN ACCESS ONLINE INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION OF ISSUES FACING BOYS AND MEN WORLDWIDE. THIS JOURNAL USES OPEN JOURNAL SYSTEMS 2.3.4.0, WHICH IS OPEN SOURCE JOURNAL MANAGEMENT AND PUBLISHING SOFTWARE DEVELOPED, SUPPORTED, AND FREELY DISTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT UNDER THE GNU GENERAL PUBLIC LICENSE.

THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN DOWNLOADED FROM [HTTP://NEWMALESTUDIES.COM](http://newmalestudies.com).