

# MASCULINE IMAGES: Father

Even as we wrote about experiencing law school from a feminine perspective and discussed the images of women and femininity in our culture, we turned to focus on the masculine image. Men, in black judicial robes, symbolize not only the authority of law, but also the authority of men. Men created and structured the laws governing all of us. American justice rests solely in the hands of men.

To begin identifying our individual and cultural images of men and masculinity, we wrote about our early relationships with our fathers. Our relationships with our father color our future relationships and the way we experience the world of men. Writing about our fathers started a dialogue about men, masculine images, and relationships. In turn, it allowed us to consider the masculine dominance in law and how we function in that environment.

The "father papers" surprised us. They were intense and personal. Other subjects had been more distant, and thus easier to articulate and structure. But our complex relationships with our fathers made it difficult to crisply sort our feelings, impressions, and thoughts. In one sentence we expressed gratefulness for something Father did, and in the next sentence expressed anger and hurt resulting from the same action. At times Father cared and involved himself in our lives, at times he distanced himself or even disappeared. The profound influence of Father, both painful and supportive, emerged in our writing.

CATHY MORGAN

I think my father's demanding, manipulating mother wounded his feminine side. Down deep, my father is loving and sensitive, but he has difficulty manifesting these feminine qualities. He acts like they are signs of weakness, a threat to his masculinity.

I vaguely remember going to the zoo with him once; it was incredibly fun. But he was an absent father. An executive in a company, he worked long hours. He was present only for Sunday lunch--a family affair--held after I

got home from (a very miserable morning at) Sunday School.

Rather than play with me or approach me on my childish level, my father tried to impress me with his powerfulness and invulnerability. (I think mainly because he always felt unpowerful and very vulnerable.) I remember the time he surprised me at my birthday party with two ponies from the zoo. They were, to my amazement, giving rides to the ecstatic children in my backyard. I also remember his inevitably unkept promises to me that he would bring home broken clocks and vacuum cleaners for me to fix. (If I wasn't precocious as a child, I sure thought I was!) His empty promises and spectacular performances were the way he showed his love to me. Never wanting to let me down, he promised the impossible. I guess he never thought I could love him for what he really was. He never learned to express tenderness or love without spending ostentatious amounts of money--amounts designed solely to impress me, his daughter.

I could never tell when he was telling me the truth or exaggerating or fantasizing. Sometimes his fantastic predictions or stories were true because my father frequently analyzed political, scientific, legal, and business information correctly, ahead of others' analyses. But I stopped trusting him when I found out that he did not always tell the truth (and then I didn't believe anything he said was true), and this in turn made it difficult for me to trust my own judgment faculties and values. I still have this problem. My feelings of distrust magnified when my father started drinking heavily, or when I first noticed that he was often inebriated and not himself (he now controls this problem).

He would often hurt my sensitive feelings by treating me as an adult--I think so that I could help him solve his problems, rather than vice versa. He made me feel as if I could never please him by being what I was--a kid. Now my nieces, his granddaughters, are the apples of his eye--as long as they don't make a mess or scream or wet their pants, as long as they don't act like kids.

I always felt guilty about causing the problems between my father and mother. I felt insecure about my self-worth and scholastic abilities (which were always high). I didn't realize until much, much later that our family problems were a result of my parents' own problems

and were not caused by me. As I look back on it, I could never have been a more perfect (dutiful?) daughter. I always got good grades in school; I was always a "lady" when we went out to dinner or traveled; and except for a few years when I became distraught, and overate, and didn't date, I have always had a man to make my father proud of me. There were things I did which I never told my parents about, but I was the perfect daughter even then, by never giving them cause to worry. I successfully kept my disillusionment and disappointment from them.

Even now I have a hard time playing and relaxing, because I was never allowed to do so as a child. My parents needed me to help them, and it wasn't until I was fully grown that they began to help me (psychologically) and parent me in any meaningful way.

The funny thing about my relationship to my father is that it hasn't been all bad. I mean I really like him, and, indirectly, I am glad of many of the painful things which occurred during my childhood, because I am stronger for them. I guess I sound masochistic, but I don't think I am. My father never would have been so indulgent with me or proud of me if he hadn't also had the severe need to impress me and gain my respect. I like the way he has always trusted me implicitly and treated me as an adult. His confidence in me gave me the opportunity to express my intellectual curiosity. He indirectly encouraged me to travel to Europe and Africa, become the chairperson of this or that organization in college, learn foreign languages, and go to law school. My father never once suggested I do any of these things, the decisions were mine, but he was very proud of me when I did them.

The fact that I married well, put my husband through two years of medical school, made law review and a top percentage of my class, and am expecting a baby, makes my father so proud he could burst! Even though I have him in mind when I am working hard and trying to be successful, and even though I am probably still living part of his life for him, I like myself better these days and think my successes in law school will be valuable. I see the limitations of a life lived for external praise and am looking more and more inside to find my own source of pleasure in both leisure and working time. I am wounded in the sense that I still try to please an unkind patriarchy; but I am not wounded into thinking a woman can't accomplish what a

man can. My father believed in me; he never set a double standard for me. I appreciate that.

One final thought. . . . The man I married helps me combat my "pleasing the father" syndrome because he embodies many characteristics I searched for in my father and never found. My husband is stable, understated, a steady worker, nurturing, mature, self-confident, and sensitive. I am very lucky to have a relationship with a man who, by simply being who he is, has helped me accept childish and unambitious qualities in myself. But it is still wonderful to have an indulgent, extravagant, father to turn to when indulgence and extravagance are what I need.

### DENISE CHAMBERLAIN

It was clear to see they were in love. Love spelled with capital letters--LOVE! Their eyes reflected their deep emotions. The man's hazel eyes shined with pleasure when he gazed at the woman. He thought she was beautiful, kind, and intelligent. He felt he was the luckiest man alive because this wonderful woman was his wife.

Rarely did a day pass without the man and woman finding some way to express their love. Their home was a happy place, filled with warm, spontaneous gaiety, laughter, and music. The man often played the piano and sang silly love songs to the woman. He often called her from work in the middle of the afternoon just to say "hello." He came home for lunch--just to be with his wife. He walked into the kitchen and sneaked up behind her. Then he threw his arms around her and gave her a big kiss. If he heard music playing on the radio, he danced with his wife throughout the house. They laughed and danced, and whirled through the kitchen...through the dining room . . . through the living room, and back into the kitchen. He then sat down at the kitchen table and drew his woman onto his lap. When their children saw this happen, they ran to their parents so they wouldn't miss out on the fun. The older child climbed onto the mother's lap and the youngest child climbed onto the older child's lap. Then the whole family hugged each other and laughed.

The man gave his wife a very special symbol of love, a box of chocolate-covered cherries. Even though the chocolates were not rich and expensive, the gift itself was

supreme. Their eyes sparkled when this present was shared.

One day the man stopped and bought a box of these chocolates before he drove his car to her office where he picked up his wife from work. He pulled into the parking lot, parked the car, and saw her waiting in the doorway. They waved to each other and she went to get her coat. She walked over to the car and opened the door. She saw him slumped over the steering wheel--dead from a heart attack. There in his hands was his final expression of love for her . . . the box of chocolate-covered cherries.

My father died 10 years ago in that sudden manner. I will always remember his last acts on the day he died. They represent the wonderful relationship he had with my mother. They were married over 25 years, and the relationship was still strong and happy. It seemed so cruel that he should die so unexpectedly and leave my mother and me alone. Yet even though he died so suddenly and at a young age, my father left me with happy memories.

My parents spent a lot of time playing imaginative games with me. We made up stories, played word games, and did magic tricks. One would think that we'd have been bored after playing the same games for many years, but the games grew with me, becoming more fun as I reached my teenage years. It was a family tradition to spend an evening trying to be the most creative story teller.

Another family tradition centered around music. My father had been a drum major in high school and loved music. When I was small, he pretended we were a marching band. He played Sousa marches on the stereo and we marched through the house in time to the music. He took my baton and pretended he was leading the band. My mother followed right behind him pretending to be a majorette. Next in line, my sister who pretended to play a clarinet. Finally, I followed the others pretending to be a drummer.

My father was free enough to do what came naturally, yet could be dignified and serious whenever he needed to be. No matter what he was doing, his warm, expressive actions made it very clear that his family was the center of his life. He made each one of us feel very special.

I am pleased that our relationship progressed from a father/daughter relationship, to the point where it also included the added dimension of friendship before he died.

We joined a choir together, and our participation gave us the opportunity to see each other as individuals.

My father's characteristics definitely color my images of the masculine. He was the man in my childhood world. His images offer a point of comparison when thinking about men in general. They offer a basis to compare and contrast various characteristics and attributes men possess. I seek in other men the positive characteristics I found in my father: intelligence, strength, kindness, a sense of humor, creativity, and the ability to express emotions.

Most of my relationships with men have been good ones, and it is probably due to my father's influence on my perception of masculine images. I appreciate my father's influence in the type of men I seek to be my friends--thanks, Dad.

#### KATHY MORAN

My father died a week before my twentieth birthday, seven years ago. I was upset at his bizarre accidental death; but shortly after the funeral I felt a great sense of relief. I never really liked my father, although I did love him on some level. (It's always amazed me that I've felt no guilt over my response--just some sadness.) My father was the sort of man who had trouble demonstrating his affection. He was a true workaholic who never had time for me, although he gave me anything I wanted. My mother told me I had so many toys because they had to work hard and didn't have time to take me places and do things with me. Hard work was very important to my father. If you didn't work hard and pay your own way, you were no good. My father was very poor as a child and a young man. I guess he was afraid that he'd be poor again if he didn't work so hard. I can understand why he acted as he did, but I can't quite forgive him.

When I was growing up, nothing I did was quite good enough for my father. I always did very well in school, but I got little praise for it--at least not directly from my father. He'd say I should do well since I didn't have anything else to do (didn't help enough around the house, etc.). I remember bringing home a report card from college with all A's and one B, and my father looked at it and asked why I got the B. Later my mother told me that

my father had bragged to his friends about how well I did and how proud he was of me. He just never told me. He constantly maintained that money for my college education was not a problem and I didn't need to get a summer job; in the next breath he'd say how hard one of my friends had to work in order to go to school and how wonderful she was. I constantly got the message that I wasn't accomplishing enough.

In high school, several girls in my class became pregnant and "had" to get married. My father became obsessed with fear that I'd do the same thing and disgrace the family, ruin my life, and never go to college. It made no difference that there was no basis in reality for such thoughts. It surprises me that I managed to develop a normal sexuality.

My father also had a tendency to yell at me or my mother when he was angry at someone else. We were convenient, safe targets--especially me.

I remember how cold my father was when my cat died. He told me not to cry, that it was just a cat, that he did all he could for him (paid the vet bills), that I liked the cat more than my parents.

I had a difficult time even talking with my father. But I remember some good times too: the countless games of gin rummy; all the times he picked me up at school so I wouldn't have to wait on the bus; walking on the farm with him as he planned yet another improvement; the gold earrings he surprised me with on my last day of junior high.

I know now that I generally viewed my father as a repressive force, as something to fear. Looking at what I've just written, I realize that my father and I got along best when I was younger. He didn't know what to do with an older adolescent. The older I got, the more ways I could disappoint him. I felt stifled by his expectations, and his death was a release for me.

My view of the law is definitely tainted by my relationship with my father. I view the law as something to be feared, to be conformed to, to be circumvented. I see our legal system as arbitrary--its wrath is indiscriminate. I see the law as being more concerned with appearances than with justice. My father was more concerned over what "people would say" than about how I felt or what I actually did. I don't see the law doing what it should be doing.

The law should be something that protects us, shelters us.

I believe that our adversarial system is a direct result of its masculine foundation. Men have traditionally been more competitive than women. Men are more likely to want to fight things out, while women are more willing to work things out, to co-operate. Women compromise by trying to see both sides of a problem. They hope as much as possible to give each party what it wants. Women want to win, but they want the other person to win, too.

It makes me sad to see women lawyers approach a problem like a man. When we do that we're forfeiting the chance to make the legal system more humane. I don't feel that men are as "understanding" as women. They are not as flexible and open. Men are too work-and-success oriented. I don't want to be like that and I don't like seeing other women adopt those qualities. I keep getting a picture in my head of a woman executive in a navy blue, Brooks Brothers suit with a white buttondown shirt and one of those ribbon ties. Her haired is pulled into a tight, shapeless bun, and she's wearing black, low-heeled pumps. She's the copy of a male execu-tive. She's offering no more than her male counterparts. I think the

#### CYNTHIA KOTCHEK

Often a female's perception of the masculine and her internalization of masculine images change over her lifetime. The change is the product of her social environment, her family, male and female friends, and other influences.

After thinking of my own internalization of masculine images, I realize that one factor influencing that internalization is my observation of other peoples' fathers. In grade school, my sister and I befriended two sisters about our age. We played with them several times a week, and although they lived on the other end of town, the friendship lasted until I was out of high school. Their father treated the oldest girl like a boy, a pattern I could see even when I was very young, and insisted she behave like a boy. He sneered at my feminine behavior. From the first time I met him I thought he was an awful person. Despite our conflicts, my own father appeared good compared to my friends' father. In high school, the father of another close girlfriend made strict demands in terms of academic achievement, dignified, adult dress, avoidance of



dating, and church attendance. His extreme authoritarianism again put my own father in a good light.

Years after I graduated from high school, I ran into one friend's father in my hometown. My friend and I had parted ways and I had not seen or heard from her in years. When I asked him how his daughter was and where she was, he looked away from me and replied, "Well, we don't hear from her much." I learned from others that the daughter had, upon graduation from high school, established a lifestyle of her own, contrary to that dictated by her father. I remember musing about Mr. B's hurt expression; I regretted that things turned out badly between him and his daughter.

As a social worker working with children, I met many fathers. I sometimes consciously compared the fathers with my own father; but mainly I stored the images unconsciously, changing my image of the father without realizing it. Even now, my image of father changes. Just a few days ago, I talked with a couple of law school friends about their grandfathers and how well they did or did not know them. A few days later, I thought about the same friends and their husband/boyfriend situations and tied in their conversations about their grandfathers.

After we enter life's mainstream, suffer defeats, and enjoy successes of our own; after we see fathers ranging from the horrible to the excellent; after we try to cope with children ourselves, even if just for a day or so; we appreciate that being a father is not so simple. Mistakes are easy to make and hard to undo. The burdens are tremendous. Perfection is impossible. Outside of situations where fathers brutalize their children outright, either physically or emotionally, mature people seem to accept a father's good faith efforts, and say that people ought to just get on with living and dispense with recriminations.

I had the good fortune to observe this type of resolution between a father and daughter. A good friend of mine, the middle of three children, had had a stormy relationship with her father from the time she was small. Her parents fought continually, sometimes not speaking to each other for months at a time, refusing to divorce only for religious reasons. My friend sided with her mother, and did not speak to her father. The home was a battlefield. Father and daughter reconciled only when he was on his deathbed--which apparently was possible, at least in part,

because my friend saw her father through the eyes of an adult. When a child grows old enough to appreciate the reality of death, resentments against the father shrivel in importance and are easier to shrug off. It is not worth all the grief to continue a grudge when the death of the parent can freeze it into place, never to be resolved.

It is almost impossible for a child to see her parent's own regret at things the parent did. I never thought about it until I saw a small scene in a movie where an old man sits quietly crying, looking out the window. An elderly friend of his, also a man, asks him what is wrong. He replies that he is thinking about his son who is now dead, and relates that when his son was a little boy, the boy had supposedly done something wrong while the father was at work. The mother reported this to the father when he came home and demanded that the father spank the boy. The father asked the little boy if he had done the mischief and the boy denied it; the mother continued the demand for a spanking. So the father spanked the boy, not really believing that the boy had been naughty. The old man said, "I was just young. What did I know? I didn't want to look weak. Things were never the same between me and Bobby after that." If parents have difficulty showing their regret at mistakes in childrearing, if they bluff and continue to insist they are right, it may take an especially insightful child to see the hidden sorrow. Perhaps the child's maturity may be all that can ever give her insight regarding the parent's actions.

I see my father different from how I did years ago; the fresh view is a serendipitous benefit of aging.