

Country Philosopher

Father's Day

This coming Sunday is Father's Day, and I kind of dread it. Not because I don't relish a pat on the back once a year, but because I know I will receive gifts from loving wife and affectionate daughters. I don't know what it is, but the entire world seems to go crazy on Father's Day. Only insanity could propel a person into buying such outlandish gifts for dear, old Dad.

I remember a few years back I sat at my dining room table at dinner time. It was Father's Day and the table directly in front of me was simply loaded with gaily wrapped packages. I sat there and sort of glowed in the knowledge that my family appreciated me, loved me, to such an awesome extent.

The first package I opened was from my daughter, Ethel. As I tore off the ribbon I smiled at her. Her little face was radiant. She sat in great expectation hoping that her gift would fill me with good and vast happiness. The ribbon came off, the wrapping thrown on the floor, and I reached in and pulled out a plastic cow whose back was covered with lollipops. Ethel, who was sixteen, saw the look of bewilderment that crossed my face, and said, "You don't like it."

I wanted to scream, "WHO COULD LIKE A DAMN PLASTIC COW? I HATE COWS. I HATE PLASTIC. AND I PARTICULARLY HATE LOLLIPOPS." But I looked at that sweet sad face, and taking her hand, I

said, "Honey, I was simply amazed. Amazed to think that you love me enough to get me a plastic cow. And golly... all these lollipops. You are a very sweet daughter and I love you so much for going to all this trouble just to make me happy."

Of course she was pleased. She had put a lot of thought into her gift. She was enchanted with plastic cows... she loved lollipops... and what better thing in this world could she get me as a gift on Father's Day?

My daughter, Amy, gave me bubble bath. Ordinarily bubble bath would have been quite welcome but it seems our house contains only a shower. No tub. And my feeble mind couldn't reason how I was ever going to use that bubble bath. Still, I looked tremendously pleased, thanked her profusely, and went on to open Jessie's gift.

It was a live frog. When I opened that package I damn near died. My face registered pain and disbelief and bewilderment. A small tear appeared in Jessie's eye, and she said, "You don't like it."

I wanted to scream, "WHO COULD LIKE A ROTTEN, DIRTY, FILTHY, INSANE FROG? I HATE FROGS... I HATE WARTS... AND I'LL BE DAMNED IF I'M NOT STARTING TO HATE FATHER'S DAY."

Instead, I picked that filthy beast up

in my hands, kissed it (ugh) and said, "Jess, that's the nicest gift in the world. I'm profoundly overcome with your generosity."

But mostly, on Father's Day, I think about my own father. Daddy was very strict and unbending and we kids tiptoed around the house when he was home. He was the disciplinarian, the head of the house, and we never had the same kind of relationship with Daddy that we had with Mama. When I was young I never gave my father the credit he deserved. It was only later in my life that I understood how deeply he had loved us and how awfully hard it is to be a good father.

A father goes out each morning and hacks away at a job that he probably finds boring and tedious. And when payday comes he brings his check home. He is going to work hard almost all of his life for the privilege of being with his mate and raising his children.

The father generally makes the major decisions and what an awesome responsibility that is. One mistake... just one lousy mistake... and he could ruin his child's life forever. I have seen children, physically hurt, and the father stands cold and aloof while the mother cuddles and comforts. The father must teach the child that life holds many hurts and pains and one must be tough to endure. He would love to take



that crying child in his arms... but if he did... the lesson of bearing pain would be lost.

I don't think a father can ever unbend while raising his children. His discipline is essential. I know when my Daddy said not to play with matches... we didn't play with matches. If he told us not to run into the road... we stayed in the yard. It was this cold authority... this unbending discipline... that allowed us to grow up without harm.

My father has been dead for many years. I would give... so gladly give... most anything to have him back again. To take that slight, white-haired man in my arms and thank him for all he did for me. And to explain to him I wasn't wise enough to understand what he had endured or how deeply he had loved.

Well, my friends, you can be smarter than I was. You can show your father, this Sunday, how deeply you love him. You go up and wrap your arms around him and just hug the hell out of him. He might blush and look embarrassed... but you go right on hugging.

For he deserves each affectionate squeeze.