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**Father's Day, 2006
The Father and the Son
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It is Father's Day; the first since the son's father died. A year ago, the son made certain to spend the day with his father, as he anticipated that it would be the last. Now, pictures flash through the son's mind! Time stood still on October 7, 2005 when the telephone rang and the message was delivered, "Daddy has died." That moment and the immediate subsequent events are sealed forever in the son's memory, yet even as that time stands still, time continues to march on. Eight months have passed since that dreaded but inevitable announcement was made. Time stands still for no one.

As the son walks through the gallery of the father's life, he sees pictures which bring great joy, yet sadness that the snapshots must now replace the father's presence. Recently, the son heard Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Well known and greatly loved, this 1874 composition transports the listener mentally and musically through a gallery of drawings and watercolors executed by Victor Hartmann, Mussorgsky's dear friend, who had died at a young age. Recurring throughout the composition is a melody entitled "promenade" which signals that it is time to "walk" to the next picture.

Life should have narration and theme music. As the son journeys through the drawings and watercolors produced by his father's life and lore, his mind accompanies with the strains of Mussorgsky's music and with his own narration of the events depicted in the pictures. Some of the portraits in his mind are of times and events which he did not experience but knows only by the images which were captured before his birth or memory. Others are vivid and intense paintings which are the product of intimate and treasured personal experience. Still others are word pictures created by the retelling of stories by his Grandmother, his own father and others of events in his father's life.

The first picture in the exhibition depicts the father's first serious injury. For his birthday – it is unclear which one, but he was a teenager – the son's grandfather gave the father a calf. The son's great grandfather was a horse trader, so it surprised no one when the day after his birthday the son's father traded the calf for a mustang. Untamed and unruly, the horse ran under a tree causing permanent damage to the father's right eye; his vision was impaired for life. Hung by this larger painting is a smaller pen and ink sketch of a young Billy Dick Holly allowing the glasses, acquired due to this injury, to fall into the trash. The battle was over and he did not wear glasses until sixty years later, still reluctantly. Yet, the event would affect the father's life forever, particularly as it excluded him from service in the World War II.

The second is an actual portrait. It is a duotone of a handsome young man with neatly combed hair, most of which was lost by his mid twenties. The promise and hope contained in the slight smile which played around his lips would be fulfilled as his family

would come to love and cherish that smile. For all of the father's life, the son lived for that smile, easily and often given by the father, and a worthy reward to be sought. Again, it seems that each portrait is accompanied by a smaller black and white sketch which expands and defines the content of the larger piece. Beside this duotone is a black and white snapshot taken of Billy Dick outside a restaurant in Kingsville, Louisiana where he and the son's mother met while the father courted several young ladies before choosing Irene Woodruff as his bride. With his hand in his pocket and his white collar open without a tie, his hair line had already begun to recede, his face suggested resolve and strong character.

The third is a group picture of 25 men and women who worked at Pollock Airfield during World War II. Taken in 1944, it shows the father in uniform with his captain's hat. At 23, he was the commander of the fire department at the Air Field where his own father served under him. He is in the front row squatting with a kitten playing in his hands. Shockingly, he has a tie on, but only because it was required by the uniform. All of the men and women in the picture are deceased now, a cadre of the "greatest generation" lost to us physically but alive in our hearts and memories.

The son pauses at this exhibit because it is the last of the youthful father who is known only through the memories of others and by actual pictures. How could a man who is but twenty-three be the leader of dozens of men and women twice his age? Future years would reveal that it was the force of his character and the strength of his will. His leadership was not imposed upon others, it was willingly accepted by those who trusted and valued his guidance and wisdom. This picture is pivotal in our gallery and a crescendo of Mussorgsky's music plays in accompaniment announcing. "Pay attention; this portrait is important."

From here the pictures come rapidly and they are brighter and larger. They are all actual memories, sometimes reinforced with photographs but all created by the son's personal experience. Ah, this one is delightful. The reins of the harness are thrown back over his shoulder as his hands grip plow handles. His strength guides the plow around the contour of the hill on which he sows the seeds for his peanut crop. As his three-year-old son walks to the field with a jar of cold water; the father pauses and replenishes the fluids which produced the sweat rolling from his face and soaking his shirt.

His son looks at him and wonders where such a powerful and enormous man came from. He breathes deeply and delights in the smell of his father. He watches as his father returns to his labor and he learns – unknowingly, he learns – how to work and how to walk through uneven rows while directing his efforts to the desired end. Then the music quietens; it can hardly be heard. Breathing seems labored, not because of exertion but because of the serenity of the scene. Silence is the only narration allowed in this section of the gallery.

Years later, in Oklahoma City, this young son, now a man, would meet an artist and see one of his paintings of a man plowing around the contours of a hill with a black horse and the reins over his shoulder. The man's face is not seen but his features are hauntingly

familiar; it is as if the artist was there on that hill in Pineville, Louisiana in 1946, or perhaps the mind of the child, now a man, has become the artist and imposes upon the work of another the structure and image of his mind. Larry Dyke happily inscribes a copy of his painting “To Bill Holly” and signs it. Today that picture hangs in the father’s home, a tangible record of this event and a poignant reminder of his life and lore.

The “promenade” of Mussorgsky’s composition jolts our memory and causes us to “walk” in our mind to the next picture. A father now in his thirties walks out on to a track field during practice in the spring of 1960. He watches as his son, not a gifted athlete, but a participant none the less, goes through the training, which while it will not result in honors and victories, will provide a basis for a life-time of healthy living. As the father and son ride home together, few words are shared, but there is silent satisfaction on the part of both, the father in the son and the son in a father who cared enough to watch even when his son was not a champion.

Inexorably, the “promenade” announces that it is time to move along. Wistfully, the child looks back upon the picture as he walks into the next room where more pictures hang. Quickly, the music announces another memory which is treasured and pleased in. Here hangs a picture of a father hooking a trailer to his truck. It is Sunday morning, only a few hours after he was awakened by his son who announced, “I won the calf scramble and tomorrow we have to pick up the Angus calf in Alexandria.” At the age when the father was given a calf by his father, the son won one. The patterns of their lives would frequently intersect and in the most unusual ways.

The laughter of that trip was contagious. With the son having won the calf scramble, the laughter was over the preliminary contest earlier in the week. On Tuesday night, the son had outrun all of the other competitors and had arrived at the “herd” of Brahma calves before anyone. With the calves bunched up, he easily caught one, but alas caught two and couldn’t immediately figure out how to let one of them go. Succeeding, he realized that he had never put a halter on a cow. It was not immediately obvious how to do that and by that time the contest was over and the three winners were announce, the son was still struggling to get the halter on the calf. The announcer and the rodeo crowd observed this and loved the sight, as the father would love the story. An honorable mention was awarded for effort and persistence but it qualified the son for the finals.

In the finals, on Saturday night, the son out ran everyone again; caught a calf and got the halter on. Now, how to get the beast which was twice as big as the son across the finish line? Fortuitously, the calf decided he wanted to go to the other end of the arena and the son followed, holding the halter rope for dear life. By all appearances, it seemed that the son had directed his calf across the finish line when in actuality he had only followed the calf where the calf intended to go. When the son heard the announcer declare, “And here is the winner,” he looked around only to discover, he was the winner. Again, the son hears the “promenade” but this is too much fun; he sits for a moment more remembering the father and the son going to get the registered Angus heifer calf which the Brahma calf had won for the son.

And here is another one of those smaller pictures. It is of the father expressing great frustration with the son who did not know the difference between a heifer and a Hereford. What neither the father nor the son knew was that the son had a language learning problem. It would disappear in future years but as a child, the son could not hear the distinction between the words. Finally, before the father lost hope, the son learned. This black and white etching, while fashioned out of some small discomfort, now is a delight to review.

Next is a pair of paintings, both involving travel. As a freshman in college, the son, who could not wait to get away from home, discovered how terribly badly he wanted to return home. The father, not to be dissuaded from his son's success, drove all night to College Station, Texas and with a brief visit encouraged the son to continue in school. The father who had attended college for one day and had left to go home – he was homesick – was imitated by the son, but from his own experience the father knew that the only thing the son needed in order to stay in school was to see Mom and Dad, even if for only a short time. There was a second all-night car trip by the mother and father. The son, now married and own his on, is in graduate school in Waco, Texas. A driver ran a red light and destroyed the son's car. Unconscious, the son was taken to the hospital. A head laceration was sutured and the son was discharged to home. With a severe headache and a loving wife, the son was anxious. When Mom and Dad arrived in the wee hours the next morning, both son and wife knew that all would be well. Lingering at these pictures, with the soft "promenade" coaxing him along, the son realized how failure was not possible with this kind of support.

Skipping several galleries, the son walks into the last display. Here hangs a frame without a picture. As Mussorgsky's "promenade" urges him on, the son wonders for a moment but then realizes that this empty frame begins a new gallery. This gallery will be filled by the son's son and daughter, and by the son's granddaughters and grandsons. As the days of the September of the son's life rush along, he remembers that it is a "long, long way from May to December, but in September the days grow short."

As the days grow short in both length and duration, it is time to remember and to prepare. To remember the father and the mother who made the future possible and then to prepare so that the galleries of the children and grandchildren may be filled as wonderfully as those of the son. This Father's Day begins a new era for the son. As his father prepared the way for him, he now prepares the way for his son and daughter. This is the way of life and this is the way of health, even as the son remembers the father.