

Hiding

in the Pub

to

Cutting

the

Cord?

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**Hiding in the Pub to Cutting the Cord?
Becoming a Father in the Past and Present**

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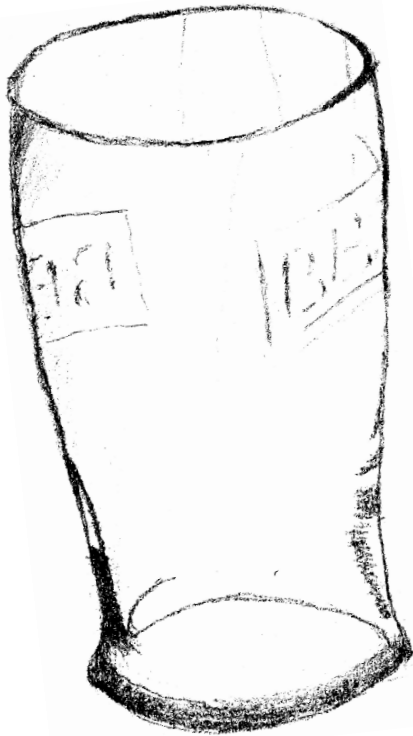
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**Becoming a Father in the Past
and Present**



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Introduction

We're delighted to present a collection of poems by dads. This is a part of an innovative project to get fathers, most of whom have never written poetry before, to write creatively about parenthood. The aim of this project was to encourage a group of dads, from a range of backgrounds and ages, and with diverse experiences of parenting, to write about their thoughts and feelings about becoming a father. The result is this exciting collection of new poetry.

Some have written to their unborn child, some have offered wise words of advice to new or expectant dads, and others have reflected on their relationships with their own fathers. All this results in a delightful insight into the world of dads in the past and today, from the emotional high of the birth itself, to the everyday reality of nappy-changing and the frustrations of being a parent. Overall, a sense of the unwavering desire of these men to give their children the best start in life comes through.

These poems were 'born' in two workshops lead by Matt Nunn, of Nine Arches Press, and hosted by Dr Laura King, an historian of fatherhood and the family in modern Britain. The first workshop, with fathers alone, was held in the Writers' Room at the University of Warwick and had a 'grown up' feel — and beer. The second, with tea, toast, chocolate and kids under the age of five, was more informal! Warwick Children's Centre 'Dads Aloud' group kindly invited us along to one of their Saturday morning sessions for dads and their young children. Each workshop involved various exercises using poems, images of fathers from

throughout the twentieth century, and the imaginations of our dads. All of our budding poets were asked to hand in their best piece of work from the session — and as you'll see, the poems are wonderfully written.

These events and this publication are part of a broader project entitled 'Hiding in the Pub to Cutting the Cord? Fatherhood and Childbirth in Britain from the 1950s to the Present', conducted by Dr Laura King, at the Centre for the History of Medicine, University of Warwick and supported by the Wellcome Trust. The development of a theatre piece entitled 'Our Fathers', by the Midlands theatre company Babakas, continues the theme of exploring fatherhood and accompanies this book. An exhibition of the poetry will be featured at Warwick Arts Centre and at the Coventry Mysteries Festival in June 2012. This publication is part of our commitment to creating engaging relationships between scholars, students, the local community and the public at large, and aims to shed new light on the meaning of becoming a father in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Britain.

Dr Laura King

**Centre for the History of Medicine,
University of Warwick.
April 2012**

Project website: www.go.warwick.ac.uk/chmfatherhood

Welcome to Fatherhood

Before I was a dad people warned that it would change me
They said that I would be a different person with a baby
But I just shrugged them off, carried on drinking my beer
'Fatherhood won't change me,' I thought, with a little sneer.

But everyone was right; when I became a dad
I started thinking differently, thought I was going mad
I began to get emotional, telling myself this wasn't true
As I changed a dirty nappy, fingers knuckle-deep in poo.

I used to go out clubbing, spend my evenings in the pub
But now the only place I go is the local fathers' club.
I used to chat about football, and knock back vodka triples
Now all I seem to talk about are babies and cracked nipples.

There was a time I'd go to showrooms, and stare at supercars
Now I spend my time in Mothercare, looking at nursing bras.
And now I get excited when I see a shiny tractor
And everybody laughs when I start crying at X Factor.

But mostly what has happened is I've become over-protective
I guess that being a dad has given my life a new perspective
And whilst my former life of freedom seems to be gone for good
A new one's just beginning: welcome to fatherhood.

Ben Wakeling, father of two

Successful Parenting - Chapter One

The rule book.
Prototype.
Template for those yet to come.
Trial, maybe,
mostly error.
My first-born son.

Hoping to get it right
by the third or fourth
but for now,
you need my guidance,
and I need you as my guidebook.

We'll help one another,
learning — getting it wrong,
trying all the same.
Writing the instructions for parenthood.

Antony N Britt, father of four

Message to my unborn son

I won't weigh you down
with expectations, son,

so if you turn out to be
not interested in cricket

(unlikely I know
but possible, I suppose)

so be it,
no problem,

we'll find you
another sport to take up.

Glyn Essex, father of three

Unborn Child

Will you have cherry lips
 as the cliché says
Will your hair be
 as jet black as mine

Will you giggle
 will you smile
Will all the boys, run a mile
 — to find you!

Will you dance
Will you be musical
Or will you read books
and be so knowledgeable!

Whatever you will be,
You will be you.

Martin Shone, father of three

Becoming

In between the growing days and midwives' shift change,
petrified of who and what I have just become
and unable to quite get
that I am some kid's old man,
I still give it a go and proudly, precariously, aloft you,
shining your vibrant big promise to vividly contrast
the damp window framing
our beloved bleak inheritance
of dawn awakening heavily smudged by eternal sleep,
like it does, I have to tell you, every bleeding day,
over the municipality of awkward shadows.

Even though, of course, you cannot even gurgle yet
I know in the natural touch you use to speak to me only
that you are already calling me dad.

Whilst I, feeling your pull gradually, happily,
am learning to call you son.

Matt Nunn, father of two

The Beginning

She looked at me,
I looked at her.
I held her carefully...
...without moving a muscle.

Feelings rushing through my head...
...pride, excitement, fear, exhaustion.
Almost everyone in the room in tears,
Mum, Dad, but not our brand new Evie
She was just staring at me,
All puffy and swollen, beautiful and perfect.

Matt Clarke, father of one

Labour Day

Five weeks to go and a very tired mother-to-be
so an early night was had by all.

1.45am a nudge in the ribs and a scream of pain – Hun, it's time!
Waters broke, got the bag, the baby coming.

So the father-to-be rushing round flapping like a chicken
Trying to get all ready
and his Mrs to the hospital.
And to stay calm.

17 hours later in the labour ward.
A Dad very bored.
Scream of pain and shout of 'push'
then out pops a head and two blue eyes
then a cry, well done!
It's a beautiful baby girl.
Then midwife asks Dad to cut the cord
First he says no, too scared,
Then O.K. Snip. (Wow)

Jamie McKeown, father of three

Life Changes

I never knew there was a four in the morning
getting up before the day is dawning.
You've opened my eyes to a whole new life,
Full of joy and laughter for me and my wife (Mummy!)

Although life is tiring, it's never boring,
From when I wake up, until I'm snoring.
The smiles on your faces cheer me up when I'm sad,
Even if the house looks a state, I'm a very proud Dad

Your Mum was very brave, bringing you into my life
She is a fantastic Mum and a wonderful wife,
Now a family of four, previously just two,
Life is amazing, even though I have lots to do.

Changing nappies is always such fun,
keeping you still until it's been done!
Dinner time is unique, with food everywhere,
Especially in your long, curly blonde hair.

Playing with lego, isn't a chore
Secretly I'd like to play with it some more.
Your designs for a house, are unique indeed
Knocking it down however, is your greatest need.

Bath-time is fun, but often out of control,
Water everywhere, but down the plughole.
Getting you out, is a whole different story,
Reading with you though, is like Jackanory.

I am continually amazed by the things that you say,
'What is gravity?' and 'How do you make hay?'
Thank goodness for Google, Yahoo and Bing,
But please don't ask me if I can sing.

It's interesting to see what a grown man will do,
When Daddy's little angels ask him to.
Pretending to be a crocodile, dinosaur or horse,
Would I do it in public, yes of course!

Life moves pretty fast, a famous person once said,
Enjoy every minute, before collapsing in bed.
Yes children are tiring, messy and they dance,
Would I have it any other way, there's no chance!

For all you future Dads out there,
Enjoy your children, don't despair.
It's true what they say, children grow up fast,
So enjoy them growing up, before it's in the past.

Rob Smith, father of two

Daddy Haiku

We're having a child!
What are we meant to expect?
Peace or simply wild?

Will this one survive?
Will we hold them in our arms?
Can we help them thrive?

What will we teach them?
Get wisdom and serve the Lord.
Help us God, amen.

Nathan Warren, father of (unborn) one

Athena Poster (1987)

If I had known you then,
Like the man on the Athena poster,
My eyes, enticed by your vulnerable gaze,
those barely moving inquisitive eyes,
would have flitted imperceptibly,
a synergistic moment of harmony,
attachment felt through sense of smell and touch.
Yet this, a free and simple pleasure,
was never to be ours.
Instead, me speculating on the touch of your
baby hands on mine,
And you, reaching out with tiny hands
To an empty, gaping space.
I learnt of your touch from shreds of paper
medical reports and fragments from your past life,
Tossed about in a battered cardboard box.
This touch was constructed on paper,
Its potential gentleness filtered through harsh wood pulp.
That non-existent moment in our lives.
But still I have you now, a handsome boy of ten.

Gerard Sharpling, father of two

It's Great To Be A Dad

It's great to be a dad
Even when they drive you mad
You survive the dirty nappy
When a hug can make you happy
You don't mind the early morning
When time with them is so rewarding

It's the everyday things that bring me joy
Playing with a favourite toy
Or making up a silly song
In the car as we drive along
Seeing their smile when I return
Helping them to grow and learn

Seeing their characters shine through
Finding out what they want to do
To be an Inventor or a Knight
One thinks a Frog would be alright
Having comforting hugs and cuddles
Splashing around in muddy puddles

A simple word can make my day
I love to hear what they have to say
To play with them and see them smile
To read with them and talk awhile
To hear about their art creations
And stories from their imaginations

There's nothing I would put above
Feeling such unquestioned love
They make you realise without a doubt
Your family is what it's all about
Having them makes me so glad
It's great to be a dad

Ben Reece, father of two

Taran MacMillan

He has always been here with me, always standing with me
you can see that from that time with our kilts on, Taran in his
Black Watch me in the Hunting.

I can't wait to tell him the time I first met his Mam,

'A very pretty Red Dragon who met the White Unicorn'.

I stopped by at Paddy's because I was tired of walking all
the time, two mythical creatures brought together under a
shamrock by pure providence, or was it
serendipity?

From Celtic blood he came to climb over toys and furniture,
'Taran' I say 'get down, get down off that chair, I say it's too
high, he smiles and climbs higher, I rush over and get him he
laughs and giggles, my heart in my mouth.

His hair is the same as my hair when I was that age, we
compared it. His Caledonian Granny, bringing my first hair
cut out, putting my first hair cut against his wee head, a
perfect match.

He has a granny Scotland, a Nanna Wales, a Bampy France,
a great Granny England and a Granddad Thailand, he could
be a true Brit if he desired.

He could be Welsh, English or Scottish and not forgetting his
Great Granddad from County Sligo, but I just prefer him to
be Taran my Son. I take him out in his pram and get angry at
the cars parked on the pavement. We plan to have them
removed Taran and I, who do these idiots think they are?

I may tell him about P COY and when my lungs were not big enough to suck in the air, about the zig-zag navigation exercise over some mountains in 30 degree heat, under the azure sky adding salt to our water, about the 'maroon fighting machine', and the 'twinkle in the eye'. Or I will take him to high places with Bergans and lunch with lemonade.

But he was always there with me, in the starlifter, in the black hawk not forgetting fat albert, even in the back of that van in bandit country trying to stay awake near cross, hey it's time for his bath now, I have to go, he needs a story or two and a cuddle before bed time, he needs a wee brother or sister, Mam?

Robert MacMillan, father of one

A lean stem

Surrounded by burning mountains
Sheltered into warm river heated by massive bombards
Narrowly escaped from disaster

Without liquor grandpa
hardly grasped his masculinity.
In his brutal masculinity his son had been captured
until he died.

Not to be a man in drinking,
He poured liquor into his body,
But tried not to
Pour into his mentality.

Longed for a sane home
Made every effort to be diligent
To inherit a sane home,
Accompanied his son to show every corner of human life.

Having grown up in a family of four children,
His son missed being a family of more.
Now with four children,
A dad is drifting the universe,
Relying on a tiny ship.

A lean stem of an old trunk of a big tree
Seems to tell the story of his family.

Byeongho Kim, father of four

How to be a father to my daughter

All I have from my father's father:
a birth certificate and passport.
The hands of my father, covered in silver, turned to black,
after a plant shutdown.
How to be a father to my daughter?
Shopping in Leicester for a push-chair and basket.
Shopping for things, not preparing.
We have plenty of time, we thought.
How to be a father to my daughter,
when I have no sisters.
Wanting her to be caring, confident, playful, happy.
To look like me and not me.
To start teaching her things. The next step.
How to be a father to my daughter?
Her living on after I die,
And wanting her to trust me more than anyone else.

Scott Redding, father of one

The seasons of a father

Drought

Some people say that we just value what we lose,
But how can we lose if you never had it?

The lack of a father can have many consequences they say,
But how can we know if you never had it?

If your lack of confidence and sense of security has been
shaped by it,
Or if you would be successful and driven if you had it

Harvest

Would you appreciate the harvest if you haven't
gone through the drought?
Would you be able to cultivate if you haven't shown
how to plough?

The sun shines when the clouds are gone
So you can see clear when the past is done

Moving forward in what you believe
Being the best father you can ever be

Marcos Campos, father of three

On being a dad

For the answers on how to be a Dad
Think back to when you were a lad
You needed love and security
And to feel you were part of a family.

You wanted the freedom to crawl and explore
To look beyond the open door
You wanted to know where you shouldn't go
And you didn't (but you did) want to hear that 'No!'

You wanted to be chased and turned upside down
To be sat on big shoulders and spun around
To be helped to the top of a climbing frame
To get stuck and be taken down again.

You wanted to be driven in a car
To this and that near and far
Sometimes if you were lucky in the front seat
Sometimes at night just to get you to sleep!

So, if ever unsure on what to do
If you're tired and maybe anxious too
Just think as a child and remember when
Your worries now weren't your worries then.

If you try to be the perfect Dad
You'll fail and drive your children mad
Just do your best — go figure it out.
Here are some tips for what it's about...

It's putting them right when they've done wrong
But standing up for them if they've been wronged
It's knowing the time to chastise and be tough
But also to play and comfort and hug.

All equally born of loving care
Trying to do right, trying to be fair,
It's showing the principles for which you will fight
Yet acknowledging the fact you are not always right.

It's checking (or doing!) their projects and homework
And checking (re-doing!) their 'help' with the housework
In short it's a duty in both good times and bad
To be there for them (to hear them say 'Dad').

Don't simply perform those duties paternal
Be brave and open to manners maternal
Muddle through one way or another
But accept there are some things best done by their mother!

You too have needs so take care of yourself
Find time to relax and look after your health.
Don't lose touch with those modern trends
And keep in touch with your closest friends.

At the end of the day still be your own man
Whatever you do you can only do what you can
Your children aren't you and you aren't they
And one day, with your blessing, they must find their own way.

Oliver Jacques, father of two

The Heart of a Father

Where is the heart of a father?
Deeper than the ocean bed.
On the front line of the battlefield
Taking on a wall of fear.

What is the sound of the heart of a father?
Restless, like a hungry drumbeat,
An unquenchable fire,
searching for the key to a locked treasure chest
Buried in the murky sea.

Who knows the heart of a father?
Only those prepared to journey
To stretch beyond the vistas of the unknown
and find the gold of immortal conquests.

What choice has the heart of the father?
To breathe life or to suffocate,
To find peace or chaos in the storm of life,
To lead or shrink back, to create or destroy.

A father's heart may sometimes tire,
Skip a beat or step out of time,
But this Father's heart will not loosen grip on hope
So strong is the call of destiny.

Steve McGarvey, father of three

To my son —

**10 essential parenting tips —
(oh, as long as your child is a boy, and oh, again,
and by the way, I am hearing your grandfather)**

Number 1.

When you get married,
make sure it is someone like your mother.

Number 2.

Things will be better for you
than they were for me.

Number 3.

Make sure his bloody guitar is turned off
if you are on night shifts.
[But don't make him get rid of it —
that was a step too far and I regret that]

Number 4.

Education is important.
Don't be afraid to take yourself off to the heads of
academic establishments
he is attending without his knowledge.

Number 5.

Make time for garden cricket
every summer evening.

Number 6.

Hanging a duffle coat that reeks of petroleum under the stairs can be of great comfort to a child.

Number 7.

Respond positively to hand-written notes pushed under the sitting room door requesting to watch slightly late but definitely improving BBC2 programmes.

Number 8.

Hide your cigarettes in a less obvious place than the bloody pocket of the jacket you wore to work that day.

Number 9.

You can never love them enough!

Number 10.

You can never love them enough!!

Number 11.

[I know that this is, technically, Point 11 of a 10 point plan, but I feel it is worth emphasising]

Remember what happened to me.
You can never love them enough!!!

Wallace McDowell, father of one



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