

Reaffirmed as a Father  
By  
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She was three years old the first time I met her face to face. Normally she was outgoing and talkative but now she was apprehensive and quiet. She didn't know what to make of me. Standing behind a chair she peeked glances at me with her inquisitive long-lashed brown eyes. She wanted to make friends but she was unsure. Her name was Lacy Jo.

I had no way of knowing what she had heard about me. Some years before her mother had divorced me to marry another man and she was a product of that marriage. Now looking at her peeking around the chair I could feel the love starting to build between us.

'Hi, Lacy,' I said softly.

Walking slowly across the room and standing expectantly beside my chair she said with a smile, "Hi."

I reached out with the intention of lifting her into my lap but she stepped back. The look in her eyes let me know she wasn't ready for that yet

This is a story about how God reaffirmed me as a father.

I had always thought of myself as a good dad until I was divorced. By letting this happen I felt I had let my children down. I had failed them by not keeping our family together.

After 18 years of marriage and four children, the divorce was anything but amicable. The strategy of my wife and her attorney was to prove, among other things, that I was an unfit father. A part of that strategy required a court order restraining me from seeing my two younger children who were living with her. These were the same children I had seen and loved every day since their birth.

The restraining order was later removed for lack of proof, but the stigma remained and seeds of doubt had been planted. Maybe he is an unfit father. But the ones that counted knew the truth.

Soon after the divorce my ex-wife remarried and eventually my children's half sister, Lacy Jo was born. She was an instant hit with them. They would tell me every thing about her-how pretty she was, when she said her first word, when she took her first step. They loved her beyond measure.

Two years after the divorce I met Eileen. She is a very special person and after a very brief courtship we were married. She was and remains a gift from God. Having no children of her own she readily became a loving, caring mother. My two younger children, Angie and Tom, chose to live with us after reaching the age of accountability.

They along with my two older children, Genia and Tony and my wife Eileen became a reunited family.

Happiness had returned to my life. It had been gone for so long I had forgotten the feeling. It flowed over me like warm oil, seeping into every nook and cranny, giving me an expression of love I had not possessed before. God was alive within me.

But all was not well. My ex-wife's husband suddenly became ill and within a few days he died. It was a very sad time for Lacy and her mother.

It was during this time of sadness that the process of forgiveness started towards the man that had brought so much pain and distress into my life. I prayed fervently that his life would be spared but more importantly that he would not enter eternity without knowing Jesus the redeemer. I was assured by my children that he had made this confession of faith before he died.

I now saw him in a different light. He was the father of a sweet innocent child who has fond memories of him as limited as they are. My remarks are chosen with these memories in mind. Where before there had been bitterness and distrust, now there was only love and tenderness directed towards this precious little girl.

As time passed, Lacy started visiting her brothers and sisters in our home. Her mother has been very gracious in allowing her to spend time with us. Lacy has joined us in celebrating birthdays, holidays, vacations, and as a family we attended church.

It was while spending time with us during the summer that I heard her say the word for the first time. While asking me a question she prefaced it with the word "dad." It was as natural as saying my first name. Hearing the others call me dad she only assumed I was her dad too. I love her just as much as the other children and they would be disappointed if I did not. It makes my heart smile each time I hear her say "dad."

Her mother did not want her to call me dad. She thought it was disrespectful to her real father. While talking to Lacy on the phone she almost always called me by my first name. A few times however she slipped and called me dad which brought a lecture from her mother. On the other hand her mother sometimes slips and refers to me as Lacy's dad. This is done unknowingly and unintentionally. Even though her mother has these feelings she has allowed Lacy's relationship with me to flourish beyond my wildest imagination.

Lacy has become intertwined with my wife just as a natural mother and daughter would be. Together she, her sisters and Eileen have planned many activities. One such plan was a summer vacation. This was just about the time Lacy was losing her first tooth. The week was very traumatic for her but quite entertaining for the rest of the family.

We were at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and all week her tooth was barely making contact with her gum but somehow it remained in her mouth. One morning while

preparing to go to the beach she placed her purse strap in her mouth to brush her hair. During one of the brush strokes her hand and brush became entangled in her purse strap and the purse, the brush and the tooth went flying across the room. Before the tooth hit the floor she was shrieking, holding her mouth and pointing, saying, "My tooth! My tooth!"

The tooth was nowhere to be found. I made the casual observation that "without the tooth the tooth fairy won't come." The shrieking became louder.

We were all on our hands and knees scouring the floor for her tooth when her sister Angie exclaimed, "I found it!" The shrieking stopped as she reached for the small tooth. She held the little thing between her thumb and forefinger lifting it up for all to see. It was hard to believe that this small object had held our attention for most of the week. That night the tooth fairy came and the little mouth minus the tooth was very calm with no hint of the trauma it had endured during the day. She was at rest.

Back home one evening she climbed into my lap and looking into my face said, "You know you're not really my dad."

"Sweetheart, I know that I'm not your dad," I said consolingly.

She quickly added, "But I'll call you dad. Ok?"

"Yes, you can call me dad," I said patting her arm.

Leaning back in the chair with my eyes glistening with tears, I remembered how far we have all come. Our lives have changed, some for the better and some yet to be healed. But my memories are good and I have been reaffirmed as a father. I am at rest.

### Epilogue

In May of 2004 Lacy graduated from Capital University with a degree in Elementary Education. Later that same year I was honored to walk her down the aisle as she became the bride of Kevin Slatzer.

That night long ago when I heard the snapping of breaking bones (read Lessons Learned from Faith) little did I know that that was the sound of God opening the windows of heaven to pour me out a blessing that I haven't been able to contain. I have a rich life, rich in knowing that Jesus saved me and knowing He is rebuking the devourer for me every day of my life.

The End