

Ted Kennedy the Family Patriarch

By Bala Prasad

The passing of Senator Edward Kennedy last month provided a poignant glimpse of the strength of family bonds. Senator Kennedy's death marked the passing of the last of the Kennedy brothers, the sons of Joseph and Rose Kennedy. Three brothers died violently – Joseph Jr. in a plane crash in World War II in France, and John and Robert in assassinations in 1963 and 1968. When the eldest Kennedy brother died in World War II, the family mantle passed to John, then to Robert, and finally, to Edward. Each brother picked up the pieces of his fallen older brother – stepping in his shoes both in matters of politics and family. Senator Kennedy is famous for assuming a father's role in the lives of his nieces and nephews (Robert's 11 children and John's two children). Significantly, Senator Kennedy's family members occupied the front of the pews at his funeral procession, sitting in front of even the president of the United States.

These are the bonds that we live and die for. Our spouses, siblings, children, grandchildren – this is who makes us what we are, and who defines us in our lives and in our death. Even marriages that fall apart still reserve a special place in the history of our lives – nothing is a better example of this than the passing of Princess Diana. Estranged for many years and ultimately divorced, Diana's former husband Prince Charles wasted no time in retrieving the body of his deceased former wife, and bringing her home for a proper funeral. That is because the bonds of marriage, though sometimes broken, never disappear.

The above illustrations also exemplify the strength of a child's relationship with their parent. The Kennedy children lost their dad when they were tiny tots, yet as an America watched them grow up in the spotlight, there was rarely a time they did not invoke the memory of their father. And when they became adult children and the world witnessed the passing of their mother, it was the children – John and Caroline – who announced that passing to the world. It was the children who were by her side, until the day she died. Princess Diana's children, both in their pre-teens when their mommy passed, very publicly carry her torch and invoke her memory at almost every public event they attend. That is because our parents, here for a short time or a long time, good or bad, rich or poor, will always be the people we loved first, and longest.

Finally, they say that the strongest bond, and the only love that truly never dies, is a parent's love for their child. We spend nine months anticipating their birth, and the day they arrive replaces all other days as the best in our lives. Then we wait anxiously for each milestone – the first smile, the first crawl, the first steps. And as they get older, we continue to celebrate their firsts – first tooth, first day of school, first time they do this, first time they do that.

We invest in our kids every thing we have – our time, our resources, ourselves, and watch eagerly as they grow into their own person. We watch them graduate kindergarten, high school, college, and can't wait for them to enter the adult world. And then, when they do enter the adult world, we rejoice in their success. But we also grieve for their heartaches, and long for the days when their lives were about painting and playgrounds. That is because we are a part of our kids – on their good days and their bad days – they carry a small piece of us with them, wherever they go.

And so, good reader, I close with the great words of E.E.Cummings, who could only have been speaking about family when he wrote: "I carry your heart with me (I carry it in my heart). . . Here is the deepest secret nobody knows (here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud and the sky of the sky of a tree called life) . . . I carry your heart (I carry it in my heart)."

Sincerely,

Bala Prasad

Sent your comments to:

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