

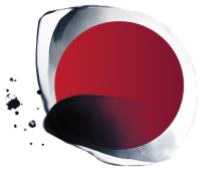
Toast



He is not an empty feeling.

"This morning, I am sitting with my son at the breakfast table. He is kneeling on the chair, leaning over the table, stretching to place a slice of bread in the toaster. He asks if he can "cook" one for me. Two slices slide into the slots, and he struggles to push the lever into position, for he is now 3 years and 5 months and informs me that this is his first time making toast. As we sit together eating our toast, mine with butter and his sawed into small pieces with enormous effort and a butter knife, I remember:

I am a small boy returning from the dock of a rented cottage on Devil's Lake in Michigan. I have just caught a small sun fish, perhaps my first. I return to the kitchen to have a second breakfast with my father, and I can tell from the rumblings outside of my child world that this is unusual, a special event. Was



it that I caught a fish? I don't think so, for I was alone on the early morning dock, the smell of raw bacon which I used for bait on my hands. No, the memory sticks in my mind because this was unusual, for me to have breakfast with my father. Maybe it was just he and I at the table, with mother in the background. Others in my family have recalled this experience from time to time, my mother, or my father. As I sit with my son, I wonder which of the experiences we share will visit his future life. There are so many in contrast with the few I shared with my father. Which experience today, that he and I inhabit, will live in his memory tomorrow? I wonder."

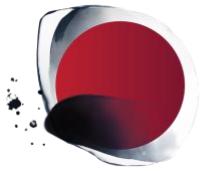
— Fathering Journal, 1/1/94

Commentary

The father's simple presence is internalized by the child. The tone and tempo of his voice, his movements, his smell, the feel of his cheeks, and the depth of his awareness are important strands which weave into the fabric of the family vessel and the child's psyche. Though his breasts are not the direct source of nourishment, his more heavily muscled body provides a nonmother contact which helps the child to locate himself in space and time. The child is nourished by this presence.

Fathers who are not available are defined by their absence. They lost a voice in what it means to be present. The present father has a voice which is heard by his child and can participate in how he is embodied. The present father provides a physical interaction which is felt by his child, and he participates in the form of his embodiment. The present father is embodied in images which relate to real relational events, and meaning is symbolized through a co-influenced relational process. He is not a disembodied concept, image, or memory. ***He is not an empty feeling.*** Rather, a present father is experienced and embodied through a process of ongoing relatedness, changing day-to-day even hour-to-hour in the child's experience. He is not represented to the child by the mother or another sibling. He is a source of first-hand events, where primary meaning of the child's experience of his father comes out of the shared interactions. He is good to eat and is readily digestible.

Image (search "Toast") courtesy of: [Chris Kursikowski @c3k](#)



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