

Foreword

Becoming the Kind Father is a memoir of a tragic father-son relationship and its ultimate reconciliation. It is also a work of literary imagination, marked by reinvented vignettes from *Moby Dick*, *The Wizard of Oz*, Shakespeare, Greek myth and Hollywood movies. Realistically its value is as a practical book that provides men with useful self-help tips to kindness, reconciliation and forgiveness.

The book does this through a recasting of the male *Hero's Journey*. Since ancient times this legend has shaped men's lives and dominated their culture, but *Becoming the Kind Father* takes the Hero down a wholly different path. The quest that Sandborn invites men to join is not a journey to conquer distant lands, save damsels, or fight dragons, but a quest to reclaim the male heart and come into relationship with their loved ones and the world. As men struggle in a post-feminist culture for updated myths, many will welcome this helpful guidebook to a new quest.

Kind Father is an inspiring autobiographical guide to the development of heart in men, and a worthy companion for men who choose to pursue this journey. An appealing feature of the book is that Sandborn is a lawyer, not a psychologist, and thus he is not just describing abstract recommended practices. He writes from personal experience, describing what it feels like *inside* to apply the useful psychological approaches. The other advantage of the book is that Sandborn is a gifted writer who holds the reader's attention.

Becoming the Kind Father first deconstructs the harsh training fathers inflict on sons, and documents the sad price men pay as a result. The book cites evidence of the damage done to men as they play out the male role of hiding their feelings and their grief. The toll of male suicide, alcoholism, disease, shorter lives and emotional alienation make a good case for wanting to change; and it is my hope this book will induce men to consider altering their lives and the lives of their sons.

The book is first and foremost personal, and is structured around recollected scenes from Sandborn's own painful relationship with his father. When the author's 25 year marriage collapses, he finds himself confronting his own anger, and discovers the extent to which he has adopted his father's anger as his own. As Sandborn explores his own self-talk, he is surprised to discover he has incorporated his father's hated voice, and the hardened voice of Everyman, into his inner dialogue. As with many men, Sandborn projects this harsh inner dialogue into anger at his family and friends. The project the author sets out is to change that destructive conversation with himself.

The turning point for Sandborn comes when the author confronts the ghost of his dead father, and asks the Old Man to leave, thus ridding himself of the critical "tapes" that he hears of his father's voice. Then, with a spark of creativity pioneered by Berkowitz and Newman, the author sets out to be a Kind Father to himself. Quite simply, he decides to start speaking to himself in the encouraging, nurturing way that a healthy parent speaks to a child.

The author carefully chooses the best qualities from all the men he has known and synthesizes them into an ideal internal mentor, a "Kind Father." This parent is one that only a fortunate few know in real life. In subsequent chapters the author recounts how he learns to parent himself and leads the reader through his experience of personal growth. Each chapter is

an essay on a theme, a meditation on a step in the journey to a man's heart. The steps include the ways a man learns to identify his feelings, ways to share his feelings with friends and loved ones, techniques to free himself from excessive anger, and finally tools for learning and practicing forgiveness.

With forgiveness as his guide the author achieves something genuinely useful, a friendly relationship with himself, characterized as a transformation from alienated anger to self-acceptance. Again with forgiveness as his guide a final reconciliation with his long-dead father ensues, and the book makes clear the author has grown stronger, and finally is able to see that his life is beautiful and full of joy.

Sandborn learns that difficulties need not lead him only to anger, isolation, and contempt, but can be lessons in opening the heart and connecting with others.

Like most men, I was ashamed of speaking my pain. But I've discovered life's sweet, redeeming secret — a secret that many women know, but that patriarchal society hides from men. The secret is this:

Sharing my sorrow with others creates an unsuspected bridge from my heart to theirs. Simply by listening to each other, we can transform sorrow into something joyful — empathic connection. This connection is one of the greatest gifts that life offers.

Becoming the Kind Father heralds a new masculinity, one that is not defined by the sword, but by gentleness and kindness. It is a masculinity that recognizes that patriarchy often destroys men emotionally and physically. *Becoming the Kind Father* recognizes that male power does not only come from the repressive anger and control that men have so often exercised. Male power can also emerge when a man knows himself, has learned how to take care of himself and opens his heart to goodness and forgiveness. This power comes when a

man learns to be open to himself and his feelings, rather than neglecting his feelings while trying to control others.

Kind Father delivers a hopeful message of healing, both for individual men and our angry culture. It has been said that in our culture “real men” cry bullets instead of tears, but this book suggests a more hopeful vision. It suggests that real men cry tears when they are sad, they sing when they are happy, and ultimately and most importantly real men are kind.

Like many women who read the *Feminine Mystique* forty years ago, some of the men who read this book are going to recognize themselves and will want to change themselves and their relationships. *Becoming the Kind Father: A Son's Journey* is an alternative to outdated models of masculinity that our stressed and angry culture sorely needs.

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