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MINNPOST

Recalling my father this Father's Day – as author and son

By [Nick Hayes](#) | 06/19/10

Father's Days went unmentioned in my 1950s Minneapolis childhood. My three brothers and I were the only kids in our neighborhood who didn't watch Robert Young's "Father Knows Best" on TV. I was only 8 in 1956 when a heart attack had killed my father and left a wound in my heart that I would carry for more than half century. A few years ago I decided to write a book about it. The memoir — **"And One Fine Morning: Memories of My Father"** — was published this spring.

Originally, I had only modest expectations for my book and who might read its story of my father, an award winning architect in his day. A handful of local architectural history buffs would probably recognize his name or trust my friend Larry Millett's blurb on the back cover enough to buy the book. A few more readers would relate to the memoir's depiction of my family's life among the "Minnesota Irish," my father's childhood on Minneapolis' North Side, and the reminiscences of a Minneapolis life in the glory days of the Nicollet Hotel Ballroom, Harry's Bar and Charlie's Café Exceptionale.

An excerpt from "And One Fine Morning: Memories of My Father"

By Nick Hayes, reprinted by permission of the Nodin Press.



It turned out I was right about that segment of my reading audience. Shortly after the book's publication, letters, voicemails, emails, tweets and Facebook postings poured in with their stories that paralleled my tales of old Catholics and the way Minneapolis once was.

However, I had not anticipated a far larger audience. I had become one of the 6,474 authors Amazon.com lists as having written books about fathers and sons. Readers, the vast majority of whom were men, disclosed in their comments to me what's behind this literary phenomenon. Memoirs of our fathers are more often

than not remembrances of their absence, not their presence, in our lives. The genre feeds into what therapists call the "father hunger" in our culture. In "Dreams on My Father," Obama called it the hole in his heart.

What is more, I came to realize that my own wound was rather simple, uncomplicated and less painful than that of most. One reader explained it to me this way: "You suffered in your childhood, a clean wound that healed," he wrote. "Most of us carry a dirty or ragged wound from a lifetime of trying and failing to communicate or understand our fathers. The wound becomes worse when as adults we experience the death of our fathers and know that we will never have that conversation with them."

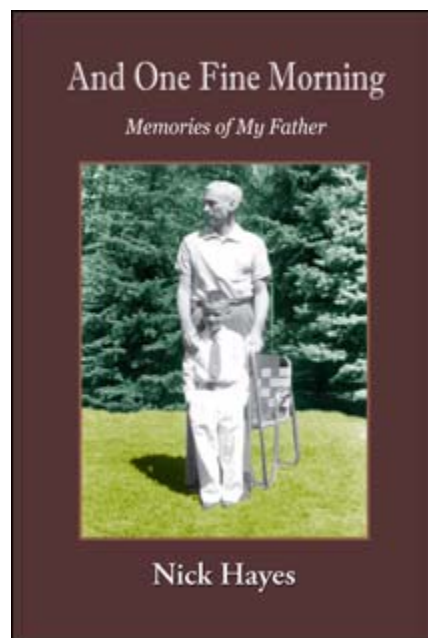
By comparison, my own wound, my father's death in 1956, now seems to me to also have been his gift. My life with my father is forever frozen in my memory, in those first years of a son and father, when he was to me so tall and handsome and our conversations about such weighty matters as the merits of crunchy versus smooth peanut butter were all anyone really needed to talk about.

My father had spared me from the pain of the inevitable conflicts that would have come. First of all, we never entered into that unavoidable tension of adolescent son and middle-aged father that comes to every man. Secondly, I came of age in the 1960s. My father had left behind his youthful enthusiasm for Floyd B. Olson and joined the ranks of the Eisenhower Republicans in the 1950s. He would not have taken kindly to a son whose mane of red hair in 1968 hung over his shoulders and down to his waist.

And perhaps, his kindest gift of all: He died when I was too young to understand the deep tragedy of his sickness and death. He spared me that agony of his death when, as an adult, I would have understood what it all so sadly meant.

Related content

Nick Hayes will be reading from his book "And One Fine Morning: Memories of My Father" on June 20 — Father's Day — from 4 –5 p.m. at Majers & Quinn Booksellers, 3028 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis, 55408. For more information, call 612-822-4611.



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