

A tip or two from Chief Keokuk

The Back Nine  
Or  
Golf and the Circle of Life

My neighbor was admiring the large number of young kids in our neighborhood and mentioned that all the young parents are on the front nine. "Huh?"

"Yea, because of the age of the young kids, these parents are on the front nine."

I was lost.

"John, you and I are on the *back nine*. Our kids are ages ten through eighteen! It's the back nine! Get it? When you and I had young kids, it was the front nine!"

I was a little slow, but I got it and I have been thinking about it ever since. The back nine? I'm on the back nine with my kids? When did this happen? The more I thought about it, the more I felt a nauseous wave of mortality sweep over me. The back nine? My hair was darker on the front nine, my waist was smaller and of course my kids were younger. But the front nine is sort of a blur. I can remember certain campouts, some vacations and certain moments at home, but I can't replay every moment.

Before kids (and ownership of an old home) I golfed as much as possible. After a round of golf, I could replay every shot in my mind. Sometimes, to my wife's dismay, I would re-live every shot for her: a play by play of every swing, every approach and every landing. It was as clear as if I was still golfing.

But fatherhood on the front nine? I look back and my mind is swirling with images of births and baptisms, birthdays and kids, relatives, Christmases, church, first days of school, baseball, soccer swimming, campouts, Scouts, family trips, and you-name-it. It all swirls like a tornado of pleasant memories and mixed feelings of warmth and anxiety. But to remember details, I have to stop and think.

Fathering is a way of life much different than the game of golf. In fact, years ago I quickly learned that golf and children are mutually exclusive. So I gave up the game, to be a father, a homeowner, a doting husband, a ref, a coach, a chief, a grade school volunteer, the Christmas Santa, an announcer at sporting events: a busy community volunteer all the while working full time as a practicing lawyer.

No wonder I don't remember every step of fatherhood on the front nine. Unlike the linear game of golf, fatherhood is a multi-tasking role filled with many interpersonal relationships. Fatherhood is often being in the right state of mind, at the right time and recognizing that moment. And today I ask myself: Did I pay attention on the front nine? Was I available? Did I recognize the moments when fathering was needed and seize those moments dearly? When I look at my four children and the relationship I have with them, I know that I must have managed the front nine pretty well. I have very few regrets in my flurry of memories.

Although my children, three of them teenagers, do not embrace me as they did on the front nine. Us fathers living on the back nine are very much like any United States President. We are simultaneously revered and reviled by our constituency. In the case of fathers on the back nine, our constituency consists of pre-teens and teens. We have encouraged and mentored our children's independence and now that they exercise the self reliance we cultivated, it's quite a shock to no longer be the center of their world. This, however, is as it should be.

So, what happens after the back nine? Well, I suppose there is a second round of another eighteen. The second round likely offers a front nine of college, maybe graduate school, the first steps into a profession, maybe a marriage and maybe even home ownership while getting laborious help from dad. If that's the front nine of the second round, what could possibly be in store for the back nine of the second round?

My guess would be: grandchildren.

Peace,  
John C. Lorenzen, Federation Chief Keokuk