**15548, Rob Kachenmeister**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am thrilled to be here tonight to receive the honor of Father of the Year by the Father's Day Council. I accept it with all humility. Being a father is one of the greatest experiences of my life. To show you more fully how I feel about it, please allow me to share some life experiences with you.

Picture this… a fresh-faced high school boy sitting in a large crowd when in walks the girl of his dreams. He can’t take his eyes off her. The other boys close by elbow each other and make boyish comments about her. She sits miles away but he can picture himself sitting right by her side. This is how I met my beautiful bride almost forty years ago.

Picture this… His father officiates the outdoor ceremony and down the aisle walks the most beautiful southern bride. She is the girl of his dreams. My dear, you are still the girl of my dreams after all these years.

Picture this… Medical school, residency, buying their first home, and starting a practice. Busily working together to succeed. Those were difficult years, but years that I cherish and wouldn’t have missed for anything. Those years developed our hearts and our character for what life would bring over time.

Picture this… The proud moment when their son is born followed by a beautiful baby girl. The perfect family. I’m not sure I can describe how I felt when I first saw my son after his birth. That feeling of joy that we had a beautiful baby boy. That feeling of pride that I had a son who would carry on my name. That feeling of wonder that my lovely wife and I had brought this tiny little person into the world. That feeling of responsibility that this helpless little person, this innocent little boy, was totally dependent upon me. I knew in that moment I would do anything to ensure he had a good life. Later, when our daughter was born I felt an extra protectiveness that this fragile little girl (don’t tell her I said that – she’s actually quite accomplished and independent) inspired in me. Those emotions overwhelmed me. My wife and my children were my inspiration for just about everything I’ve done ever since that time.

Picture this… Church school, afterschool sports, family trips. Family memories made. I have spent a lifetime of building memories with my children as they grew up. I remember teaching them how to throw a football and how to play baseball. That was both my son and daughter. Never let it be said that a girl couldn’t keep up with and possibly even surpass a boy when it came to sports. Despite that, when they grew up my son learned when he could compete with his sister and when he needed to be the protective older brother. And she learned when to compete with her brother and when to accept his help and protection around “the guys.” It was a labor of love when I built a complete train set up in my young son's room, and later to participate in the tea parties with my young daughter and her dolls.

With both of our children so active there were bound to be times when we would be at an event and someone would receive a minor injury of some sort. Knowing I was a doctor they would call upon me. I had to remind them that I am a plastic surgeon, not a general practioner. Our children were a little young for my expertise.

The years my wife and I spent, watching them grow into young adulthood were a quite a journey. Sometimes it was quite a wild ride. They learned new things daily and eventually they began to surpass me in their abilities. They even learned to beat me at golf, which was my passion. But, as challenging as it was to have my children surpass me, it also made me very proud to see them grow, learn and excel.

The years our children were in college were some of the most interesting and the most challenging. I’ll never forget when we went to college orientation with our son. The new freshmen were on a tour of their own while the President of the University arranged to speak to all the parents. He gave us some very practical advice.

During the time your children are in school, especially this first year when you’re getting use to them being out of the house, there will many times when you may feel very sentimental. Times like their birthday, holidays, times when you know they will be under a lot of stress such as exam time. During these times you will be tempted to send them very heartfelt and sentimental cards telling them how much you love them and miss them and want the best for them.

Don’t. I tell you this because I can guarantee you that your children will quickly peruse your sentimental letters, ripping them open in anticipation and shaking out the envelope. Because the only thing your children will really need and will be seeking when the mail comes, Is Money. That’s right, Money. Forget the sentiment and just send your kids money whenever you can. They will love you forever because you remember this very practical advice. *(Give your audience a moment to let this soak in and laugh. Any parent who has had a child in college will love it.)*

Almost forty years since we first met and picture this… two lives as one, our dreams fulfilled, our kids raised, and we are still madly in love. It doesn’t get any better than this. And, now that our kids are raised and on their own, we can have another honeymoon. Only this time we can take our time and have all the fun we wanted to the first time but couldn’t afford to at the time.

Just know that way back then, my love, that fresh-faced boy pictured exactly this. I couldn’t imagine life any other way. I couldn’t imagine our children growing up to be any other way. The great thing about our kids being grown with families of their own is that we can sit back and observe how they handle all the challenges of life, the times of disobedience of their kids and say a quiet, “I told you so”, to ourselves. We now get the complete pleasure of spoiling our grandkids knowing that we can then send them home to their parents and we can go on about our lives.

Seriously, I am truly honored to be named Father of the Year. No matter what I have accomplished in life, in my career, in my friendships, or in any part of my life, cannot compare to the joy of being a father. I am, of course, prejudiced when it comes to my children. I think they are the best in the world. But, I would hope that every father feels that way about his children. Even when we have to discipline them, it’s important to remember that even discipline is a teachable moment. We don’t do it to punish so much as we do it to teach them so they don’t make the same mistake again.

I firmly believe that the proof is in the pudding, so to speak, when it comes to parenting. Although children may rebel, most of them will learn and grow from every life experience. I can remember times when my children’s behavior challenged me as a father. But, looking over a lifetime with them I can see they learned their lessons. That makes me very proud as a father. It encourages me that I must have done more right than wrong. And, I couldn’t have done it without the help and love of my beautiful wife.

One last word fathers. Be sure to let your wife, the mother of your children, know how much you love her and appreciate her.

Again, thank you everyone, for the honor you bestow upon me tonight. Being a father is an honor in itself, but to be honored by all of you is icing on the cake.