

CROW TEACHING

By: Dave Roberts



There is a passage in Jamie Sams and David Carson's book, *Medicine Cards*, regarding crow. It reads, "Honor the past as your teacher, honor the present as your creation, and honor the future as your inspiration." (Sams and Carson, p.135) As a parent who has experienced the death of a child, this passage has been a powerful and transformative one during the last four years of my life.

Reassessing My Life

The death of my 18-year-old daughter Jeannine Marie Roberts on March 1, 2003, was one that turned my world upside down, resulting in a total re-evaluation of my life. A crucial part of this process was examining my relationships, both past and present. It is the relationship with my father, Austin Marion Roberts, that I wish to address here.

My father, by all accounts, was a brilliant man who did not possess a moral compass. He was one of five brothers all conceived by different men. My father grew up in chaos, and lived by a set of rules that reflected his chaotic existence. My mother, Sadie Bridgett Roberts, whom he married in 1954, was the antithesis of my father. She was raised in a loving, stable Maronite Catholic home, where all of her brothers and sisters had the same biological parents. This consistency and stability was lacking in my father's life, and in retrospect, I believe that his soul yearned for that type of atmosphere. However, for reasons unknown to me at the time, my father left my mother to raise me as an only child, when I was 5 years old. This was my first experience with catastrophic loss.

The Aftermath

I never saw my father again. My mother and I did discover that he died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania when I was 11 years old. I couldn't adequately verbalize at 5 years of age how I felt or what I thought about my father's decision to leave. However as I grew older, I became increasingly angry and saddened because of my father's absence. My mother repeatedly emphasized the good things about my father and believed that in his own way, he loved us. Though of some comfort, it didn't compensate for the lack of his presence in my life. Just as a child is not supposed to predecease his/her parents, a child is not supposed to grow up without both of his parents. The upside of my anger was that I vowed never to make the same choices my father made and that when I got married, it would be for keeps. I have been happily married for over 32 years to my wife Cheri and have helped to raise three beautiful children, one who now resides on the other side.

Lessons of Love

The challenges presented by Jeannine's death have yielded many rich teachings that have helped me adjust to my new reality. The most significant teaching I have discovered is that love can exist in its purest form after death. Love can also morph into many other positive experiences, such as joy, compassion, and the rediscovery of faith. Love can also help us to accept the actions of others that at the time seemed incomprehensible to us.

The unconditional love that continues to exist between Jeannine and me has allowed me to view my father's actions from a different perspective. My father could not exist in a traditional marriage, because he was not raised in a traditional household. His continued presence would have been a burden to my mother and me. He needed to let go of me and my mom, the two people whom he loved the most deeply, so that we could thrive. The anger I had towards my father has now turned into unconditional love, and the anticipation of a glorious reunion on the other side.

Letting The Past Influence Your Present

I want to close with four suggestions for allowing the past to be your teacher in the present:

- Commit to looking at your past as an integral part of your growth in the present, not as something to be ignored or suppressed.
- Honor the gifts of your ancestors and express gratitude for them. The ancestral work that I did with my father has facilitated the recognition of wisdoms from other family members who have predeceased me.
- Keep a written or audio journal of the ongoing teachings you have discovered from your past and decide how you can use them to author your present life experience.
- Witness your past without judgment. Be gentle with yourself.