

A Father's Heart

Michael Stepien was senselessly and tragically killed during a robbery in 2006, leaving behind his wife Bernice and his daughter Jeni. The grieving wife and daughter decided to honor his life by donating his organs to others in need.

Michael's heart was carefully shipped hundreds of miles away to a man who had been needing a heart transplant for almost 10 years. Tom Thomas was seriously ill and could barely walk. Michael's heart gave Tom new life. Tom was forever grateful.

Tom wrote a heart-felt letter of gratitude to the Stepien family. Correspondence continued between the families in the ensuing years.

10 years after she lost her father, Jeni was planning her wedding to her sweetheart, Paul Maenner. She wrote a letter to Tom asking him for a special favor: "Would you walk me down the aisle?" Deeply honored, Tom gladly said, "Yes."

They did not meet in person until the day of the wedding. When they met, towering Tom leaned over and whispered into Jeni's ear something she would never forget: "If you'd like," he said softly, "when I give you away, you can place your hand on my chest and feel the beat of your father's heart."

Just before Tom placed the bride's hand into the hand of the groom, he held her hand up to his heart – the heart of the bride's father that had been graciously transplanted into his body so that he could live. The bride "felt the heartbeat that had once comforted her as a little girl, cheered her on through life, and loved her unconditionally." Her father's heart was with her on her wedding day. *

The Heavenly Father's heart is full of love for us. He longs for each of us to be a part of His forever family. Even though our sins have separated us from Him (Isaiah 59:1-2), we clearly see the loving heart of the Father by the price He paid for our salvation.

"This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10 NIV).

We see the love, heart, and grace of God when we visualize Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus

died for our sins so that we might live with God forever. That's how much God loves us.

God will save and give eternal life to those who place their faith and trust in Jesus (Acts 16:30-31), turn from their sins in repentance (Acts 17:30-31), confess Jesus before men (Romans 10:9-10), and are baptized (immersed) into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). He will continue to cleanse from sin and prepare for an eternal home those who continue to walk in the light of His Word (1 John 1:7-9).

Kurt Kaiser extolled the loving heart of God with these lyrics:

“Jesus to Calvary did go, His love for sinners to show.
What He did there brought hope from despair.
Oh, how He loves you; Oh, how He loves me;
Oh, how He loves you and me.”

-- David A. Sargent

* Information gleaned from “Bride is walked down wedding aisle by man who received her late father's heart” by Fox News Staff, www.foxnews.com, from an account shared with Fox News by the authors of *Godwinks*, Squire Rushnell and Louise DuArt.