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**To the Fathers Who Lost Their Child
Color of Law**

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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I was hoping they would cancel Father's Day this year, mostly because my son Ezra Malik died.

He was my baby boy, and he died the day before he was born, in a hospital in August of last year. He was a beautiful baby with a full head of hair and flat little feet, and I only got to hold him once. I cannot describe the intense feeling of joy over meeting and holding and kissing my son, and the excruciating pain over seeing him lifeless. His mother and I read him a bedtime story before we put him in the ground, to be with his ancestors. And now I am left lamenting over the birthdays, the graduations and other life events that will never happen, over the laughs and memories of bicycle rides, amusement parks, and ice cream - experiences of seeing him grow up which I will never see because it wasn't meant to be.

Losing my child was the most traumatic experience of my life. Nothing else comes close. It was like crashing into a brick wall, or having my heart yanked out of my chest. To those who have not had the experience, I pray you will never know the feeling. What makes it particularly difficult is that parents are supposed to protect their children and keep them away from harm, and now we feel as if we've failed.

This membership organization is a secret society of sorts, whose members often suffer in silence because society doesn't care to listen. To be sure, there are many parents in this secret society, many fathers such as myself, those who have that strong fatherhood feeling, who love their child without question. But we are not viewed as fathers in the regular sense because our child died. Maybe there should be a special Father's Day just for us.

Think of the countless children in this world that die every year from one of any number of causes, whether disease or famine, or homicide or suicide or war, or causes unknown. For example, every year in the U.S., 5,000 children die from gun violence,

and African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately affected. Homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American males between ages 15-34, the second leading cause of death for Blacks ages 10-14, and the third leading cause of death for the 5-9 age range, with guns accounting for 90%, 70% and 34% of these deaths, respectively. That's a lot of children. That's a lot of mourning parents, and an army of grieving fathers, often at war with their emotions, and shunned by a society that doesn't support them through their painful journey.

This is a society where value is placed on looking good rather than feeling good. People ask "how are you feeling?" without really caring about your response. In a society that does not deal well with death, particularly the death of children - and wants people to just "get over it" and feel better, mistakenly believing that simply forgetting the loss will make the pain go away - parents of lost children have a rough time of it.

Mothers who grieve over a lost child tend to have a more supportive network than fathers to help them through their pain, not that they always receive the support that they need. Men are told to buck up, walk it off and "be a man". After all, we are told, it is hardest on the mothers.

As a result, fathers of lost children are lost in the wilderness. We must grapple with the fact that our child has died, yet often we are ill-equipped to do so. Many men have been conditioned to hide and deny their emotions, their pain and their sorrow, with unhealthy consequences. Think of all of the people - especially men - who are behind bars because they could not deal with what was on their mind. Unable to manage their emotions, they cracked up, and perhaps even hurt those around them. Maybe they were unaware of the counseling and support services available to them (two online support groups for babylost parents are [MISS Foundation](#) and [Glow In The Woods](#)). Or they were reluctant to seek those services because of the social stigma of being labeled weak, unstable or crazy.

As for those of us who are coping with the loss of a child, the pain will never go away. It might get easier to live with, but that is not the point. The stages of grief don't always progress in a straight line. Years after our child's death, the bad days may still sneak up on us and assault us out of the blue. Hopefully, healing will come, and we can find ways to incorporate the loss into our daily lives. But the bar has been lowered on the highest level of joy that we are able to experience.

So, finally, to those fathers who can physically hold your child on Father's Day, I tell you to hold them tight and don't let go. Do not take your child for granted. To those fathers whose children remain with you in spirit, I say hold them tight in your heart, in your memories, and in your daily life, and don't let go.

But if you are someone who knows a daddy of a lost child, don't hesitate to go up to him and feel free to acknowledge his loss. Bringing up the tragedy won't make him feel worse, because he is already living the hell that is the most traumatic experience of his life. But when others pretend that he is not a suffering father, that will almost certainly make him feel worse. We grieving fathers need to know we are not alone this Father's Day.


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