

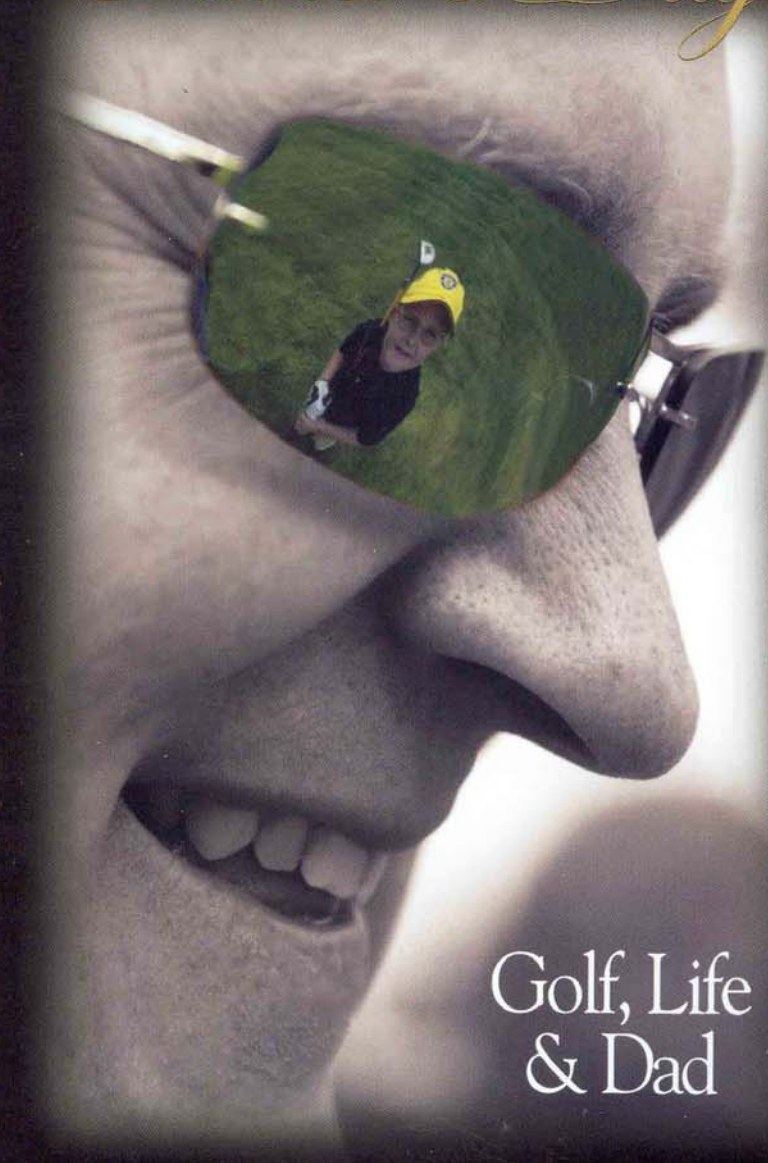
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Father's Day



Golf, Life
& Dad

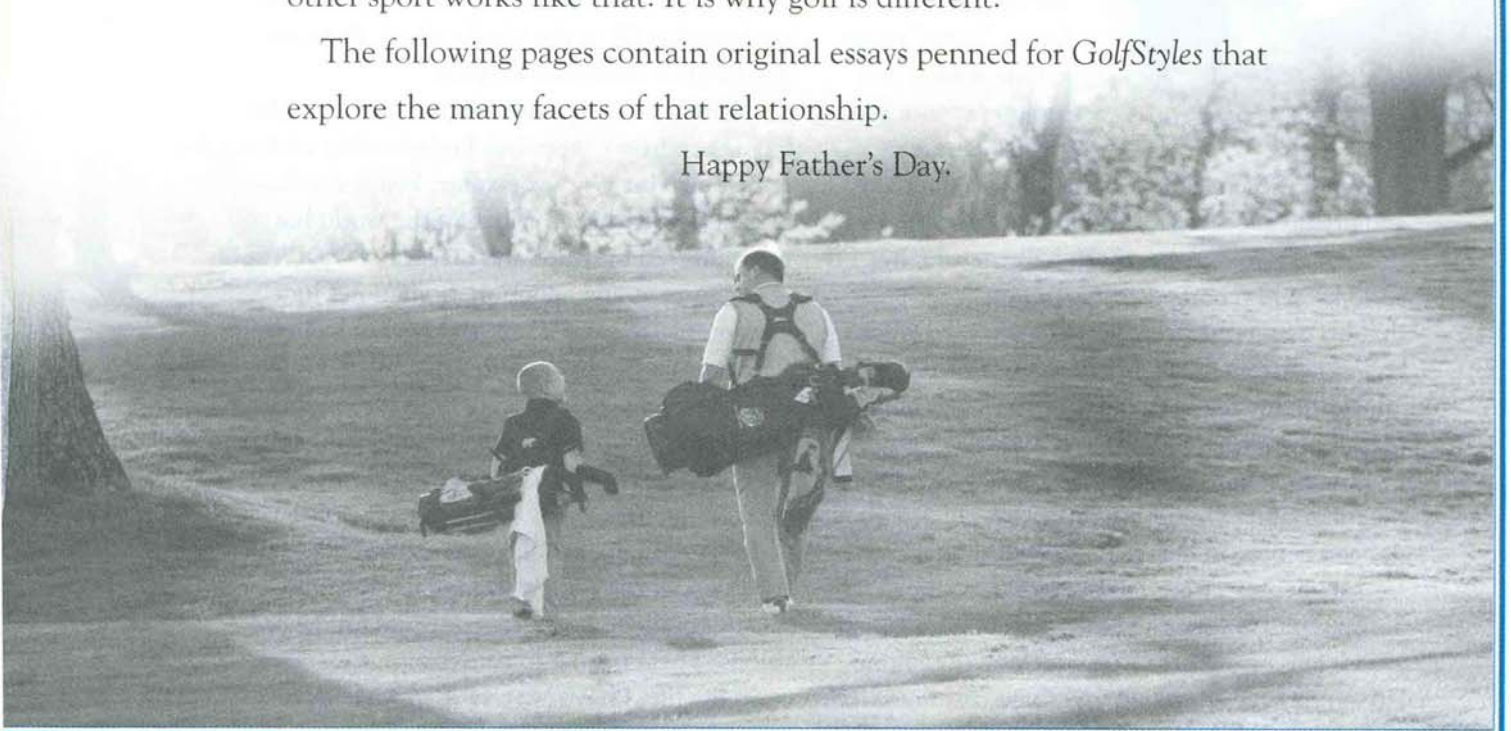
Fathers, Sons & the Game of Golf

It's an unfortunate fact of life: sons outgrow their fathers. The things that are precious one year are gone the next. A few years ago you were chasing that toddler around the house in a game of hide and seek or holding his hand on a walk around the neighborhood. The next year you were throwing the little guy into the pool; the next playing catch in the back yard; then, suddenly, you found yourself sitting in the stands watching him on the field. Parenting is an 18-year process of letting go – from doing everything for your son to hoping he has learned enough to do everything on his own.

For fathers lucky enough to share golf with their sons it is like having a parental safety valve. There are few things in life that go on and on like a father's golf relationship with his son. It requires little maintenance. In fact, the game often performs the maintenance in the relationship. No other sport works like that. It is why golf is different.

The following pages contain original essays penned for *GolfStyles* that explore the many facets of that relationship.

Happy Father's Day.



Future Dreams

By Patrick Jones

I always despised the first week of school when I was growing up. I dreaded it. It was not for the obvious reasons. Every year, the well-meaning homeroom teacher would walk around the class quizzing each student on what his father did for a living.

Why did they always have to ask?

In that Ozzie and Harriet Nelson era, it was unquestionably assumed that dad was off to work while mom stayed at home corralling the kids, ironing ribbed undershirts and slaving over a meatloaf recipe for dinner.



YOUNG PATRICK JONES (LEFT) AND HIS FATHER

My palms sweated and my temples pulsed as each classmate in front of me discussed his father's job as traveling salesman, dentist, insurance adjuster or whatever profession paid for the split-level home, Vista Cruiser station wagon and summer vacation on a Florida beach.

Damn those teachers and their presumptuous and prying questions. Talk about being put on the spot. How does an emotionally developing child keep his composure explaining to his peers that his own father's life was extinguished when he lost control of his Chevrolet in a driving rainstorm one night and died several days later from his injuries in an Atlanta-area hospital?

I wish I could share uplifting anecdotes of the touching times I spent bonding with my dad on the golf course, and how we still share that treasured connection. I wish I could say that during every final round of the U.S. Open, which always falls on Father's Day, I pick up the phone late on Sunday afternoon and share the drama with my dad as the final holes unfold.

But I can't.

In life, like golf, sometimes you are blindsided by a triple bogey early in the round. My father died when I was six, just a few months after I entered the first grade. He was only in his 30s. The lone option for our remaining foursome was to pick up and move on. In my case, thank God for a loving and resolute mother. She provided me and my older brother and sister with a reasonably normal childhood given the forced one-parent family structure.

My dad – Harold Jones of Duluth, Ga., – would have turned 80 this year. He was a World War II veteran, having done his part as a teenager to vanquish Hitler in Europe. As for his love of golf, I only remember some neglected hickory-shaft clubs that I discovered tucked in a corner of our garage long after he was gone. Perhaps he bought them to hone his own game in preparation of introducing golf to his two young sons.

Perhaps is all I have to hang my hat on.

I like to believe that, given the time frame of his final years, he was a charter member of Arnie's Army. Palmer's hard-charging, chain-smoking, charismatic style would have apparently suited my father's own from the patchwork of remembrances that have been shared with me through the years. Mostly, you are forced to fill in the blanks where there are few tangible memories to grasp.

There will always be sadness on what might have been in my short-lived relationship with my father, but this is no woe-is-me, heavy-on-the-melancholy catharsis. Much of the world has been affected by death and divorce, abandonment and adoption. Sometimes June Cleaver has to raise Wally and Beaver by herself. It's never out of the question that Ward might succumb to a massive coronary in his lounge chair after playing 36 holes, or that he might run off with Lumpy's svelte mom.

Stuff happens.

In another applicable allegory of golf and life, eagles and birdies often come directly on the heels of blow-up holes. Good things follow bad things. There is time to recover.

In my life, I have been blessed with my own son, Justin, now age three. He's too young to be

smitten with golf – Bob the Builder, Mister Rogers and Buzz Lightyear rule the roost – but the groundwork for a love of the game is already in the works. His emerging lefty swing with plastic clubs has a hint of Mickelson, a touch of Weir and a tad of Charles as he swats practice balls around the house.

Sometimes, in moments when he slips under parental radar detection, he'll pick up my putter, choke up on the shaft almost to the clubhead, and take smooth and untutored whacks around the house. Handsome chunks of sheetrock have been extracted from the walls.

That's my boy. Spackling is a pleasant repair task if it is on the road to the offspring's low handicap. Fortunately, my son's mother is a far-sighted and understanding golfer, too.

Fatherhood, for me, is a clean slate. Because of my upbringing, there are no preconceived or ingrained notions on how it should be done. I have, however, learned valuable lessons on how not to rear. There are too many examples of childhood friends whose own fathers so badgered them toward athletic success – terrorized them to a degree – that they came to hate the games intended to be fun. One friend went so far as to reveal that he envied my lack of a father in the household. That was tragic.

My son will be presented with every opportunity to learn to love golf, as well as other sports and pursuits. He might choose to be a pianist. Heck, I could handle a ballet dancer. You want your kids to follow their own paths to fulfillment. But I'm hoping golf will play a prevalent role in our relationship. I long for the days when we can share a quick nine or, better yet, a slow 18 that provides plenty of time to discuss the mysteries of life, or to just play along in comfortable father-and-son silence when no words need to be spoken.

Somewhere during a round, I'll make it clear to him that mistakes and disappointments on the front nine can always be overcome by finishing strong on the back side. If you don't quit until you have pulled the ball out of the cup on No. 18, then a level of success has been achieved.

The dream of every golfing father is to someday watch his grown son making a charge on the back nine in the final round of the U.S. Open. That would be very special. I will be fulfilled, however, if my son, in future years, picks up the phone late on U.S. Open Sunday afternoons in June and calls to wish the old

man a Happy Father's Day as we watch the drama of the final holes unfold.

It would be kind of cool, too, if he put my grandson on the phone to babble a couple of words.

