

Fathers in my papa's waltz and my winter sundays

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Maintaining a family can be difficult. In many instances, fathers have to work countless hours to keep their family afloat. Therefore, they rarely have time to interact and bond with their families which creates problems among them forming a happy relationship with their children. The love fathers give toward their children can be taken for granted. The poems “ My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke and “ My Winter Sundays” by Hayden Robert illustrate this experience in two different scenarios. The Poet in “ My Papa’s Waltz” describes the experience through recalling the times he would rough-house with his dad. While the poet in “ My Winter Sundays” describes the experience in a more sad and appreciative manner as the poet realizes how much his father did for him.

The fathers in both poems are described similarly as both poems are about the troubles of a working dad. Theodore Roethke in “ My Papa’s Waltz” tells a story of a child and his memories that happened late at night with his father (possibly his own childhood). His memories seem to be about his father. His father seems to be an alcoholic as he is often drunk as he arrives home late at night stinking of alcohol. Once his father is home, he waits to waltz (dance) with him. The poem then goes on to say they danced until pans in kitchen slid off the kitchen shelf. The poem also describes the father to have battered knuckles and rough palms which suggests that he works hard and possibly a lot. Finally, the father waltzed him to sleep in bed. In “ Those Winter Sundays”, Hayden Robert also tells a story of a child and his memories with his dad (also possibly his own childhood). His memories describe the times his father would wake-up every morning to get dressed for work in the cold darkness and before leaving he would prepare the family

for the morning. He prepared the family by gathering firewood and keeping the house warm and then waking the family up. Although he did not receive any thanks, he did it anyway. Overall, the fathers in both poems are hard-working men trying to support their families and rarely have time to bond with their children.

In both poems, the poets describe a flashback of theirs with much respect and love for their dads. The title “ My Papa Waltz” infers that the poet respected and loved his father. When children call their dad “ Papa”, it shows that they are close and that they admire and respect their father because “ Papa” is a friendly word that is more personal over saying “ dad” or “ father”. Also, the word “ waltz” implies a joyful and formal dance. As a result, the title of Roethke's poem and the way he describes his father at times in the poem is generally positive. Another illustration of the child's respect and affection for his father is shown by the things he overlooks and ignores to go on with dancing with his dad. For instance, the child ignores the discomfort in his ear from scraping against the buckle of his belt. Also, in the poem, it states “ the whiskey on your breath / Could make a small boy dizzy; / But I hung on like death” (Roethke 2-3). Roethke doesn't seem to fully approve everything his father does to or for him, however, he still loves him despite his drunkenness and sometimes aggressive behavior. In Hayden's poem, he remembers his dad as selfless and self-sacrificing as he says, “ Sundays too my father got up early” (Hayden 1) which means he even worked on Sundays. Also, the child does not have any negative remarks about his dad outside of not being close to him. He remembers his father with respect and love, but also with some remorse as he says, “ speaking indifferently to him”

(Hayden 10). Him speaking indifferently with his dad means he is not interested in his dad and does not appreciate him. However, the child later says, “ What did I know, What did I know / of love's austere and lonely offices” (Hayden 13-14) which shows that he deeply regretted not giving enough thanks and appreciation for what his dad did for him. Ultimately, both children in the poems loved their father deeply despite their hardships and uneasy relationship.

Even though Theodore and Hayden had different struggles bonding with their fathers as their fathers worked countlessly to support them, they both showed respect and love for their fathers. This respect and love may not have been a huge concern to them when they were children, but now, as they mature and grow older, they start to understand why their fathers acted the way they did as they reflect upon themselves through their poems.

Works Cited

- Hayden, Robert. “ Those Winter Sundays.” 1966.
- Roethke, Theodore. “ My Pap's Waltz.” 1942.