

BRIDGES

Reuniting
Daughters & Daddies

Jonetta Rose Barras

**BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
*WHATEVER HAPPENED TO DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL?***



Copyright 2005 by Jonetta Rose Barras. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by electronic means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote passages in a review.

Published by Bancroft Press (“Books that enlighten”)

P.O. Box 65360, Baltimore, MD 21209

800-637-7377

410-764-1967 (fax)

www.bancroftpress.com

ISBN 1-890862-38-X paper

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004117379

SUBJECTS OF BOOK:

non-fiction/self-help/family relations/fathers/daughters

Cover and interior design by Tammy Sneath Grimes

www.tsgcrescent.com, 814.941.7447

Author photo by Bruce McNeil



*For Afrika, Umoja, the choir of wounded women
who sing the fatherless dirge, and the fathers who hum
their own painful tunes about their daughters' absence*

ALSO BY JONETTA ROSE BARRAS

*Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl?
The Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women.*

New York: One World/Ballantine Publishing Group, 2000.

*Last of the Black Emperors:
The Hollow Comeback of Marion Barry in
the New Age of Black Leaders.*

Baltimore: Bancroft Press, 1998.

The Corner is No Place for Hiding.

Washington, D.C.: Forest Woods Productions, Inc., 1996.

All available at <http://www.jrbarras.com>

**REQUESTS FOR AUTHOR APPEARANCES,
AS A SPEAKER OR WORKSHOP FACILITATOR,
CONTACT:**

ESTHER PRODUCTIONS, INC.

P.O. Box 21477

Washington, D.C. 20009

(202) 882-2838

jrb@jrbarras.com

or

bruceb@bancroftpress.com

PRAISE FOR JONETTA ROSE BARRAS'
Bridges: Reuniting Daughters & Daddies

“I firmly believe that daughters have a ‘hole in their soul’ in their fathers’ shape, and when dads are unwilling or unable to fill it, there remains a painful, and often, lifelong wound. Jonetta’s book is an empowering resource to aid women during the much needed healing process. Indeed, it’s a must read for any woman who longs to be called ‘daddy’s little girl.’” —**ROLAND WARREN, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE**

“Many fathers served by the South Carolina Center on Fathers and Families’ fatherhood programs want to reconcile with their child and/or the mother of their child, but do not know how. Seeking professional services, whether from a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist, is not a readily accessible or affordable option. *Bridges* is an insightful and invaluable resource for such fathers. Because it’s easy to read, and proceeds step-by-step, I highly recommend it to anyone interested in reconciling a relationship or just wanting to learn more about the process of reconciliation. But I particularly recommend it for any two people seeking a simple, down-to-earth structure for—and positive reinforcement during—the reconciliation pilgrimage.” —**DR. IRENE LUCKEY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, INSTITUTE FOR FAMILIES IN SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA**

“When my father saw his final days ahead of him, I was serving as a warden at a women’s prison. Though they’d never met my father, and I don’t doubt for one moment that the women prisoners were sincerely concerned for me and my family, the grief they expressed to

me, and the tears they shed with me, were really based on their own sense of loss over the years—their loss of self-respect, and their lost connections to children, fathers, and mothers. When my mother died, I was warden at a men's prison. There, I witnessed the same unpredictable and priceless response from 1,200 men. What a privilege it is for me, then, to share this important work with readers. Jonetta Rose Barras' *Bridges* recognizes that we can ill afford to believe that lifelong relationships can simply be picked up and continued whenever the incarcerated return to *our* communities. Where there's life, it's been said, there must be hope. To help damaged and fragile people hoping to reconnect with their families, we must do all we can. The incarcerated are, after all, related directly or indirectly to each of us. They are our sisters, sons, cousins, parents, nieces, and daughters. Our effort to reunite families, enhanced and furthered by this essential book, is an exceedingly worthwhile investment, for when we save our families, we also save our communities. Our society deserves nothing less."

—**MARY LEFRIDGE BYRD, DEPUTY SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA**

"Jonetta Rose Barras writes about the impact of fatherlessness with a passion and candor that cannot be ignored. She opens up her heart to her audience so everyone may share the rewards of healing and reconciliation. *Bridges: Reuniting Daughters and Daddies* is the book we were hoping Jonetta would write."—**DEE BAECHEBROWN, PRESIDENT, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

"Jonetta Rose Barras' latest book is a must-read and logical follow-up to her *Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl?* It's not only a powerful, timely, and groundbreaking roadmap in the journey toward healing, but easily transferable beyond daddies and daughters—to all others in

need of reconciliation.”—**DARRYL GREEN, MS, CASEY FAMILY SERVICES, THE DIRECT SERVICE ARM OF THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

“The day before her wedding, my daughter and I sat alone, briefly reflecting on the years that seemed to pass so quickly as she grew to womanhood. As our conversation wound down, she presented me with a framed photo of me holding her when she was just four days old. The accompanying note stated in part, ‘. . . Even though I’ll be a married woman soon, I’ll always be “Daddy’s Girl.” ’ It touched me at such a deep emotional level that I choked up and was rendered speechless. Jonetta Rose Barras has given us all an insightful and incisive analysis of the unique, vital, and profoundly personal relationship between fathers and daughters. And she has crafted a perceptive and practical road map to achieve reconciliation when those relationships become frayed and estranged. Hats off to Jonetta for filling the gaping information void in how to repair father-daughter relationships—and for understanding how emotionally perilous the journey to reconciliation is.”—**VINCENT C. GRAY, COUNCILMEMBER, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

"Jonetta Rose Barras has courageously reached into the dark agony of her own odyssey of self-analysis and produced a deeply personal and highly sensitive guidebook that leads the rest of us out of the wounded places in our hearts along a bright path to healing and redemption. This book is not only a tool to cure the anguished relationship between a father and a daughter, but can also be used to mitigate the ongoing emotional war between Black women and the men in their lives."—**BROOKE STEPHENS, AUTHOR/EDITOR, MEN WE CHERISH: AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN PRAISE THE MEN IN THEIR LIVES**

“Too much of today's conversation is about father absence and not enough about healing oneself from the effects. Jonetta Rose Barras has gotten out front by transitioning the conversation to ‘father-healing’ and providing step-by-step support. Her book will also help men understand and support the women in their lives who’ve suffered from father absence.”—**RICHARD L. BROWN, VOLUNTEER, THE FATHERHOOD COLLABORATIVE, COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

“I thoroughly enjoyed and highly recommend Jonetta Rose Barras’ valuable, easy-to-read, and much needed new book. Not only will *Bridges* be an important guide to daughters and daddies all around the world, but to *anyone* seeking reconciliation with another loved one. Those who follow the steps laid out in *Bridges* will undoubtedly achieve a successful reunification.”—**ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS, SYNDICATED COLUMNIST AND HOST OF “THE ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS (TV) SHOW”**

**PRAISE FOR JONETTA ROSE BARRAS’
*Whatever Happened to Daddy’s Little Girl?***

“Barras's new book is a brilliant, heartfelt exploration of the human condition, with numerous excellent suggestions for rising above desperation and healing deep personal wounds. Although written from the unique perspective of a fatherless black woman, Barras's investigation of ‘fatherless woman syndrome’ has universal appeal . . . In the spirit of Hope Edelman's *Motherless Daughters* (LJ 5/1/94), Barras's guide compassionately addresses a social crisis—fatherlessness that

affects almost 50 percent of American households—and is highly recommended for all libraries.”—**LIBRARY JOURNAL**

“Passionate and provocative, *Whatever Happened to Daddy’s Little Girl?* explores the impact of fatherlessness on black women from a thoughtful and highly personal perspective . . . Perhaps one of the most important means of healing (both individually and societally) is the conversation Barras opens with this significant work.”
—**AMAZON.COM**

“Integrating a personal narrative with other women’s testimonies and research findings with self-help remedies, Barras sheds light on the profound impact fatherlessness can have on black women.”
—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**

“Searing and intimate.”—**CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

“Vivid, piercing . . . This book has great value. . . . [Barras] speaks with the passion and penetrating detail of one who has firsthand experience.”—**THE WASHINGTON TIMES**

“Thanks to Barras, I’m starting to wonder if it may not be tragically true that girls who don’t know the love of their fathers may find it hard to love themselves as much and as unquestioningly as they should . . . My concern—even before reading Barras’ powerful book—is that men have underestimated their own importance in raising healthy and competent sons and daughters. . . Barras is right . . . We need to pay more attention than we have to what’s happening to Daddy’s little girl.”—**WILLIAM RASPBERRY, SYNDICATED COLUMNIST**

“Jonetta Rose Barras digs deep, drives fast and furious, and gets to the root of many a Black woman’s suffering ... She blows apart the ages-old adage that sons are the only ones who need their fathers to grow into healthy adults ... Barras not only hits the mark with this one; she hits the heart.”—**THE WASHINGTON INFORMER**

“The book delivers an important message for the African American woman who was abandoned and the people who enter her life ... Barras’ work makes a case for us to reexamine the value of the family if we intend to endure and thrive as a people. It is a compelling reading for women. Men who read it will achieve a greater understanding of their crucial role in the life of their daughters. The book is destined to prompt much discussion within the village.”
—**QUARTERLY BLACK REVIEW**

In an emotion-laden dialogue, an author who writes about growing up without a father talked about the experience yesterday with a group of male prison inmates, many of them absentee fathers themselves ... Her words hit home for many inmates.”—**PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER**

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	1
Author's notes	2
Introduction	3

BOOK ONE: *Setting the Foundation* 19

DEFINITIONS

THE INTERNAL SURVEY

THE PLAN

LET'S REVIEW

BOOK TWO: *Building the Bridge* 47

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

First Contact

Pacing and Communications

Pitfalls and Obstructions

Rest Stop

Building Rituals and Reaffirming the Commitment

LET'S REVIEW

BOOK THREE: *All by Yourself* 107

WHEN DAUGHTER AND DADDY CAN'T RECONCILE TOGETHER

LET'S REVIEW

BOOK FOUR: *Practice and Succeed* 119

RECONCILIATION EXERCISES

RECONCILIATION RESOURCES

Starting a support group

Launching a reconciliation center

Organizations and individuals to contact

Afterword 219

Glossary 225

Bibliography 231

About the Author 235

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I continue to be grateful to David Carr, Victoria Sanders, and Cheryl Woodruff for their support in helping me find my voice on the issue of father absence and setting me on my journey of self-healing.

I also want to thank Bruce Bortz, editor and publisher of Bancroft Press. By rescuing this book, he kept me on my path while more sharply focusing my mission of healing daughters and reuniting them with some of the most important men in their lives. Thanks also to Bancroft's Ronda Lindsay, for her meticulous and continuing attention to the book's clarity, consistency, and appearance; and to Shirley Payne, who helped polish the early manuscript.

Wade Horn, Gayle K. Porter, Roland Warren, Jeffrey Johnson, Lisa Paine-Wells, Darryl Green, Joe Kelly, Charles Ballard, Audrey B. Chapman, Aminifu Richard Harvey, and Trent Tucker were some of the experts who helped in the development of this book; I appreciate their support.

Meri Nana-Ama Danquah, Misty Brown, Brooke Stephens, Dorothy Brizill, Gary Imhoff, Logan Wiley, E. Veronica Pace, Richard Fiske, Earl Cabbell, Kojo Nnamdi, Torrence Thomas, Ron Drake, Faye Williams and Cassandra Burton of Sisterspace and Books, and Ivory Sanders also offered support during the completion of this project. I appreciate their kindness.

My heartfelt thank-yous are also extended to the dozens of men and women who opened their hearts and souls to me so that others may be healed, particularly Tiffany, Lawrence, Hannah, Djamila, L'Ertes, Aisha, David, Tonya, Gigi, and Afrika. I grew because of their generosity and enormous patience.

Most important, I thank Russell for being there.



AUTHOR'S NOTES

Some of the names of individuals in this book have been changed at their request. In other cases, only the first names have been used to protect the privacy of those individuals. However, the information provided by all these people accurately reflects stories pulled from the pages of their lives, and truthfully represents their feelings and opinions about such events, at least as conveyed to the author.

The exercises in this book, which have been developed by the author, are in no way meant to substitute for the services of a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist. However, the author assembled a team of professionals, including family and relationship therapist Audrey B. Chapman, MMA; clinical social worker Aminifu Richard Harvey, DSW, LCSW-C; and clinical psychologist Trent Tucker, Ph.D., CAS, who reviewed and approved each exercise. Where specific comments or augmentations of exercises were suggested by these professionals, I have included them.

*If any reader has trouble remembering
which father pairs up with which daughter in the book,
feel free to consult the following chart:*

COUPLES

<i>Daughters</i>	<i>Fathers</i>
Hannah	Thomas
Anna	Lincoln
Djamila	David
Tiffany	Lawrence
Gigi	Daddy Feldman
Patricia	Michael
Diane	Charles

INTRODUCTION

PATRICIA stands in the middle of a room filled with strangers. Her cocoa-colored face is awash with tears as she tells her story about the agony of fatherlessness: “My father smothered me with love.

“Then, something happened. My parents separated. My father’s love was snatched from me. He just left. I never knew why. I used to wonder if I had only dreamed of him during those first few years of my life.”

When she was about fourteen years old, Patricia learned that her father had remarried and started a new family. “I was devastated by that news. If he had to go and get another family—a better family—I felt I wasn’t good enough. I’ve been hurting all this time; I’ve been in such deep pain. I couldn’t talk about it, until now. I didn’t think anybody would understand,” she says in between sobs.

“How can I reconcile with my father? I know where he is. But, what should I say to him? Is it possible for us to bond and have a relationship after all these years?”

I hear these questions repeatedly. I’ve heard them during national radio and television interviews and in dozens of cities, where I’ve spoken during the last few years about the importance of a father in a girl’s life. The same questions are also asked of me in e-mails, letters, and telephone calls—some from as far away as Germany and Lithuania. The questions are asked by varied voices—young and old; black, white, Hispanic. They come from the mouths of women, but also from men like Michael.



A repeat offender at the State Corrections Institution at Chester, Pennsylvania, Michael has been in and out of prison most of his thirty-eight years. Within the next year or two, he says, he will have another opportunity to make it on the outside. He has tried to maintain some semblance of a relationship with his children, especially his 22-year-old daughter, who is unmarried but already has two children by two different men.

“I know what the problem is—I wasn’t there for her. When I get out this time, I want to fix that. I want to make up for lost time. I want us to be like a father and daughter are supposed to be.

“But, to tell you the truth,” he says, “I don’t know where to start. What do you think I can say to her? What should I do? Can we get back together? Do you think there’s been too much time between us?”



MORE THAN A DECADE EARLIER, I posed these same questions to myself, when I met my biological father for the first time; I was thirty-seven years old. I felt joy at the prospect of having a father. But I was equally confused about how I should respond to this new opportunity. One part of me argued that I didn’t need him after all these years. Another part of me longed to reach out to him, have him envelop me in his arms and say he loved me—that he had always loved me—and missed me terribly all those years of separation.

But our reunion was too brief for any real healing or bonding to take place. I became peeved at a perceived slight, and I moved away from him. He died two short years after our initial meeting.

Like Patricia and Michael, I knew nothing about reconciling with



my father after so many years of distance, and after so brief an encounter. Further, I had not undertaken the self-reflection crucial to any successful reconciliation. I had not properly gauged my own emotions, nor had I ever considered those of my father. I had no concept of the work, time, determination, and unwavering commitment required in any reconciliation effort. I was completely ignorant of myself, my father, and the process for reconnecting the two of us. I am not sure I even fully understood, then, the concept of reconciliation.

Today, Patricia, Michael, and others like them remain where I was in 1988—confused and desperately seeking guidance on how to mend the broken bond between daughter and father. They are like the prodigal daughter and father wanting to return home—only unable to see the path, and without the knowledge of where or when to begin the journey. What will be their fate? Will Patricia spend years in an abyss, unable to rescue herself or have the father’s love she craves? Will Michael remain beaten by guilt for his earlier parental failures, needing to forgive himself in order to redeem the daughter-love he so desperately desires? Will father and daughter learn how to heal their wounded lives? Will they embrace each other, learning to love again?

BRIDGES: REUNITING DAUGHTERS AND DADDIES provides answers to these and other questions for Patricia, Michael, and all the other fathers and daughters who hope to heal their personal and familial wounds. This book is for daughters and fathers who have experienced absence because of death, divorce, or abandonment—emotional or physical.

And there are a lot of them in America alone. The U.S. Census reported that in 2000, nearly 30 percent of all children lived in homes where their biological fathers were not present. Among African-Americans, the problem was much more acute—60 percent



of children remained in single homes, most headed by women.

This book is also for daughters and daddies who, for one reason or another, simply cannot reunite. Perhaps the father doesn't know the location of his child. Maybe the daughter died before he could "set things straight," and yet he still has a wounded heart and sense of guilt with which he must reckon. Perhaps the daughter is simply uninterested or the level of distrust is too great to surmount. Even in these cases, there must be a coming to terms with the past, a burying of personal ghosts.



THE FAMOUS NOVELIST Thomas Wolfe once wrote, "You can't go home again." The adage was intended as a warning—that after a long absence from our homes, during which we have been shaped by worldly travels and new experiences, it's hard to reconcile our new selves with our old environments. But like Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz," I discovered that, most often, we never really *left* home. It remains forever embedded in our psyches. Throughout most of our lives, we continue to walk a familiar landscape.

We find ourselves, like Charles Dickens' Scrooge, walking the neighborhoods of our youth, knocking on weather-beaten front doors that open onto our personal interior or our ancestral narrative. With new and, perhaps, more experienced eyes, we see our remembered joys, dreams, unrealized hopes, hardships, and disappointments. When properly assessed and used, these return visits can be transformative, providing a wonderful and amazing opportunity to gain greater understanding of, and appreciation for, ourselves, our families, and our communities.

My reconciliation with a father I had never met was made possi-

ble by a series of crises I faced when my mother told me of his existence. These difficult episodes had caused me to step back and take a look at myself and my life. Although I was in the middle of deep personal reflection, I had few resources available to incorporate the broader evaluation that would be needed to reunite with a daddy recently returned to me. At that time, I couldn't explain my constant rage and anger. I couldn't provide a plausible explanation for two failed marriages and countless aborted platonic friendships with men and women. And I hadn't come to realize yet that, from bad choices and misdirected dreams, I had fashioned a confusing and flawed definition of love.

Before you take off on a plane flight, the attendant advises that if there is turbulence and a sudden loss of altitude, the oxygen mask will fall from the overhead compartment. The attendant cautions that those with children or others who may be physically limited should first put on their own oxygen mask. The implication is striking—you can't help anyone else if you are having trouble yourself, whether it's breathing from or adjusting the device.

Similarly, meeting my father in the emotional place where he needed to be met wasn't possible because I hadn't arrived at the proper internal terrain. In fact, I had frequently avoided it. In other words, I had to find and don my own oxygen mask.

Traveling over a new landscape with a stranger as my companion meant trouble and added dysfunction. I didn't know this then, and certainly couldn't appreciate what it meant for a reconciliation with my father. Nor did I have any clue about the sustained effort that such activity demanded of me. I think I can safely say my father was equally ignorant. That he had sought me out, though, suggests he was willing to make the trip.





THOMAS, a fifty-something retired businessman from Miami, was initially consumed by the loss of his two daughters after a divorce. “I stayed in my house for nine months. A friend came to make sure I was all right. But I wasn’t. I was depressed. I could hear my daughters as if they were still in the house. I could hear my daughter Hannah, especially, calling for me. There wasn’t a day that went by that I didn’t think about my kids.”

His two daughters had relocated to another state, and his ex-wife urged him not to visit. She didn’t want him in their lives, she told him. Eventually, however, Thomas and his daughters were reconnected. But establishing a relationship hasn’t been easy. They have attempted several reconciliations—they are on their third try, but refuse to call it quits.

Lincoln and his daughter Anna were also separated when he and her mother were divorced. But Anna’s father had substance abuse issues that stood in the way of a reunion. Meanwhile, Anna’s maternal relatives shaped and badly tarnished her image of her father. She had to commit herself to discovering her own truth; and he, after cleaning up his life, had to provide an opportunity to begin again for both of them.

David, a high school teacher in his fifties, felt great anxiety when he and his daughter Djamila were separated. He had never married Djamila’s mother and was so busy trying to make a career for himself that he didn’t connect with his daughter until she was 19, although he says he made several efforts. Djamila’s mother had moved herself and her daughter from the east coast to the west coast; and physical distance added to the alienation of father and daughter. Finally, however, a strange encounter led Djamila to



her father—and, for more than 10 years, the two have been attempting to bond.

Off and on, Tiffany lived with her father, Lawrence, after he and her mother divorced. Her father remarried and moved out of the area, making continuous interaction almost impossible. During the years when he did bring Tiffany to live with him, the relationship between his second wife and his daughter proved horrendous. Ultimately, Tiffany was reared by her paternal grandparents. It took years before she and her father finally tried to return to a normal relationship. They still aren't there, but at least they are trying.

Gigi, who is a published journalist, lost contact with her father after he and her mother divorced. Later, Gigi's mother permitted her new husband to adopt her two children, pushing Gigi's biological father—"Daddy Feldman"—out of her life physically, but not mentally or emotionally. She would wonder where he was and what had happened to him. Finally, after several failed attempts, she was reunited with her father.

The journey from wondering and finding to reconciling and bonding can be long, as these couples found out. Further, it can be filled with fits and starts, as Gigi's was. It can also be filled with painful bumps and dangerous curves that leave us questioning why we decided to commence such an arduous undertaking, as surely was the case with all the daughters and daddies interviewed for this book—as was the case in my own life.

Along the way to reconciliation, there are enormous opportunities for unimagined personal growth and spiritual maturity. Think of that credit card commercial where the father and son are at a ballgame. The announcer recounts the price for the tickets, the hotdogs,



and other items. But the time together between father and son is declared “priceless.” The time daughter and father spend together is also invaluable, and a dedication to restoring that relationship is well worth the cost.



IN BRIDGES: REUNITING DAUGHTERS AND DADDIES, I present what I’ve learned about reconciliation through my own personal experiences, through interviews with experts—Aminifu Richard Harvey, Audrey Chapman, Wade Horn, Roland Warren, Lisa Paine Wells, Darryl Green, Joe Kelly, Charles Ballard, Gayle Porter, etc.—and various daughter and daddy combinations, including those previously mentioned.

Although there are untold benefits from applying the information provided in this book, it is not intended to replace therapy or counseling. And I certainly don’t purport to be a psychologist. But there is value in what I call “lived expertise”—that is, information and insights derived from experience. Still, I don’t claim to know all the answers, simply because I don’t know all the questions. Who ever does? Each day, thankfully, we are challenged by new questions. The search for answers leads us to the places where life’s gifts are quietly buried.

One thing I have learned in my short life is that when I am truly ready to explore some issue or some previously closeted aspect of my life, guidance suddenly appears. That assistance often comes in the form of a person or a book. In either case, I am emboldened by this arrival, which assists me in becoming more confident of my next step, more reassured that the dream I dream will definitely come true. My soul grows.



BRIDGES: REUNITING DAUGHTERS AND DADDIES seeks to provide that guidance to you, the reader. It seeks to deepen your understanding of the issues confronting fatherless daughters and daughterless fathers on the road to healing. It seeks to practically prepare daughters and daddies to address these issues, individually and jointly. And it seeks to provide a step-by-step map to daughters and daddies hoping to reconcile after years of being absent from one another's lives.

In addition, it's the goal of this book to offer helpful resources as daughter and daddy attempt to create a life-long relationship built on mutual respect, caring, understanding, and love.

Daughters, fathers, and experts have all conspired here to offer their stories, their lessons, and their knowledge. **BRIDGES: REUNITING DAUGHTERS AND DADDIES** presents three main steps to reconciliation. They are:

- **CONDUCTING AN INTERNAL SURVEY**
- **DEVELOPING A PLAN OR STRATEGY**
- **IMPLEMENTING THAT PLAN**, which includes:

determining the initial contact with a previously absent father or daughter; pacing the encounter; addressing pitfalls and obstacles in the process; and establishing rituals to help build the relationship and reaffirm the commitment.

Two metaphors—travel and construction—are used throughout this book. They are intended to underscore an important message: Reconciliation requires hard work. It is not a destination but a continuous journey, affected by challenges that arise when we experience new terrain or old landscapes with fresh, more critical eyes. The book employs illustrations, theories, affirmations, and practical exercises.



It is divided into five sections:

BOOK ONE helps set the foundation for the daughter-daddy reconciliation. Fathers and daughters are asked to conduct an internal survey designed to resurrect, in a healthy way, past experiences that serve as emotional-historical baggage. The survey also requires daddy and daughter to ascertain their own reasons for the reconciliation before actually moving to make direct contact. A solidly realistic reconciliation plan is also developed.

In **BOOK TWO**, daughter and daddy begin to discuss implementing that plan and dealing with the challenges that may arise in the process—communication, meddling friends and relatives, and bonding.

BOOK THREE is written specifically for daughters or fathers who are unable to reconcile with the absent parent or child.

BOOK FOUR is the workshop. Through a series of practical exercises, the reader is guided toward a deeper understanding of the materials in the previous sections, and affirmations specifically created for the issues are identified.

Finally, **BOOK FIVE** is the resource guide offering a list of experts, and help with launching a support group or establishing community reconciliation centers. The first four sections end with “Let’s Review,” which restates the principles, philosophies, or theories important to understanding specific aspects of the reconciliation process as outlined.

The chapters, and later the exercises, are presented sequentially. It is best not to skip around, picking and choosing what you will or won’t do. *Everything must be done in order.* Although this book is fairly easy to read, the issues—personal and familial—are not. You are being required to explore these issues, which will involve time, patience, honesty, and, of course, commitment.

Even with this prepared guide, many daughters and fathers will



wonder whether they are capable of digging down to the depths of their soul and their lives' experiences to find the sweet, fruity meat of forgiveness. Most surely, they will be fooled by the distractions of normal living that trick us into thinking interior growth and familial development are of little consequence—only material or professional success matters. At times, they may find themselves discouraged or even disillusioned. But if you're serious about reuniting with your father or daughter, it's important to commit yourself to the trip, being patient with yourself and others, resting and reflecting where appropriate, being alert and attentive to dangers and distractions that can send you on a winding, dead-end path. And, when there is too much fog, or you have just gotten too far off the main road, don't be afraid to seek additional assistance. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Most important, as you move toward reconciliation, don't be a slave to time. Some daughters and daddies have achieved their goal of bonding far quicker than others. The first time Hannah, a twenty-something aspiring actress, reconnected with her father, Thomas, was at her high school graduation. Then they lost touch with each other again. Now, they are attempting, once more, to build a healthy, loving, committed father-daughter relationship.

Djamila met her father, David, when she was 19. Even now, eleven years later, they are still grappling with first level reconciliation issues.

These things don't happen overnight.



WHEN I WAS CONDUCTING RESEARCH for an earlier book, I remember psychologist Maxine Harris telling me that if I had sought out my father one last time before his death, meeting him



would not have been for him, but for me. It would have offered me the closure and healing I needed. I missed that opportunity. And it was only after eight hard years of wandering, wondering, struggling, reflecting, and writing that I finally found some solace.

Reconciliation isn't only about healing the family unit, although surely that is a more than admirable motivation and goal. Far more important is the aim of reuniting with ourselves.

This book is as much about hurdling the internal obstacles that have kept us away from self-love, as it is about crossing the seemingly unbridgeable gap between estranged daughters and fathers. It's as much about soul development as it is about reconciliation between a parent and a child, once believed to be lost to time or circumstance. To enter the kingdom of your inner heart, to know your true beauty, to experience a deep and enduring love, you must first lower the drawbridge.

Roland Warren, director of the National Fatherhood Initiative, notes that these things—this merging of self and making whole an important familial relationship—can't occur unless each person is willing to be vulnerable. "Vulnerability is the gateway to intimacy." That intimacy, born during reconciliation, enhances the quality of our lives, and brings peace and real happiness to our souls.

Crossing the bridge is fraught with danger and seemingly lethal levels of fear. But in the end, you will have learned, and can happily assert that "yes indeed, I can go home. I am home, again." And because your life will have been so enriched, you will wonder why it took you so long to make the journey.

