

## Reference Materials for Clergy Day Presentation by Rev. Bill Donoghue

### Books:

Antonio Damasio, Self Comes to Mind  
The Strange Order of Things  
The Feeling of What Happens  
Looking for Spinoza, Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain

Harvey Oxenhorn, Tuning the Rig, A Journey to the Arctic

Bessel van der Kolk, The Body Keeps the Score

### Article:

<http://cap2-7-2.com/war-stories/thinking-of-archie-on-fathers-day/>

### Thinking of 'Archie' on Father's Day

By Bill "Doc" Donoghue, CAP 2-7-10, 1970-71

*Doc Donoghue was a corpsman who served with CAPs 1-4-5 and 2-7-10. He's now a minister in New Hampshire and this is his sermon from Father's Day, June 20, 1999.*

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**Genesis 21:11** *The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son.* This text is a beautiful one for Fathers' Day. If we accept the commonplace wisdom of our time, that women are more aware of relationships, of the various threads that hold our families and communities together, and that men are more analytical, more precise and focused in making decisions, then this story of Abraham turns that commonplace wisdom on its head. For Sarah, Abraham's wife, sees her son, Isaac, playing with Abraham's other son, Ishmael, son of Hagar. Being frightened for her son, Isaac, she demands that Abraham banish Hagar and Ishmael from the encampment. Abraham does so, but not easily, for he is distressed about his son, Ishmael.

Abraham is asked to make another of many decisions in his life when deciding in favor of one will mean possible death for another. He is a father who cares deeply for everyone in his family.

Photo courtesy of Eddie “Chipper” Caiado  
Bill Donoghue in Vietnam

It is good to be reminded on Fathers’ Day that men are able to be as attuned to the context and ambiguities of family and community life as women. Our time’s simple reduction of men thinking one way and women another is also simply wrong. But I find it helpful as well to see how Abraham’s understanding of how to be a father gets shaped steadily over the years as he grapples with one dilemma after another. He changes. He gets better at it. Abraham’s model is a belief in God who changes too, to the extent that he keeps trying even though people are constantly disappointing. Maybe in our best moments we do the same. I don’t think the work of being a father has changed a great deal since Abraham wandered in the wilderness, long ago and far away. I know that for me some of the greatest learning about being a father came through the privilege of knowing a fatherless boy, long ago and far away. At this time of year I think of him quite a bit. From April through August of 1970 I lived with a Marine Combined Action Platoon in Viet Nam that had this boy as an informal member. We worked constantly conducting military operations, day and night, in and around villages where people cultivated rice paddies in the way they had done for hundreds of years. Every day at dusk, we would saddle up, layering our weapons and ammunition and packs and extra gear on us in the order in which they might be needed, should anything occur. We would walk for at least two hours, until settling in to our spot for night activities.

In the middle of our line of eight Marines and 20 Vietnamese would be “Archie.” That is the only name I knew him by then and now. He had no family. His life was such that a Marine Combined Action Platoon was a place of security and home for him. Wandering day and night over the countryside with us he was exposed constantly to the danger we encountered. He helped me every day by translating so that I could have a remote chance of being able to treat the various injuries and illnesses embodied by the people who would make their way to me.

One night, after arriving at our position for night acts, I dropped my pack as usual, stacking my gear for easy use, when Archie came through the dark to get me, “Bac Si, come!” he whispered loudly. I followed him to a home in the village, a thatched roof, two room dwelling where a mother and a father stood anxiously over a girl about 8 years old who burned with a terrible fever. I could not detect anything besides the raging fever. I used Archie’s interpretation skill to ask question after question, but ended up feeling very helpless. I gave the parents some aspirin tablets and urged them to give their daughter water through the night. When I left the home with Archie beside me I said to him how helpless I felt, I had done in very simple ways all I could do. I worried the girl would die for want for better care.

“Thank you, Archie,” I said, “for bringing me here to try to help.”

“No, khong sau (don’t be afraid), Bac Si, thank you.”

I returned to the perimeter to spend the rest of the night. The next morning the girl seemed fine. All was well. It didn’t always turn out that way. For five months Archie brought to me, or helped me interpret for those who found me on their own, an endless series of hurting people. Old men, women, and children would seek us out regardless of the risk involved, indifferent or grown used to the carnage around them day and night. In between day operations, and night ambushes I bandaged and treated infections, and listened, listened, listened, with Archie helping me to understand.

At the end of August, 1970 we moved out. Our unit was deactivated and I was transferred further north. My last sight of Archie was as we drove off in the back of a large Marine truck, waving to him, wondering how he would be. Perhaps he survives to this day. I have no way of knowing, or of tracing him. I do know that for five brief and intense months I had the privilege of being a sort of father to a boy who was much more like Ishmael than Isaac, much more the outcast than the accepted and blessed one of the family. He shaped in careful ways how I do my work as a pastor. He helped to determine how I act as a father to my two sons and my daughter.

Dallas Pulliam, an older member of our congregation who died several years ago, many of you remember him, lived for a time with the Allied Forces who

liberated Europe at the end of World War II. He told me once of how he watched children scavenging through garbage cans to survive because, orphaned by the War, they were starving. It shaped how he behaved later as father to his children. It was known, for instance, that Dallas would often have to replace the windows of the his garage door because his children, and later his grandchildren would break the glass while playing ball in the driveway of his home. Family wondered over the years while he never seemed bothered by the nuisance of replacing glass after glass. Why didn't he ask them to play elsewhere?

After Dallas's death, while going through the garage among his tools, in and around the things that men play with, the family discovered a neatly piled stack of about 20 panes of glass, all cut to the specs of the garage windows, ready to pop in when one popped out. Dallas knew what mattered, and what didn't. I really hope that I remember what matters, and what doesn't as I continue to go along this journey of being father to my children, and pastor to my congregation.

Sometimes, just as it was for Abraham, we learn how to do the most important things by sensing their absence, by feeling caught in the endless complications and mysteries of trying to keep our loves and lives together in a way that makes sense.

Last Wednesday I watched my 18-year-old son, Sam, walk across the platform to receive his high school diploma. I watched him with a sense of privilege, of humility. I hope I have loved him well enough to give him strength for the days ahead of him. I know that I have been simply given the gift of being present to him, trying to make sure he is not harmed, trying to bless him in the biblical sense of Abraham, to fill him by my words and presence with energy, and courage and life. Fathers strengthen, fathers love in a unique and special way. Today we are renewed in that work. Amen.

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