



"Cross Connection"

Radio Ministry of Hope Wesleyan Church and Wells of Salvation Ministries
Ultimate Oldies Radio – FM 97.7 and 101.5, Huber Heights, Ohio



Series: Christian Messages In Secular Music

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Program 25 – “Cat’s In The Cradle” © 1974 Sandy and Harry Chapin

This 1974 folk-rock song carries a timeless message about parenting. It paints a compelling picture of a father so caught up in the business of work and life that he passes up opportunities to spend quality time with his growing son. Ultimately, the father realizes that he cannot recapture his son’s growth years, and that he has unwittingly modeled behavior that his son has copied into adulthood. Dr. James Dobson, of Focus On The Family, has often quoted the lyrics of this song to illustrate the dynamics and pitfalls of contemporary parenting in America.

The Song¹:

- Based on poem by Harry’s wife Sandy
- Inspired by Sandy’s first husband’s relationship with his alcoholic father, who virtually abandoned their 3 children; Harry subsequently adopted them

“Sandy showed it to Harry as a warning when he was on the road too much and he made it into a song. Harry was on his way to a business meeting from his home on Long Island to New York City when he died in the car crash. Ironically enough, a meeting to discuss how he could manage his career to spend more time with his family.”²

- Also recorded by Johnny Cash and Ricky Skaggs

The Artist³:

- Harry Chapin (1942 –1981) – renowned as a singer, songwriter, and humanitarian
- Father was road drummer for Big Band Era groups such as Woody Herman
- Harry often performed with his brothers Tom and Steve
- Chapin donated an estimated third of his paid concerts to charitable causes – principally to combat hunger in the U.S. and around the world
- His other hits include – “Taxi”, “I Wanna Learn A Love Song”, and “W.O.L.D.”
- Died from a heart attack and a tragic car-truck crash in New York
- Soon after his death, his widow is quoted as saying -- *“Harry was supporting 17 relatives, 14 associations, 7 foundations and 82 charities. Harry wasn’t interested in saving money. He always said, ‘Money is for people,’ so he gave it away.”*

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat's_in_the_Cradle

² Dana Chapin, Harry’s half-sister, <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=2796>

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Chapin

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it"
– Proverbs 22:6

My child arrived just the other day
He came to the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it, and as he grew
He'd say "I'm gonna be like you dad
You know I'm gonna be like you"

What can we know about this child?

- Born into 2-parent home
- Busy father
- Looks to dad as a role model

1 Timothy 5:8 tells us, *"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"*

What do you think of a father who provides for his family through "planes to catch and bills to pay"? Is this wrong? Why or why not?

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
When you comin' home **dad**?
I don't know when, but we'll get together then
You know we'll have a good time then

My son turned ten just the other day
He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let's play
Can you teach me to throw", I said "Not today
I got a lot to do", he said, "That's ok"
And he walked away but his smile never dimmed
And said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah
You know I'm gonna be like him"

"Fernando (a prisoner) developed a sincere concern for his three teenage sons who had become gangsters, following in his footsteps... despite the fact that Fernando had been away from them in prison half of his life, they wanted to emulate their criminal father, who was their role model and hero."⁴

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
When you comin' home **dad**?
I don't know when, but we'll get together then
You know we'll have a good time then

In the time of Christ, "...it was assumed that a son would train under his father and eventually enter into the same vocation. If his father was a tentmaker, it was assumed the son would be as well. If the father was a farmer, a son would almost always be a farmer. Thus "like father like son" was a cultural norm."⁵

Well, he came from college just the other day
So much like a man I just had to say
"Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a while?"
He shook his head and said with a smile
"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys
See you later, can I have them please?"

Note the role reversal here

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
When you comin' home **son**?
I don't know when, but we'll get together then **dad**
You know we'll have a good time then

"I never want to choose career over family or God. In today's fast-paced, career focused society, I think many have lost sight of what is real and what is important. A father who chooses career over family is as sorry as a deadbeat dad... No, I don't claim to have it all figured out, but I think I have this figured out: My family needs me more than my boss."⁶

⁴ *Gangsters: Fifty Years of Madness, Drugs, and Death on the Streets of America*, Lewis Yablonsky, NYU Press, 1998, ISBN 0814796885, p. 8

⁵ <http://www.challies.com/archives/articles/like-father-lik.php>

⁶ <http://fromthemorning.blogspot.com/2004/10/cats-in-cradle.html>

I've long since retired, my son's moved away
I called him up just the other day
I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind"
He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time
You see my new job's a hassle and kids have the flu
But it's sure nice talking to you, Dad
It's been sure nice talking to you"

Here is a flashback to how the song began, only this time, the scenario has migrated to the next generation

And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me
He'd grown up just like me
My boy was just like me

The final verse in the Old Testament prophesied a time when "*He* [in this case the prophet Elijah] will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers;..." -- Malachi 7:6

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon
Little boy blue and the man on the moon
When you comin' home son?
I don't know when, but we'll get together then son
You know we'll have a good time then

Where are our priorities with respect to balancing work, marriage, recreation, social obligations and family?

Final Thoughts:

Some of you might say, "Well, at least this kid had a dad.... I didn't!". To Christian men, please note that God characterizes the act of visiting the fatherless as "*pure and undefiled religion*" (James 2.18).

It has also been said that a man's impression of God the Father is colored by his perception of his earthly father. Through our ministry team's visits to various prisons, it has become painfully clear that many of the male inmates there hate their fathers – typically for abandoning, neglecting, or mistreating them. Bottom line – it is critical that fathers take their role seriously – as what our children see in us, whether good or bad, they will almost inevitably model.

Recognizing the critical role fathers play is one thing... but as the "Cat's In The Cradle" lyrics illustrate so starkly, we have but one brief window of opportunity to fulfill that role. The Bible describes how fleeting life is. How much more fleeting is our chance to redeem the few years we have to nurture a positive, meaningful relationship with our children! A former supervisor and I were comparing notes about our sons. He expressed regret concerning how his career and various activities had consumed his life when his son was very young. Then he held up one hand and pointed to his little finger. "Do you see this?" he asked. "I would cut this off in a heart-beat just to be able to go back in time and do things differently."

Proverbs 20:7 says, "*The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him*". Consequently, we have a God-ordained responsibility to model positive, godly beliefs, behavior and actions for them.

Of course none of us can do that, yet God has given us the opportunity to shape how we live today and the days to come. For those of you who may have missed the chance to spend sufficient quality time with your children when they were young, perhaps God will give you opportunities to be a positive influence on the growth of your grandchildren, or to children growing up without a father. Please prayerfully consider what God would have you do.

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