

David Hodson (500 words)

My son telephoned me recently.

He doesn't call as often as I would like, but he's an adult with his own life to lead, so it's always pleasant when he does contact me. We arranged our usual social liaison, our tipples of choice; an afternoon of staring, moaning, groaning, enthusing and quite probably swearing at the television as we watch football.

For a couple of years in the mid-noughties I and my son, who is now in his late twenties, had a very strained relationship. I had split with his mother in 2001 and, although the circumstances were unhappy, my son and I seemed to be on an even keel. However, in 2003, my life took some unhappy detours off the straight and narrow and this badly affected our relationship.

Rather than turn this into an episode of Trisha Springer or Oprah Kyle, let me say that our relationship is now fine. He is now old enough to be as much my friend as my son, which is a stage any parent should hope to reach. It's a much better relationship than the one I share with my own father.

I come from a working class background: son of a builder and scaffolder, grandson of a roofer. When my son was born I was a bookseller and his mother, a middle-class girl (I pulled above my station) was a "personal assistant", but we lived in a working class area of North London. No matter how hard I tried to climb the greasy class pole, our football fixation was our cultural heritage.

My son supports the same team I do, as did my father — despite our other differences — and my grandfather. I would like to say football was the only time my father and I ever saw eye-to-eye, but I would be lying. In fact it underlined every difference that existed between us; a conversational battlefield where every view I espoused was opposed. I was born on the Saturday that our team last won the league and my father missed the game because of my thoughtlessness. To make matters worse, I was a week late appearing behind the gooseberry bush and, having been born after April 5th rather than before, thus caused him to lose a whole year's tax rebate for me. As a child of the early 1960s and first born, I was also ineligible for family allowance. Thrice damned worthless as I drew my first breaths! No wonder we had such a strained relationship.

Happily, my son and I have no such stresses between us. We enjoy each others' company, especially when watching football. Friends of his and friends of mine who have shared our company at such times speak in complimentary terms of our relationship, wishing they had the same with their own fathers or sons.

Time to check the television schedules for the next few weekends ... it must be my turn to telephone my son.