I became a father in 1992. However as my daughter Mona was raised by her mother, fatherhood at the bottle feeding, diaper changing, bottom cleaning, 24/7 care level really only began in 2007 when my wife gave birth to our son Tasi. And just when we thought we were finally going to get to sleep again, our daughter Maya entered center stage, on cue, in 2009.

It goes without saying that there is a difference in the immediacy of the maternal and the paternal bond. Dad’s physical contact with baby, after-all, begins with a nine-month handicap and to top it off Mom has the boobs. That is not to say that I was not immediately taken by the miracle of birth, the wonder of our blend and the weight of the responsibility. But it was not love at first sight. Of course I loved our children in the sense that they became priority one from the day they popped out (my wife would take issue with this characterization of their birth) and that I was one hundred percent focused on their well-being. But fatherhood is a relationship and like all relationships it took time to develop. And with time I have come to know and fall in love with this pair of personalities.

And fall in love I have. The thought of anything happening to our children is too painful to contemplate. Sometimes dreadful “what ifs” send chills running up my spine. John Irving speaks of the terror of parenthood and how this is a reoccurring theme in his work. What would I do without the beaming smiles and “Daddy!” that greets me when I come home. I hate it now that travelling by car is one of the most dangerous things we do. Climate change, wars, financial meltdowns, what kind of a world have I brought my children into? The World Health Organization reported that we are possibly on the brink of a drug resistant tuberculosis pandemic. XDR-TB it’s called. XDR as in “EXTRA drug resistant.” Now what am I supposed to do with that? Be EXTRA careful? The truth is that you can try (you must) to keep harm at bay but despite all that you do threats will always be there. Fatherhood is sobering in that way.

Of course one cannot live in constant fear. In fact recent studies show that over protecting your kids does them a disservice in the self-confidence and creativity departments. Life has to be lived. Fortunately, it turns out that kids are remarkably solid. That golf ball sized bump on his head he got banging into something disappeared in three short days. That black and blue fingernail doesn’t seem to bother her a bit. Wipeouts that would set an adult back a couple of weeks may trigger a tear or two but three minutes later it’s time to climb something else.

Fatherhood is also liberating in the sense that one’s responsibilities become clearly delineated. I once heard an interview of a man who lost his sight through a degenerative eye condition. Incredibly he felt the loss of his eyesight had simplified his life as his priorities were now reduced to the mundane – how to get to the grocery store to buy food, for example. Having a kid is something like that. The kid centric whirlwind you get sucked into focuses your lifestyle whether you want that or not.

Challenging? Sure it is. But fatherhood is also bliss and a sense of purpose that is wonderfully calming. It is laughter. It is tears. It is love. It is life’s greatest experience and I am thankful to be there for the ride.