Richard, you’re a good

father to our children

**History. Baggage. Drama. Unresolved**

**issues.**

I have realised that these are some of

the things that we bring into relationships

and, by extension, parenting. They

are like generational curses or blessings,

depending on how you look at them. I

know that my partner, Richard, has his

own back story which we have to couple

or clash with mine as we raise our

children.

I had a good relationship with my father.

Psychologists say that if one’s father

was outstanding, women look for their

fathers in their partners. Unconsciously

or not, I might have been looking for my

father in Richard.

However, my father also had his tragic

flaws. When I was growing up, he left

me and another sibling upcountry for

prolonged periods since he lived and

worked in Nairobi. I felt as if we had

been neglected by the person who

claimed to love us. We were abandoned

and forgotten, sometimes for many

months, only to be remembered when

occasions or vacations demanded.

That is why I want a father for all seasons

for my sons. Not a seasonal father. Richard

and I have our differences, which

are normal to most couples, but we are

unanimous about giving our children

the best upbringing that we can. This

involves not just being alive and kicking,

through antiretrovirals and all, but also

being there through thick and thin.

At times, the nature of our work takes

us miles away from each other and our

children. Still, we always do our best to

make sure that the absences are not too

long.

**Dearth of father figures**

I raised Peter, my firstborn son, alone. I

did the best I could under the circumstances.

However, I know that had there

been a man in the picture round the

clock, Peter would have benefited more.

I felt this gap on birthdays, and especially

during his traditional rite of passage

several years ago. My emotional

load would have been lighter. Men and

women are tuned differently. As much

as I tried to be a father, I could not fit

into those particular pants.

I hope this thirst for a father figure will

not kill Peter’s fathering instincts. He did

not have a live-in example or role model

and that can be some people’s undoing.

Peter may have missed out on that

relationship, but I believe this can bring

out his A-game when his parenting time

comes.

**Oath of silence**

My work revolves around orphans and

vulnerable children. It does not for

one moment escape my mind that my

children are truly blessed to have two

biological parents. Nowadays, because

of advancement in treatment and care

of people living with HIV, more parents

are living to see their children and their

children’s children.

In the early days, almost always the

first parent to succumb to HIV-related

complications was the father. Whereas

women were quick to go out of their

way to share experiences and seek

psychosocial and medical help, most

men preferred to die “like soldiers”. I

am afraid to say that even today, when

HIV has been demystified, there are men

living with HIV — fathers and husbands

— who are still caught in this deathly

oath of silence.

I met Richard because he was man

enough to break his silence. In retrospect,

I now see that he did not do it

just for himself. He did it for the future.

He did it for our four adorable sons who

bring us tremendous joy. And for that I

am thankful.

**Different strokes for different folks**

My sons, Joshua and Israel, have found

out that they can walk all over me. I always

thought I was a toughie until they

came along with their charm. I know

that when the twins, Gabriel and Baraka,

learn to crawl, their older brothers will

infect them with this walk-all-over-poormom

virus.

That is why it is good to have Richard

around. His tough love helps put the

boys in their place. My father handled

things differently. With most of his

children, he did not spare the rod, even

when it was not necessary. That, if not

handled with restraint, can be a recipe

for discord. I do not want our sons to

grow up resenting their father. Rather,

I want them to respect him. That is

because I know that Richard and I are

passing them to other hands. They

are not ours for keeps. And I desire, if

there is any hint of a (fatherhood) generational

curse, that it be broken in my

generation.

Happy Father’s Day.

HIS TOUGH LOVE IS GOOD FOR THE BOYS

**This is the diary of Asunta Wagura, a mother-of-five who tested HIV-positive**

**23 years ago. She is the executive**