

## ONE FATHER'S TESTIMONY

John W. Fountain is a professor of journalism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He was formerly a national correspondent for The New York Times. This is his testimony in the NPR series, "This I Believe":

I believe in God. Not that cosmic, intangible spirit-in-the-sky that Mama told me as a little boy "always was and always will be." But the God who embraced me when Daddy disappeared from our lives—from my life at age four—the night police led him down the stairs, away from our front door, in handcuffs. The God who warmed me when we could see our breath inside our freezing apartment, when the gas was disconnected in the dead of another wind-whipped Chicago winter, and there was no food, little hope, and no hot water.

The God who held my hand when I witnessed boys in my 'hood swallowed by the elements, by death, and by hopelessness; who claimed me when I felt like "no-man's son," amid the absence of any man to wrap his arms around me and tell me, "everything's going to be okay," to speak proudly of me, to call me son.

I believe in God, God the Father, embodied in his Son Jesus Christ. The God who allowed me to feel his presence—whether by the warmth that filled my belly like hot chocolate on a cold afternoon, or that voice, whenever I found myself in the tempest of life's storms, telling me (even when I was told I was "nothing") that I was something, that I was his, and that even amid the desertion of the man who gave me his name and DNA and little else, I might find in Him sustenance.

I believe in God, the God who I have come to know as father, as Abba—Daddy.

It wasn't until many years later, standing over my father's grave for a conversation long overdue, that my tears flowed. I told him about the man I had become. I told him about how much I wished he had been in my life. And I realized fully that in his absence, I had found another. Or that he—God the Father, God my Father—had found me.