

Can You Confirm You're My Father?

I usually spend a Sunday afternoon in the company of my elder daughter Laura and my three grandchildren. I love them dearly (dearly being the operative word, particularly when the ice cream van stops right outside my daughter's house) I'm not saying the kiddies are boisterous but the bruises and swelling usually clear in a day or two...

Recently, daughter Laura confirmed me as a 'friend' on the social networking website Facebook. My other daughter, Michaela, already has me as a 'friend' as does my fiancée. I'm not sure whether to be pleased or desperately saddened by this although you may glean from the tone of this article, I'm leaning towards the latter...

Facebook has become a world-wide phenomenon. It can also be quite addictive. Sorry – make that *very* addictive. When I use the term 'social networking' it can, in many ways, be described as anti-social networking. The other day Michaela sent me a message on Facebook, to which I responded fairly quickly. You may ask what is wrong with this – the fact we were in the same house at the same time should answer that question.

There's something about the idea of Facebook and its ilk that doesn't sit right with me (and I'm not talking about these ill-fitting trousers I'm wearing) Jeannie Bloggs posts that's she's making chicken casserole for supper. Whoop de doo. Then Fred Smith posts that '*he likes this*' with a thumbs up sign. Now the whole world knows what Jeannie is having for supper and can comment if they wish (providing, of course, they're 'friends' of Jeannie...) Fred is suitably impressed to tell the world he's very happy at this turn of events and hopes all goes well. Jeannie will then film the 'event' with her smart

phone and put the clip on Facebook and YouTube. Depending on how many 'friends' Jeannie has, the recording of her cooking supper will then be available all around the world. At this point, if you're like me, you may well be asking 'why?' But Chuck in downtown Texas will be thrilled by this and 'share' the page with his 'friends'. Before you know it, 'innocuous' has become 'viral...'

As I type this I have received a message – on Facebook, naturally – from Laura which says 'she has listed me as her Dad'. To confirm this 'family request' I have to follow the link on the message. Hmm. What if I don't confirm this 'family request'? Does this mean I'm no longer father to my elder daughter? Has Facebook taken over the world to the extent I have to confirm my relationship with my family members on the site?

Of course, by joining Facebook I'm well aware I am contributing to this sad, almost geeky state of affairs. Laura and Michaela wouldn't hesitate to tell you they think I'm the world's biggest geek in any case. As I say, Facebook can become addictive and there are those who go on the site several times a day, every day. On the plus side, I have made contact with some people I haven't heard from in years – although some of them won't make 'real' contact by phone or email, they'll continue to do so via Facebook. Which makes me think, are they real friends or are they just keen to impress the world with how many people they know?

I now find that I need to check my daughters Facebook page in order to find out news about how they are. If the kids are ill, it's on Facebook. Now, you can call me an old fogey (you're an old fogey – Ed) but I find it rather disconcerting that someone in Australia finds out my four year old daughter has a tummy bug before I do...

Perhaps I'm being cynical. Which is unlike me, I know. However, when I was a small child in the late 1960s, I used to

have an imaginary friend. Now, nearly 50 years later, I'm on Facebook – and I have more than 60 of them...