



FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

“Daddy’s Day”

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It can't get any better than this. Start the day with a brisk jog...on the treadmill (nothing “brisk” about 90-ish degrees at 6:00 am). Throw in a new Under Armour athletic shirt (to match my five year old “tomboy” daughter’s wardrobe), a designer four-sided trashcan with pics of the family, a motivational book about fatherhood, and homemade wrapping paper with likenesses of bugs, planes, dinosaurs, ballplayers, and some abstract art (love those squiggly lines). A trip to the bagel place (to-go) with my 19-month old which resulted in an impulse purchase of a chocolate muffin (actually two), though I put my foot down over that cookie (harsh life lesson). A casual brunch for the family at our home prepared with love by my wife (I brewed the coffee) that included a tasty egg and cheese soufflé, French toast casserole, bagels, lox and cream cheese, cinnamon pull-apart cake, lemon cake (Dr. Atkins would not approve), and berries for garnish.

An afternoon lounge on the couch with the movie Cars I (only a brief snooze), about 15 (losing) games of Sequence for Kids, and a few heated battles of Dodge Ball (in which rules change every few minutes). Take-out Mexican food for dinner with the kids’ favorite chips and queso (mine too...double-dipping not only allowed, but encouraged), and chocolate cinnamon ice cream for dessert. Another game of Sequence, a few Dora the Explorer bedtime books, and a late-night story to cap off a great day. Not a bad way to spend a Sunday (and a nice Father’s Day to boot).

BETTER LATE THEN NEVER

I must admit, I relish the dad role, especially since 10 years ago in my “wild and crazy” bachelor days, I was so busy chasing underwear models, I never thought I would slow down long enough to have children of my own. (Stop laughing, honey.) As the calendar took me beyond my 30s, I began to question whether fatherhood (or even marriage) was in the cards. Yet, lo and behold, in my early 40s I fell in love (luckily that same someone fell in love with me too), and suddenly kids entered the discussion and actually became a real possibility. While I always loved kids, I was never sure I was cut out to be a father. Sure, I spent tons of time playing with my sisters’ girls and loved watching my buddies’ little ones grow up, but other people’s kids...that’s easy. At the end of the day, I was able to go home and fall asleep to SportsCenter, while their parents dealt with their late-night tantrums and cursed me out for getting them wound up (payback is hell).

Needless to say, when I first learned “we” were pregnant, I became a nervous wreck (much to the shock and dismay of my long-time friends). Heck, I had never been responsible for anything in my entire life. My mom would probably be doing my laundry if I was still single. Her “little boy” was finally growing up, and yet I was totally “freaked out” before my oldest daughter was born. But the first time I held her; the first time she opened her eyes and gave me the once over; the first time she grabbed my finger as if to say “hey daddy”...all that worrying and freaking out, it was all so worth it. Five-and-a-half years later, the worrying never ends, but is far surpassed by the fun, the joy, the pride, the unconditional love (at least, most of the time).

A HANDS-ON DAD

Since the first day she entered our lives, I have rocked her to sleep at night, wiped many a snuffle (and many a tushy), and carried her so often I may have delayed her walking (and her crawling). I have prepared frozen chicken fingers, mac and cheese, and spaghetti and meatballs to her liking (we share the same exact picky eating habits) and hypocritically begged her to eat veggies (unlike her dad). I cried from a distance as she (and Froggie) struggled through those first few days of nursery school, overflowed baths with more bubbles than necessary, became an expert on Dora, Caillou, Berenstain Bears, and SpongeBob (which sadly I find myself watching long after

everyone is asleep). I have dropped her off at school in the morning (at the classroom, not in carpool), jumped in bouncy houses at birthday parties, held her hand and dried her tears during several rounds of stitches (we both proudly wear that same scar on our chins as a badge of courage). I celebrated milestones as unused overnight pull-ups got tossed in the trash, baby teeth were exchanged for tooth fairy gifts, and caps and gowns were donned at pre-school graduation.

I have served as Coach on sports teams, much to the chagrin of others dads who soon wrote off their kid's professional futures because we focused more on Duck Duck Goose than the games themselves. I have grown frustrated over her listening skills (or lack thereof) and apologized moments after every argument (in stark contrast to the advice offered in virtually every parenting book ever written). I have watched her make friends, gain independence, and (at times) prefer their company to mine. Lately she shies away from holding my hand in public, gets embarrassed when I kiss her goodbye at school, and rolls her eyes at the same shenanigans that used to crack her up just days earlier. (I thought the "eye-roll" didn't start until the teenage years.) And yet, at the end of most days, she still wants me to lie down and tell her a story. It is during those late-night talks that I learn most about her day, her likes and dislikes, her school work and play time, her friends and crushes, her worries and fears. And I remember that she's still my little girl.

ROUND TWO

Since the day my oldest daughter was born, I have been totally obsessed with her. So much so, that I worried I could never love another child as much as her. And then the baby came along four years later. She gave me that same initial stare; that first smile (maybe it was gas?); and we bonded in an instant. A friend once described to me that it's as if your heart just opens up to make room for another. And that is a pretty good description. Now I am obsessed times two (and still in a constant state of worry). I forgot how much I loved (literally) the 3:00 am feedings when the house is totally quiet and we simply stare and memorize each other's faces. This baby was a bit more colicky than her sister (still not sure what that means), but the crying gave me the opportunity to come to her rescue with a warm shoulder, a bottle of milk, a made-up song in which she was the star. In time, the tears were replaced by smiles, then laughter, and finally conversation that few besides a father and daughter could truly understand. Now she converses with the world, though I still like to think we maintain our own little secrets from the early days and I relish those early morning calls of "Daddy Daddy" (as long as they are not TOO early).

I have been thrilled to get reacquainted with Dora and Caillou, though Elmo is now a fan favorite since his friend, Zoe, shares my little one's name. I love watching her emulate her sister and follow her everywhere, despite the constant tormenting that I assume older siblings are required to dish out as a right of passage. While I often defend the baby, I try to understand the challenges of going from "totally spoiled only-child" to "sister of a toddler who can do no wrong." I seek out special time to spend alone with my oldest as we enjoy father-daughter trips to the movies, the pool, and the park while her sister naps, though occasionally her friends now join our party.

I know my girls will grow up and I'm excited to watch (and participate) as they walk through life. My "older" friends warn me to relish these days as they pass too quickly. They tell their teenage kids goodbye on Friday mornings and don't see them again until Sunday nights (and those "rolled eyes" come more often). They see them grow more comfortable on their own...from sleepovers to summer camp and finally to college. They worry about things far scarier than runny noses and loose teeth. They spend Father's Day on the golf course because their kids have made other plans (or that's their excuse). They hope their kids have learned their "life lessons" and understand right from wrong because, in many cases, their friends have become more influential. For now, I will enjoy the matching Under Armour shirts, bad pizza at Chuck E Cheese, endless SpongeBob episodes, and weekly toddler gym classes. I will brag about routine accomplishments, stress about insignificant issues, and agonize over the silliest arguments. I will (try to) enjoy each moment with my kids to the fullest because, after all, every day is really Father's Day.

***FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH** is a publication of Brounes & Associates focusing on not much of anything other than personal anecdotes, musings, and mindless thoughts about life. Please call Ron at 713-962-9986 (ron@ronbrounes.com) for questions and/or comments, and check out www.ronbrounes.com for earlier issues and for financially-oriented pieces. "Dad's" Day is more special because it coincides with "Mom's" Day and a certain someone to share family moments (who makes a great egg and cheese soufflé).*