



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Daddies Be Good To Your Daughters

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I saw an old friend recently and asked about his little girl.

He immediately turned to mush.

The transformation advanced like this: His head tilted. He smiled. His body softened as if he'd been microwaved five seconds. In a final gesture, he rapped on his heart...one, two, three times. He never did speak, however.

He didn't have to.

I know it sounds sappy, but the relationship between daddies and daughters turns me into putty, too. In fact, if you ever see me driving down the road with tear goggles on, I'm probably listening to some country tearjerker like "Butterfly Kisses," "I Loved Her First," or Tim McGraw's "My Little Girl." Any lyrics that remind me of my girls as babies—then fast-forward my imagination to their wedding days, where they're waiting to be given away—pull my heartstrings in every direction.

Given this, is it any surprise that I have a soft spot for doting dads? I can spot them in crowds and, fortunately, see plenty in our community. Many are guys I knew in college, cool daddies who rocked the house at band parties—always with a beer in hand. I run into them at birthday celebrations, the ball field, even the Tot Lot, and smile at the evolution. Sixteen years ago, I never would've believed they'd wind up pushing strollers, wearing Baby Bjorns, talking proficiently about Disney princesses and potty training. But here they are, taking parenting by the horns.

I love it.

Today's dads are hands-on, and as my mom jokingly notes, this wasn't the case in her day. Her point hit home years back when my dad asked his four son-in-laws to help assemble a bed. With the bed intact, it came time to add linens. My dad held up the fitted sheet and glanced around in puzzlement. "What do I do with this?" he asked. His son-in-laws burst out laughing. As one wryly remarked, Mom's assumption of all domestic duties was a lesson she did *not* pass on to her daughters.

But while Dad never changed my diaper, or cleaned up after me, he did provide everything a young girl needs: love, faith, and security. I grew up with one brother and three sisters, but I still felt like Daddy's girl. My dad has this uncanny ability to embrace our differences in a way that makes each child feel like his favorite.

Looking back, I recognize the comfort zone Dad created. He set the standard for how the opposite sex should treat me, and though it didn't save me from dating some not-so-fabulous guys, it did attune me to warning signs. Whenever someone strayed outside the parameters, an inner

alarm went off. Of course, like many girls I learned to tune the alarm out, press snooze when I wanted more time, but eventually the feeling that something *just wasn't right* prevailed. After a certain number of strikes, I wouldn't like the person anymore.

Fortunately, I married the sweetest guy possible. And in silent calculation, I sized him up to my dad and my brother—another father figure to me—while we dated. *Would he move heaven and earth to protect me? Does he have God in his heart and make me a better person? Does he love the "real" me, quirks and all?* When no buzzers sounded on my laundry list of questions, I knew I could trust my instincts. I now rely on Harry to instill similar yardsticks in our daughters.

Obviously, there's no guarantee that girls who know better will do better—or that those whose fathers fall short will settle later on. People disprove this theory every day. It is fair to suggest, however, that daughters of devoted dads have a leg up in future relationships. If nothing else, they won't waste years of their life wondering why they can't trust those of the XY chromosome.

If you have a little girl, remember that she craves more than the obvious "I love you." Like her larger counterparts, she picks up on every subliminal cue. So before she loses her baby fat, or fixes her buck teeth with braces, assure her she's beautiful. State it as a fact, not opinion. When she sits by you in church, hold her hand protectively, squeeze it from time to time. Tell her you're proud of her just because—*before* she brings home straight A's, or declares a new achievement. And as you watch her dance routine for the fifteenth time, plant a smile on your face. When she's up on stage, peering into a dark audience, that smile is what she'll see.

The older she gets, the more she'll roll her eyes, tell you you're overprotective, complain that you embarrass her. Deep down, however, she'll be grateful someone cares so much. Your attention will make her feel *worthy*.

And isn't that what we all want, daughters who feel worthy? Who have a core of confidence in place for when the world starts chipping away? It saddens me to think not all girls find early validation at home. On the other hand, there are plenty of daddies knocking the ball out of the park. And to them I'd like to say, keep up the good work.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four with a background in PR, writing, and photography. Contact her at kampakis@charter.net.