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Sesame Family Newsletter

June 11, 2008

The Changing Role of Dads

by Jordan D. Brown

Who are you calling "Mr. Mom?" Oh, me.

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This Father's Day, show Dad how much you love him with a gift to Sesame Workshop on his behalf. He'll receive a special e-card featuring popular *Sesame Street* Muppets from around the world!

Whether the dad in your life is your father, grandfather, son, or friend, he'll be honored to know that his gift helps us teach children school readiness skills, as well as lessons about emotions, respect, and mutual understanding.

[Send Dad an E-Card Today!](#)



THE DIFFERENCE ONE HUNDRED YEARS CAN MAKE

Thanks to the Internet -- that bottomless pit of wonderfully useless trivia -- I discovered that this year marks the one hundredth

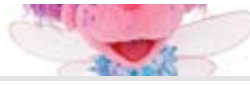


anniversary of the first Father's Day in the U.S. I also learned that one of the fathers who inspired this national holiday was a Civil War veteran who raised six kids by himself. As the married father of two rambunctious young children, I thought, "What? SIX kids? By HIMSELF?!" In honor of Father's Day (June 15), I'd like to reflect on how the role of dads has changed in recent years. I would also like to pass along some tips to any beleaguered dads, who -- like myself -- sometimes find the, um, "joys of parenthood" elusive.

When my father and grandfather became parents, it was understood that they would spend most of their time doing what their fathers and grandfathers did before them: earn money outside the home. Cooking, diaper changing, organizing playtime activities... these were considered "women's work."

When I became a dad for the first time in 2001, I knew that things would be different. My wife Ellen had the better paying job and benefits. After being in an office for nearly ten years, I was working from home as a freelance writer. In addition, my passion for cooking dovetailed with my handling the childcare. So, with a combination of excitement and trepidation, we agreed that after my wife's maternity leave, I would be our son Finn's primary caregiver during the day. (My dog Satchmo was also very happy with this decision.)

Three years later, when my daughter Olivia was born, Ellen and I decided to continue our arrangement. It was working, so why change it? During the seven years since Finn was born, I've noticed more and more fathers staying home to care for their children. I don't need to read magazine articles or see TV news programs to know that I'm part of a much wider trend. A simple trip to the playground, supermarket, or laundromat gives me all the evidence I need. Stay-at-home dads are here to stay.



[TODAY'S DADS](#)

There's a good reason today's fathers are more involved than ever.

[ARE TODAY'S DADS DIFFERENT?](#)

Read what dads have to say about fatherhood today.

[THE DAD REPORT](#)

Being a good father isn't just about earning money anymore. See what today's dads think parenting is all about.

[STAY-AT-HOME DADS](#)

A father reflects on the joys of parenthood.

OPERATION: CHAOS CONTROL

Going to the supermarket with the kids after school is always a challenge. Before we go inside, I give my usual, "I need you two to behave" spiel, but secretly I know that a fair amount of chaos will be coming my way. Finn and Olivia behave at preschool and school, and I know after school is their time to blow off steam, get silly, and engage in what I call "sibling revelry." If the supermarket aisles have little coupon dispensers, I can count on my kids having a contest to see who can get more "money." A trip to the produce section will probably involve their each grabbing a string bean and pretending it is the mustache of a villain. They'll put toys and other random groceries in the shopping cart to see if I notice. (Oh, things like five eggplants).

Sometimes, in an effort to get us to the checkout, I'll just pick up 40-pound Olivia in one arm, while insisting that Finn help me push the cart. Invariably, there are bouts of whining and multiple trips to the bathroom. I've often thought that a trip to the supermarket with young children could be a new Olympic sport. ("Sports fans, he's nearing the checkout now. This father's going to win the gold! But wait, his daughter has lost her shoe in the dairy aisle -- and now his son has collided with a display of chips...It's all over!")

Usually, at the peak of chaos, some friendly shopper will wander over and say the thing I've heard on many previous supermarket trips, "I can see you have your hands full." I smile and press on. But when I hear this, I can't help thinking that if I were a woman with two energetic kids, they probably wouldn't make this comment. In a subtle way, they're saying, "Hey, Mr. Mom, out of your element, aren't you?"

But I wouldn't trade being a stay-at-home dad for the world. I find that with the right attitude, even these hair-raising moments are enjoyable...especially in retrospect.



[THE SECRET LIVES OF SESAME DADS](#)

The private joys, jolts, and challenges of the Sesame Street dad.

[VIVE LA \(DAD\) DIFFERENCE!](#)

Research shows fathers play an important role in a child's development.

[DAD TIME. FUN TIME](#)

Readers recall the games they grew up playing with their dads.

ADVICE FOR BELEAGUERED FATHERS (LIKE ME)

As a stay-at-home parent, I've learned a few things along the way. While these tips are geared for dads, they also apply to at-home moms.

1) **YOU'RE NOT ALONE.** Many stay-at-home dads feel uncomfortable at the playground when most of the other parents are moms. It is important to take the risk of initiating playdates for your kids. I learned early on in my parenting days that it is a good idea to bring along some cool, inexpensive toy for Finn to share with other children (e.g., bubbles, sidewalk chalk, paper airplanes).

2) **TAKE CARE OF YOU.** You know how on airplanes, the flight attendants always say, "Put on your oxygen mask first before you help your children." Same goes for everyday life. Parenting can be very rewarding, but also very draining. It is vitally important that you find a little time every day to do something for yourself. In the days before we had a part-time babysitter, I made a point of relaxing during my son or daughter's naptime. It is usually a mistake to squeeze in "one more thing" during this down time. It is also easy to get trapped into thinking that you must constantly plan and structure your children's playtime. Sometimes "doing nothing" is exactly what your children want and need.

3) **CAPTURING THE CHAOS.** When I'm having one of "those days" with my children, I try to remember that as frustrating as things might be, it will all be over much too quickly. I'm going to look back on these times as the most precious in my life. When Finn and Olivia are doing all they can to make the day an "Olympic challenge," I often make a point of documenting these chaotic moments (rather than get frustrated by them). I'll take snapshots, pull out the video camera, or even jot down some of their quotes, so I can capture the vivid details for the future.

Well, it's time for me to return to my daddy duties... Finn needs help making a deep-sea anglerfish puppet for a school science project, and Olivia is eager to put on a fashion show of all the dresses in her closet.

Oh, look! Olivia just yanked all the dresses out of her closet. And she put them in a huge pile on the floor. Isn't she helpful?

Hope you and your family have a fun-filled Father's Day.

Jordan D. Brown



[HOW DO THEY DO IT?](#)

Success secrets of stay-at-home moms and dads.

[STAY-AT-HOME DADS. UNITE!](#)

How to connect with other dads just like you.

WEEKLY TRIVIA

Some of the best father-child moments on Sesame Street come courtesy of Baby Bear and his dad, Papa Bear. Which of these Muppeteers plays the part of Baby Bear?

- A. David Rudman
- B. Kevin Clash
- C. Frank Oz
- D. Jerry Nelson

Pencils down! The answer is (A) David Rudman.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP



Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary *Sesame Street*. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat*, *Pinky Dinky Doo* and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of

Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org.

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