



The Fun Side of Fatherhood



*Did you know Father's Day is 100 years old this year? Thanks to his kids' boundless love, humor, and energy, **Jordan D. Brown** rarely feels that old himself.*

How It All Began

This Sunday, June 20, is Father's Day. Thanks to the Internet--that bottomless pit of trivia--I discovered that this year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the first Father's Day in the U.S. I 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, I'm writing about some of my favorite aspects of fatherhood, those [fun dad activities](#) that always bring me joy.

If you're like me, it's easy to get caught up in the pitfalls of parenthood, and stress out about all the things that go wrong. I've discovered, though, that the path to parental happiness isn't as complicated as we sometimes think. Sure, kids sometimes forget to tell you what a truly great dad (or mom) you are. Remember: Even on your worst parenting days, you're probably doing a MUCH better job than you realize.

Just Being Together, One-on-One

On a recent Saturday morning, my wife Ellen took our son Finian with her to run some errands. Meanwhile, my five-year-old daughter Olivia and I stayed home to deal with a mountain of laundry, clean out her fish bowl, and get ready for a barbecue that afternoon. As soon as Ellen and Finian left the house, Olivia turned to me and said, "Daddy, can I tell you something?" I nodded. "It's..." she said, adding a dramatic pause.

"It's Daddy-Livvy Time!" she shouted. (Livvy, of course, being her nickname.)

I love that Olivia has come up with a special name for the hours we spend together, just the two of us. If you have more than one child like we do, you know that one of the challenges is finding the time to be with just one kid.

I try to make the most of "Daddy-Livvy Time." One of the secrets of success is letting Olivia call the shots, whenever possible. Whatever she wants to do--going for a nature walk ("Maybe we'll find some fossils or a slug"), playing school ("Daddy, do I have to put you in the time-out chair?"), or giving me a makeover ("This red lipstick looks beautiful on you!")--I roll with the punches. Olivia recently learned that "Dad" is spelled "D-A-D." Recognizing her fondness for complicated pat-a-cake rhymes, during our next "Daddy-Livvy Time", I plan to show her this [video cheer for the letter "D"](#).

Long before Olivia could talk, one of our favorite things to do together was--believe it or not--diaper changes. Mine. (Just kidding...) To keep Olivia distracted and content while she lay on her back, I would make up funny voices, put one of her shirts on my head, and even move her legs rapidly back and forth, like she was a ballet star, and say, "Flutter-flutter-flutter!" I was happy to read in the [Sesame Family Robinson blog](#) that Martin Robinson, the Muppeteer behind Telly Monster and Snuffleupagus has a blast moving his babies' arms and legs in silly ways, as if his children are puppets.



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The Power of a "Victory Twirl"

In a paradoxical way, children have the unusual power to exhaust and energize us. Just when I think I'm about to fall asleep from playing yet another game of cops-and-robbers or hide-and-seek, one of my children will say something sweet or do something surprising that jolts me out of my stupor like a shot of espresso.

Last weekend, on a scorching day, Ellen and I were doing yardwork, while Finian and Olivia were having the time of their lives flying kites, spraying the hose, rolling down the hills, and smashing water balloons (not all at once, mind you).

At one point, Olivia who had been struggling to climb the lower branch of a tree succeeded. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched as she didn't give up. Finally, she shouted, "Daddy, I did it! Give me a Victory Twirl!"

I instantly smiled, dropped my rake and obliged. A "Victory Twirl" is a fun celebratory action that I came up with years ago, when Finian was maybe 2 or 3. It simply involves grabbing the recipient tightly around the waist from behind, and spinning him or her around and around until both of you are a little dizzy and a LOT delighted.

Picture Perfect Presents

When I was a boy of about 5, my Grandpa Milt turned me onto the comedy legend Groucho Marx. We'd watch his movies together, and he taught me how to hold a breadstick to imitate Groucho's famous cigar-wiggling, eyebrow-raising shtick. So, what does this have to do with Father's Day? Hold on, I'm getting to that. One of Groucho's favorite songs to perform was called "Father's Day." The song starts with a child telling his father that he loves him so much he is giving him a tie. Giving ties as father's day gifts fortunately is a thing of the past. (As a stay-at-home dad, I rarely wear ties, except when playing dress up.) If you're looking for a father's day gift that dad will appreciate and treasure forever, take it from me--nothing beats photos and kid-made drawings or cards. The years go by so quickly that having some of the special times captured in a sturdy homemade book can make all the difference. A photo memory book of "Daddy & Me" needn't be elaborate or expensive. If you're feeling creative and adventurous, you can try turning some of the daddy experiences into a simple poem. For inspiration, take a look at [Abby Cadabby's Real People Tales](#) about a boy and his dad. Or, help your little ones [make a board game featuring Dad](#) and then play the game with Dad!

Have a fun and festive Father's Day!

Jordan D. Brown
Sesame Workshop



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