



Sesame Family Newsletter

The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more

May 3, 2006



For Parents

Time Away From the Kids

by *Jordan Brown*

A stay-at-home dad takes a solo vacation.

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From the Workshop



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Time Away From the Kids

A BIG BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

For the past 5 years, I've spent most of my waking hours--and many of my so-called "sleeping hours"--parenting my two young children. Being a stay-at-home dad to my son Finn (age 5) and my daughter Olivia (age 1) is one of the most thrilling and exhausting jobs I've ever had. Since Finn was born, I estimate that I've clocked in more than 35,000 hours doing everything from changing diapers and giving baths to taming tantrums and planning playdates. Monday to Friday, while I'm immersed in these parenting activities, my wife Ellen is busy at her office job, enabling us to pay the bills, have health benefits and much more.

Over the past decade, through her work, Ellen has had the opportunity to travel around the world to countries including China, Brazil, and France. Back in my "pre-dad" work days, I used to enjoy traveling, too. Since Finn was born, though, I've spent most of my time in our immediate neighborhood, either working from home as a writer, or taking care of the kids. These days, a trip 20 blocks away can feel exotic!

A few months ago, for my 42nd birthday, Ellen surprised me with an amazing gift--a round-trip ticket to London, purchased with her frequent flier miles. I would leave on a Wednesday night and return on Sunday afternoon. While I was away, Ellen would take off work to care for the kids. When Ellen presented this gift, you'd think I'd have focused on the excitement of traveling to one of the world's leading cultural and artistic centers. Instead, the first thought that crossed my mind was, "Hey, I could take a shower every day!"

The prospect of taking a vacation was thrilling, but I had some concerns. When Ellen is away on business, being the solo parent for two young children and one excitable dog can be overwhelming. Even with my wife's boundless energy and top-notch planning skills, I knew she'd have her hands full. Last year, in one of my newsletters, I recounted how I dealt with the ups and downs of caring for two kids and a dog by myself. (See "Planning a Balanced Day" next to this section of the newsletter.)

Shortly before I left for London, we decided it would be wise to board our dog Satchmo (Mo) at a "doggie hotel." There, he'd get a chance to sniff and chase other dogs for hours on end, retrieve tennis balls, etc. And, like me, maybe he'd get a chance to take a bath!



TAKING TIME OFF

Even the best parents need a break.

DAD AND THE GIRAFFES

One father's seven days of freedom.

PLANNING A BALANCED DAY

A father juggles the needs of two lively kids and a dog.



UP, UP AND AWAY

Last month, after weeks of planning and packing, I was finally aboard a plane heading for London. As we lifted off, I daydreamed about what it would be like to have four whole days without diapers and deadlines. I was both giddy and wary. Many questions and worries filled my head:

*Would Finn and Olivia understand why Daddy wasn't home for a few days?

*How much time should I spend doing "touristy" things, vs. just "doing nothing" and basking in my freedom?

*Would I truly be able to "let go" of my day-to-day responsibilities and enjoy this rare and special vacation?

*Would I get lonely traveling by myself?

*What if they lose my luggage?

A few days before I left, Finn and I looked at a world map to see exactly where London is in relationship to where we live. He was excited that I'd be flying over the Atlantic Ocean. There wasn't much I could do to prepare Olivia since she's so young. Before heading out to the airport, I gave everyone big hugs and kisses, and told Finn I'd bring him back a "snow globe" from London for his collection. When I waved goodbye, Olivia, in her usual charming way, said "mmm-ahh!" as she blew me a big farewell kiss.

On the plane, as I took off my shoes, grabbed a good book, and gave the flight attendant my drink order, I resolved to make the most of this trip. I would focus on the positive, and do my utmost to embrace the spirit of adventure. Ellen had given me a wonderful gift, and I wasn't going to blow it by wasting my energy on matters that were beyond my control.



COPING WITH GOOD-BYES
[How do you help your children handle separations?](#)

THE FIRST SEPARATION
[Leaving your baby overnight can be difficult for both of you. Here's how to make it easier.](#)

FOUR DAYS, NO KIDS?!

Knowing how fickle my memory can be about recalling details, I kept a notebook of my thoughts and experiences while in London. Here are some excerpts:

*I just got off the London Eye, a big Ferris-wheel-like ride that provides a bird's eye view of Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, London Bridge, Westminster Abbey, and lots more. As the wheel moved very slowly around, I couldn't help wonder how Ellen and the kids are doing. Is Finn having a mini-tantrum about putting on his clothes for school? Has Olivia once again tried scaling the bookcase?

*I can't overstate what a joy it is to take a long, relaxing



shower every day. As I enjoy the relaxing steam, no one is calling, "Daddy, I need you!" While I shampoo, no curious toddler is yanking all the toilet paper off the roll.

*Much as I try to focus on taking a break from being a dad, I find it hard to "play tourist." I walk by a playground in Hyde Park, and immediately think about Finn and Olivia. At a used bookstore, I wish Ellen were with me to browse the shelves. While exploring the Natural History Museum and the Science Museum, I take pictures of all the stuff I know Finn would want to see--huge dinosaur fossils, preserved Angler fish, volcano exhibits, and the like. At an outdoor café, I'm able to get lost in a good book...until I see a woman walking her spaniel. And I feel a bit sad that Mo isn't there to take a stroll with me.

*Actual entry in the handbook in my hotel room: Under the heading "Mosquitoes," it says, "These are unknown in London. For homesick dwellers in warmer climes, an irritating buzz can be arranged by request."

*Will the rain ever let up? London has got to be one of the soggiest cities I've ever visited. Every day, for at least a few hours, it pours! In the closet of the hotel, there's even an umbrella for guests to borrow during their stay. Still, when it rains, I'm not trying to navigate a stroller through city streets, while I hold my son's hand, and clean up after my dog.

* Ellen urged me to take along some books, so that I could read them over meals. I try this out today at an afternoon tea at a nice hotel. Knowing this is going to be on the pricey side, I make it my one big meal of the day. For more than three hours (!), I sip tea, eat finger sandwiches, nibble scones, and gobble decadent pastries. As my dining companion, I have chosen DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE, a collection of humorous essays by David Rakoff. Laughing out loud while I read makes the experience less lonely, although I am getting some strange stares.

*Old habits die hard. I spend so much time being a dad that, at restaurants in London, I scan the menu to see if it lists mac-and-cheese or hot dogs. When I overhear a kid having a meltdown, my instinct is to run over and give the kid a hug or a "timeout". My only one big mistake: Yesterday, I accidentally asked the concierge if he needed to use the potty (just kidding).

"DADDY'S HOME!"

On the last day of my trip, I'm ready to return to my normal life. It's been a refreshing break but I'm eager to get back to my old ways. On the airplane, I'm anxious, and wish I could click my heels a la Dorothy, "There's no place like home," and magically be back with Ellen, the kids, and Mo.



As I turn my key in the front door, I hear Finn shout, "Daddy's home!" He runs over to show me the paper airplane he just made, and tell me the latest facts he's learned about sharks and vultures. Olivia leaps into my arms and gives me a giant hug. Moments later, she says "ih-be bye-buh" which I know means she wants me to sing the "Itsy Bitsy Spider."

As we all snack on some tasty cookies (or "biscuits" as the Brits call them) that I brought back, Ellen fills me in on all her adventures with the kids. "Olivia put her toothbrush WHERE?" I ask... It is a relief to be back on familiar turf.

Nearly a month has passed since I returned, and the relaxing aspect of the trip has long since faded. Nevertheless, I have many marvelous memories, and had a chance to take a break from the stresses of parenthood. Since I've been back, I also realized an important lesson: You don't need an extravagant trip to reap the benefits of time away from the kids. It is not necessary to leave the country for several days to recharge your batteries. Simple "get aways" like taking a walk by yourself for half an hour, going to the gym, or reading a favorite book in a restaurant or coffee shop can be invigorating. Change of scene is vitally important for anyone's sanity, especially parents.

Whether you're planning a mini-vacation, a movie with a grown-up friend, or scheming a way to sneak a nap or a shower into your daily routine, good luck!

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop

Weekly Trivia

Did You Know?

Kermit and Ernie are the only Muppets that are constructed with a built-in smile. All the other Muppets are built without expressions.

FROM THE WORKSHOP

In 1968 when it began, it was one little street. Now Sesame Street reaches around the world to over 120 countries. Your gift of support will allow Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind Sesame Street, to use media for what may be the greatest good, helping children around the world reach their highest potential.

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COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

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

Sesame Workshop

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