

"LIFE WITH FATHER"

Darcie D. Sims, Ph.D., CHT, CT, GMS



I learned everything I know about barbecuing from my dad. Every Saturday afternoon my father began a ritual, which would eventually lead to the family gathering together around the medicine cabinet.



My dad was the only man I know who could take a perfectly wonderful piece of meat and turn it into FISH. After my father would pronounce the meat as "done," my mother would quietly open a can of salmon or defrost one of those tuna casseroles and we'd mark another Saturday backyard barbecue down in the family medical records. I love my dad dearly, but NOT his barbecuing!

Not everyone is a dad (or can be one), but everyone HAS a dad. Whether your dad is still out mowing the lawn, or has already gone to the Hardware Store in the Sky, each of us has memories of our LIFE WITH FATHER.

Over the years, our family has developed a number of rules for our dad. These helped us co-exist with the great barbecuer. Living with DAD became a challenge, one which we still remember...

Dads are brave. Dads always enter the house first, to check for burglars (and to get to the bathroom ahead of the rest of us). Dads check under beds and in closets before turning out your light at night, making sure no Boogeyman is hiding anywhere. Dads climb on roofs to fetch stray kittens and kites, and Dads loan their car keys to newly licensed sons and daughters. Dads ARE brave!

Dads sit at the head of the table. They sit there because they are the head of the family (as opposed to being the tail of the family, which is usually reserved for the last one in the family). Dads become head of the family after they learn to carve the

turkey. They take the lead in family discussions and dispense "When I was a child" stories when things get out of control. Dads never let things get out of control because mothers won't let them.



Dads are strong--or think they are. Our job is to help them believe this even if it means loosening the jar lid before giving it to Dad to open. Because dads are strong, they don't cry much in front of us. Some dads hide their hurts in bottles, some in gruff words, some in stony silence. But dads are strong--at least on the outside.

Dads are busy. Most dads go to work every day. Some go every other day or every other month or every other year. Some already went to work, and some don't have any work to go to, but dads are busy-busy trying to figure out the mysteries of the universe so they can explain them to us. Dads know they must have the answers to all our "why" questions, even the hard ones, even the ones about "death."

Dads can fix anything. They can fix leaky faucets, sometimes turning the m into waterfalls. They save junk so they can turn it into "something useful someday." (Look what they did with us!). Dads mend fences, bicycles, dented fenders and broken hearts. They tell terrible jokes, make gigantic messes and wonderful sandwiches.



Dads are the reason we are here. Without them we wouldn't be. Some of us have warm and wonderful memories of our dad; some have other memories. Some never knew their dad. Some are still barbecuing with him on Saturdays. But, regardless of our Life With Father, our lives have been shaped by that man who, if only for a single moment, loved us enough to give us life.

My dad was a terrible barbecuer, but he fixed my sink and listened to my aching heart. His strong hands surrounded me with love, and his tears blended with

mine as we struggled to find the WHYS of change and the REASONS for death. He was as puzzled as I am and just as helpless. He taught me to look at the stars and walk in the direction of their light, even if I don't know where I am going.

I wish I could call my dad this weekend and just talk. Perhaps I will just look through the scrapbook and remember. Maybe I'll just chat with him in my heart. Maybe we'll cry and maybe I'll fire up the BBQ...

I wonder if mom still has some tuna....

