

COMMENTARY

Job of at-home dad opens a whole new world

A few months ago, my employer "reorganized" me out of a job. After a few days — OK, more than a few days — of anger, I came to a grand realization. I would, at least for a little while, be home with my daughters all day.

It was summertime and I would be home to revel in the joys of being a dad. I had no idea what sort of adventure I was in for. While I always considered myself a pretty "hip" dad, I was now going to be immersed in the day-to-day happenings of two little girls.

Mom would pick up more hours at her job, day care was suspended and Dad would begin a journey into the delicately balanced world of what I call "direct parenting."

Until now, I was a master of "indirect parenting." In the morning, I would peek in on my little sleeping angels, whisper a soft "goodbye," and take off. When I returned home, they would run up to greet me shouting, "Daddy!"

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For The Post-Crescent



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super-late working on an article about who-remembers-what. They want to watch cartoons about seafaring sponges and a turtle that talks. They want breakfast. They want all sorts of stuff, all of which start with Daddy emerging from bed.

But it's not a Saturday. Daddy can't simply transfer from bed to the sofa, turn on the TV and slip back into sleepy-land. There's softball for Daughter #1, and tot sports for Daughter #2. They must be fed and dressed and in the van ... in an hour!

I tell myself I can do this, and that it will be fun. I've got an hour, right. I slowly sit up and open my eyes to a sight that shocks and frightens me. It appears that during the night, Daughter #1 got out of bed and went to a hair salon for Halloween witches. Arrrrgh! What happened to her head? It never

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looks like that when I come home from work!

She looks at me, not realizing my fear, waiting for me to transform the snarly blonde haystack atop her head into ... well ... I don't know what. She tells me, "I want a ponytail! No, piggies (pig tails, for the hair-unaware)! No, no, braided piggies!"

Calmly, confidently, I suggest a hat. It's softball; you'll need your hat, right?

Uh, wrong, Dad. Besides, unless her team is wearing those rainbow-colored reggae-style "Jiffy-Pop" hats, you better get brushing.

No worries, you've got, uh oh, 45 minutes? I begin raking through the tangled forest of hair, getting more and more frustrated by the frequent wincing and ouch-ing from my daughter. Is there no better tool for this? It's like thatching the lawn with a plastic fork.

Finally, I can pull the brush

from forehead to neck. A quick jamming of the now-expanded mop of hair into a "hair-pretty," a glorified rubber band, and I'm done.

I sigh with relief, sweating from the task I've conquered, when I see Daughter #2 standing before me, brush and hair-pretty in hand. Thankfully, #2's hair is much less thick and snarly. Having survived the jungle of #1's head, this would be a piece of cake. Or not.

You see, #2's hair is so wispy, it makes the gathering and holding as difficult as the detangling of #1's. Time is racing. The girls need to get dressed. Daddy needs to get dressed. Breakfast! Water-bottles! "Woof-woof." Didn't Mommy feed the dog? Arrrrgh!

Just then, when it seemed that this time-crunched series of tasks would most certainly send me to the corner of the room, rocking back and forth with my thumb in my mouth, it happened.

Daughter #1 came into the room and said, "Good job on the ponytail, Daddy." Then #2 ran in from her room with her shorts on and shirt stuck on her head. I pulled the shirt over her lopsided ponytail to reveal a smiling little face. "Thank you, Daddy," she said as she scurried

off to get the socks, most likely mismatched, that I laid out for her.

I realized that I was home, with my girls. I was spending time with them that I never realized was shooting by faster than the 13 minutes I had left to get ready that morning. I decided that being a little late for softball is a wee bit less tragic than being late for their childhood.

So, I gave them each a big hug and joined them for a bowl of fruit-oriented-loopy cereal (hey, it's got fruit in the name, and look how healthy the bird on the box looks).

While I had no idea what I was in for, I smiled at the prospect of my new job: At-Home Dad.

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