

The Milestone (or, The Day My Daughter Got Her Ears Pierced)

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(The Santa Barbara Independent - October 20, 2005)

It was quite possibly the best day I'd ever spent with Madison.

The memories of my daughter as an infant didn't seem "just like yesterday", but more like months, than years, had gone by. Mary, my wife, had wanted to get Madison's ears pierced, but I wouldn't let her. I was this bleeding-heart liberal, who'd refused to put holes in his daughter's head until the day she asked for them.

But, the months before her fourth birthday, Madison had been expressing interest in piercing her ears. For a couple of weeks there, she'd announce, "Maybe tomorrow I'll get my ears pierced." But, when tomorrow came, she always decided against it, stating that maybe she'd do it the next day.

Mary and I supported our daughter's uncertainty one-hundred percent. But her mom didn't think she was ready, though, for earrings. Her fear: the pain would be too much, and Madison would fuss with them while her ears were trying to heal. Mary figured our daughter would get earrings when she turned ten.

I had promised I'd take Madison to ice cream when she finally decided to get it done. One night in bed, she asked, "What if I get my ears pierced when I'm an adult?"

"What about it?" I asked.

"Well, will you still buy me ice cream?"

I chuckled, "You probably wouldn't want me to, by then. You'd be all grown-up, maybe living with your own family."

Disappointedly she responded, "Oh."

"But," I continued, "a deal is a deal! If you wanted, I'd still buy you ice cream."

Her face lit up, "Thank you, Daddy."

A few nights later I heard a familiar, “Tomorrow I might get my ears pierced.” When she awoke the following morning, Madison announced, “Today’s the day I get my ears pierced.”

Astounded, I asked, “Really?”

With an enthusiastic nod and an excited smile, she replied, “For real.”

I had the day off and took my girl to preschool and went to the gym for a work-out. An hour later, when I picked her up, she was so pleased to see me. As we left, Madison told everyone, “I’m going to get my earrings!”

That’s when it hit me. What had I gotten myself into? This was really happening. I don’t know anything about earrings. I don’t know what they feel like. I don’t know what kind of pain they cause nor how long the pain lasts. I could feel my heart beating out of my chest as I realized I was going at this alone what with Mary at work.

I reminded Madison. “Sweetie, you don’t have to go through with this if you don’t want.” Something secretly inside me was wishing she’d back out.

“I’ll be okay,” she grinned, “I know it will hurt for a little bit, but I’ll be tough and try not to cry.” Not a hint of fear in those eyes.

When we arrived at Claire’s, an accessory store at the mall, it was all Madison could do to contain herself. It was as if someone had painted a permanent, toothy grin on her face. Giggles continued to slip their way out through her teeth every few seconds. The clerk informed me that since she was the only employee on duty, she’d have to pierce one ear at a time (which meant Madison would know just what to expect with ear number two after ear number one had been pierced). I explained the process, again, “It’ll pinch. Then, the lady will do the other ear. You okay?”

“I’m okay, Dad.”

I had Madison pick out any earrings she wanted (I was completely wrapped around her finger at this point). As the employee raised the gun to my little girl’s earlobe, Madison had no idea what to expect because she was still grinning like the Cheshire Cat. I had no idea because my heart seemed nearly audible as it pounded away.

I saw the piercing point of the gun touch her earlobe... The, the smile immediately disappeared. Madison’s mouth dropped open. Her eyes seemed to

say, “What the heck is this? This isn’t fun anymore.” Then, her frown appeared. It looked as though my baby were going to cry. It felt as though I was, too.

“One’s down, Sweetie. Hang on. There’s just one more,” I was able to force out. The woman pierced ear number two, and Madison was fighting the urge to cry. She breathed in her bottom lip. Three tears fell on her cheeks, but she still made no sound. She never jerked her head nor pulled away. It was over. I rushed to my daughter and held her.

“You did it, Big Girl. You got your ears pierced.” Still on the verge of crying. Truly not knowing, I asked, “Are you sad because it hurt so bad, or because you were scared?”

“It hurt a little,” she warbled, “but I’m scared.”

I tried consoling her, “It’s over. You did it.” Still on the verge. “Do you want to see your earrings?” She nodded with a puffy lower lip.

When Madison saw those green stones stuck in her lobes, those near-sobs became laughter. Her eyes brightened and the tears ceased. She had earrings! It finally hit her. It was over. She’d done it! My daughter really was a big girl!

The woman gave my recovering daughter two lollipops (one for each new hole), and Madison skipped and sang as we continued down the mall, “I got my ears pierced. I got my ears pierced. It hurt just for a little bit, and I tried to be tough. I got my ears pierced. Now I look beautiful.” I didn’t recognize the tune.

Later that day Madison told me that she wanted to do it again the next day, because it didn’t hurt too bad. During the next twenty-four hours she told me a few times that it hurt, but followed that up with, “I’ll be okay”, and a big, bright, beautiful smile.

Madison was ten feet tall. She exuded self-confidence and strength. She drew strangers and not-so-strangers to her that day. She held her head high and was more beautiful than ever. And, it wasn’t the green stone in the earrings that made her more beautiful. It was the milestone.

We went to four places before we found the ice cream. Madison had never been prouder of a McDonald’s Soft Serve ice cream cone as she was on that day. She even shared it with me. “Even though you didn’t get your ears pierced, Daddy,” she explained.

But, maybe I did deserve a lick or two, because it wasn’t just Madison who

reached a milestone that day. I had, also. I had taken another step deeper into the depths of fatherhood. And, with each step I better understand being a dad, I better understand my little girl, I better understand my wife, and most importantly, I better understand myself.

Madison is six now, and she has taught me so much about life and love, things I could never have learned on my own. Being a father is a lifelong journey, and each cautious step is an incredible gift. It can be scary, but I once learned from a little girl that we must face our fears, stay calm, maybe cry a little, then hold our heads high, sing a happy song and eat some ice cream. Thanks, Madison.