

Short End of the Schtick

By Leon Scott Baxter

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In many ways, compared to women, we guys get preferential treatment in our society: more pay for the same job, “distinguished” (not old) as we age, pay less to dry clean a shirt versus a blouse, always a president...never a first-husband.

So, we really shouldn't be complaining, but there is one area where men tend to get the short end of the stick. And, that's parenting. Moms are expected to play the lead role in parenting, where dads sometimes get credit as a supporting character (sometimes just an extra with a line or two). Granted, many moms are terrific at the job and many dads can't quite cut it. But, then again, as men and women should be looked at as equals in careers and politics, so should moms and dads be looked at as having the same potential in the parenting arena. Things have changed for many fathers, stepping up and showing the world that they (we) can change a diaper and help with homework with the best of them.

When I was a kid, every year before a field trip, they would announce, “Now, go home and ask your moms if they can chaperone tomorrow.”

I'd always raise my hand, “Can dad's come, too?” knowing darn well that they could. See, my dad was a part-time ship's rigger (gone sailing for months at a time), and a part-time stay-at-home parent. So, he was usually the only parent with facial hair at our beach and museum excursions.

“Ask your moms if they can make cupcakes for the party,” my teacher would tell us.

“Can I ask my dad?” Just trying to get some equality in the classroom, you know.

Always a bit flustered my teacher would respond, “Oh, yes, Leon. Of course. do you think your father would make cupcakes for us?”

“Probably not, but I wanted to know that he could if he wanted.”

I remember when I first became a dad. Because of my work schedule, my wife, Mary, and I decided that I would care for the baby during my four-week break to save on childcare costs.

“You’re going to let Leon watch the baby... all alone?” one of my wife’s friends asked once. How could a man care for a baby without a woman to help? Sure, I had no experience, but neither had my wife. And, never once in nine years of parenthood has any of my friends ever asked me, “Dude, where are the kids? Don’t tell me you left them with Mary, all by herself? Yikes.”

Whenever I take my girls out to the park without my wife, I get respectful looks and smiles from women as if I just adopted a three-legged mongrel with fleas from the local animal shelter. Apparently, taking the girls to the park is going above and beyond my manly duties. Yet, when I see moms at the park with their kids, rarely is there a man fawning over them for taking the children off Pop’s hands for a couple of hours.

This whole “short end of the stick” thing really becomes apparent when you look at Father’s Day. Turns out, Mother’s Day is the third most popular holiday for sending greeting cards in the U.S., right behind Christmas and Valentine’s Day. Father’s Day is down the list a ways, apparently just before Arbor Day and Ramadan.

Want to know what list Father’s Day tops at number one? The number one day to call you dad collect. Talk about short ends, huh?

And, this season, I’ve been keeping a close watch on the gifts the media is pushing for moms and dads. Moms are supposed to get perfumes, flowers, brunch, jewelry and handbags for Mother’s Day. Dads, on the other hand, we are told, really want ties and underwear. The best commercial I heard on the radio for Father’s day was from Home Depot: “Get Dad a gift card for all the things he really wants.”

Right, here you go, Dad. It’s your day, twenty-four hours to celebrate you. Now, go by some shingles and fix the leaky roof, and if there’s any money left over, build a new windowsill to put Mom’s Mother’s Day flowers on.

Gayot.com lists the Top Ten Mother’s Day gifts. The list includes wine, cupcakes, a spa treatment, a mini-vacation and even a 2008 Nissan Rogue SL 2WD... a car... for Mother’s Day!

About.com offers a similar list for Dad. On that list... a cell phone charger, a hydration system (so Dad can drink water) and a pen that writes in a pool.

“Hey, Dad, I want to show you what you mean to me. I know you drink water. I’ve seen you talk on a cell phone. And, if you ever want to write Grandma a letter while you’re doing the breaststroke, you’re covered. Happy Father’s Day.”

But, really, moms do deserve recognition, and we fathers will keep at it, and try to earn our stripes. In the meantime, though, can we do something about moving Father’s Day back a couple weeks? It’s always summer and my kids are out of school. I’ve been waiting for a ceramic ashtray for nearly a decade.

Happy Father’s Day.