

June 2001

From Father to Daddy

by Allan Shedlin, Jr Connect for Kids

It occurred fifty-four years ago, but the memory remains as vivid to William as if it happened yesterday: When he was four years old, he began carrying a small suitcase around the house whenever his father was gone on one of his frequent business trips. William filled the suitcase with his father's old ties.

Carlos can still feel the warmth of his father's hand as he led Carlos and his younger sister to safety through the rising floodwaters of the Rio Grande River in Albuquerque. That was thirty-two years ago.

Forty-nine years later, Fred is still wondering if his dad really liked the green sourballs he always chose from the bag, or if he just ate them so his kids could have the red ones he knew they preferred.

John remembers asking a friend to remind him to get a vasectomy as soon as he reached puberty. John didn't want to be able to be a father. He didn't want to inflict the same pain on his child that his dad had inflicted on him. That was more than forty years ago.

Henry still marvels, twenty-one years later, about how his father knew precisely what day he was "ready" to ride his two-wheeler. His dad removed the training wheels that day to demonstrate his confidence in his seven-year-old son.

Daddy, the Verb

The scores of men I interviewed for my forthcoming book on lifelong daddying, shared memories like these confirming the importance of fathers—through their presence or absence—in their children's lives. These same men, all fathers, described being a dad as a profound and enriching experience (a finding substantiated by research). Many described feeling a "different" kind of love for their children, a depth of feeling that took many of them by surprise.

In swelling numbers, men are putting their families first. Breaking ranks with their fathers and grandfathers, they are more actively involved in raising their kids than ever before.