

Fathers....Treat Your Daughters Well

It was Father's Day and I just finished reading, *Boys Will Put You On a Pedestal (So They Can Look Up Your Skirt) – A Dad's Advice for Daughters*. My pre-teen daughter has already begun voraciously reading the advice therein (the title alone brings in the customers). The book was written by Philip Van Munching after he nearly was hit by a bus. His immediate thought afterward was, "I wouldn't have been able to share all the advice I have for my daughters with them." So, he decided to write down the advice for all daughters.

Despite the title, the book is not anti-boy. It is written from a humane, light-hearted perspective with lots of humour and self-deprecating anecdotes about the author's growing up time. It is first and foremost an empowering book for teen girls.

Apart from the content, it is the manner in which the book is written and the fact that it was written at all that got my attention. That your first priority following a near death experience is to pass on wisdom to your daughters gives them the message that they are important and worth spending time on. This sends them into the world with the experience of being valued. So does coaching their soccer team or helping them with their homework or driving them to school or changing their diaper. The fathers I know who spend hours coaching, rejoicing in their daughters' accomplishments (no matter how modest), sharing musical ideas (yes, sweetie, Brittany's version of *Satisfaction* may not have been the best) and just generally showing an interest are giving their daughters a priceless gift – self-worth. They are also creating a template against which to judge future relationships. The best way to ensure a healthy choice of a boyfriend is to have a respectful, interested father.

The advice in Philip Van Munching's book is given without strings attached. The effectiveness of the advice is enhanced because it given with some emotional distance, rather than in the heat of a conflict when advice is often given, without solicitation. The book's format is "This is what I think, this is why I think it, and here are a bunch of humorous and poignant examples to back up my viewpoint. You have to decide what is right for you".

This brings up the fine line between advice and narcissistic control. Having a rigid template that your daughter must follow because of your belief system, personal fears or overblown ego and enforcing that template through coercion or emotional control tactics does not produce a healthy, confident woman. The most appalling example of control gone awry recently was the Atwal case where a young woman was killed by her father ostensibly because she violated the father's personal belief system in her choice of boyfriend. Less egregious forms of the same process happen when we are opinionated, unilateral and close-minded with our daughters. If this sounds familiar, don't feel too bad – it's a big club. We men usually know we are right and our daughters are precious, so sometimes we might press our opinions a little too hard. When you've got a feisty

teenage girl disagreeing with you, things can get nasty. It's never too late to come back and have a real discussion where she gets to have her opinion considered. There still might be a ruling imposed at the end of the discussion, but the process breeds confidence and self-worth. As age increases, there should be more times when the decision is your daughter's. Parenting guru, Barbara Collorosso maintains that the goal of parenting is to prepare children to make their own decisions by the age of 18. Giving advice and allowing for (non-life-threatening) mistakes is the recipe for self-reliance.

As for Van Munching's advice about boyfriends - They should be approximately the same age, someone the daughter truly likes (not just because they are on the football team) and they should treat her respectfully. Pretty simple – no shotguns or pointed talks in the study (or psychological tests) with prospective candidates required.

Van Munching's recipe for happiness:

- Deal with issues that make you unhappy
- Get organized
- Figure out who your real friends are
- Move on, if you are hurt by someone (count on Karma to deal with justice)
- Filter out poison (e.g. gossip)
- Open your mind (accept that you may not know everything)
- Be the cause of happiness in others
- Take care of your whole self (body, mind, spirit)

Ok, Dads go show your daughters you love them.

Dr. Jim Browning

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