

Daddyland: Under Construction in 2004

by Andrew Stenhouse

For single parents, time is more carefully scrutinized around the New Year. I tend to notice it more, how quickly it goes and how little of it I actually have left to spend with my kids. I don't want to miss a single day with them. While I am fortunate to see my daughters nearly every day, there are times when it seems like an eternity since I was last with them.

A few weeks ago after I picked them up from their mom's, we were walking back to the car when I remarked how quickly they were growing up.

"When did you two become such little ladies?"

"Dad, I'm 14." Taryn rolled her eyes.

"Well, where have I been?"

She smiled as she poked fun. "You've been in Daddyland."

We all laughed. As we climbed into the Jeep, we joked about Daddyland and tried to decide what and where Daddyland actually is.

We decided that Daddyland, a little like Neverland, is a land where dads want time to stand still. It's a land where dads visit as often as possible in order to hold on to their children, especially when their children are

away. It's a land built entirely on memories.

For some fathers, Daddyland is a sparse place, nearly vacant; not many memories, not much to hold onto. For other dads, though, what a grand place it is—full of wonderful memories. For these dads, Daddyland is always in a huge building program as it becomes grander every day.

Construction never ends.

I want to be one of these dads.

This New Year's, among the other resolutions like losing weight, reading the Old Testament and enrolling in a class, I plan to build up Daddyland by creating lasting memories out of adventures and traditions.

Adventure (ed-ven-cher\ n) *a remarkable and exciting experience.*

Adventures are new experiences that can occur throughout the year. While they can be big adventures like amusement parks and vacation getaways, little adventures like a family night out or an impromptu picnic at the park or beach can be just as meaningful. Simple things mean so much when they are new experiences, and since time together is the real value, experiencing something new with loved ones creates a remarkable memory. What the adventure is, isn't nearly as important as who the adventure takes place with.

These adventures often end up becoming traditions. For example, a great day on Catalina Island, which started out as a big adventure, can become an annual retreat, a big tradition. Traditions, particularly important for single-parent families, provide stability and continuity to a life of constant change.

Tradition (tre-di-shen \ n) *an inherited, or passed down, custom.*

While some of the bigger traditions are usually seasonal ones, small traditions, like Friday nights, occur more regularly. My daughters and I begin each weekend with dinner at a favorite restaurant followed by a walk through Barnes & Noble with Starbuck's coffee and hot chocolate. We can spend hours in the bookstore and rarely leave empty-handed. It's our Friday night ritual. It's our tradition.

Just the other day as I was paying bills and the girls were at their mom's, I discovered an old receipt for Noel Streatfield's *Ballet Shoes* that was crammed in the back of my desk drawer. I smiled as I recalled three years of Friday nights full of coffee, hot chocolate, and books. I stared at the receipt and thought, "I need to keep this in a safe place. It's a ticket to Daddyland."

Sidebar:

This New Year's, build your own Daddyland.

1. It's a place where you can be with your children when they are away.
2. It is built on memories.
3. Daddyland memories are best created by:
 - a. Planning adventures, those exciting new experiences with your kids.
 - b. Establishing traditions, those adventures that go so well you want to repeat them regularly.

What's your building plan for 2004?

Andrew Stenhouse is building Daddyland in Costa Mesa, Calif.

For more information on building your own Daddyland, request Family Traditions, item code BL216. (Suggested donation \$11, price in Canada \$14.50.)