

The HOME FORUM

One small box, one Super Dad

Asksed to condense a life into a box, what would you put in? That's the question my preschooler and I struggled with recently as we gathered things that remind him of his dad, to put in a keepsake box he would be decorating at school.

My little guy was joining schoolchildren around the country in that annual ritual of creating masterpieces to present to their dads on Father's Day.

In past years, my children had made gifts such as picture frames smothered in glitter that leaves a trail everywhere it goes, and painted cups that are even decorated along the drinking rim, ensuring that they will be eternally admired but never used.

But this year's project gave me pause. What objects would make my son think of his daddy?

Power tools wouldn't fit in the box, and we couldn't squeeze his office in there either. His favorite foods are duck and lamb, but the smell would be overpowering after a short time if we included them. Favorite books? It's hard to tell since he reads them only halfway through, and then abandons them in favor of the latest book someone has recommended about becoming a billionaire overnight or about how to get the most out of your life in five easy steps.

We finally settled on a fuzzy yellow ball to represent his tennis game and a hammer because he loves to build things such as the indomitable tree fort/minihouse he constructed in our backyard. We also threw in a baseball card for his love of the

snoozing on the couch.

But the box of objects felt light. Not because it was empty or had a lot of extra space in it. It felt insubstantial because of what we had left out.

That brings me back to the question of how you measure a life. Sure we'd included symbols of his favorite sports, and we'd given careful thought to his likes and dislikes as we filled up the box, but is that who he is?

There was no room in the box for boa constrictor-like hugs and puckery kisses, for business meetings missed to attend ballet recitals and school plays, or for nighttime reading to the kids when his eyes are at half-mast.

The box couldn't contain all those hours away from the office to coach Little League teams, weekends spent teaching the kids how to throw balls, how to stay on teetering bikes, how to ski, how to use tools, and even how to subdue "sea monsters."

There wasn't a place to put father-led family meetings, tantrum-calming talks, snowball fights, and singing - lots of singing. How can you confine to a box the musical game in which he sings partial lyrics from musicals and the kids try to guess which show they're from?

We couldn't put piggyback rides in the box or a sack-a-potato kid slung over his shoulder.

It's really all the stuff that can't be boxed that makes up a daddy. Maybe the true Father's Day gift wasn't really the keepsake box anyway.

Years from now, when my husband looks at that box, it may not make much difference to him what he finds inside. What he'll remember most are Joel's adoring eyes watching him open the box and the sticky kisses and hugs that came with it, making him feel like Super Daddy.

And isn't that what Father's Day is all about?

Betsy R. Rosenthal

My little guy was joining schoolchildren around the country in that annual ritual of creating gifts for dads on Father's Day.



KAREN PRESTON

HIS DAY, EVERY DAY

Long after the applause for the eloquent words of great leaders, come the endless echoes from a father's quiet example.

Karl Green