

Father Knows Best?



As I write these words, my wife and I are in the middle of a road trip to Southern California, something we do a couple of times a year to visit my family. In fact, my first column for POP was about a particularly disastrous family vacation road trip and it was that column that ultimately led to my getting this “Father Knows Best?” gig. So I thought it would be fun to revisit the topic a couple years later and in “real time” no less.

Our first day started off with a bang. Or rather, it was more like an explosion. Our kids were excited about this trip and sleeping in wasn't exactly something they were prepared to do. Thus it was nearly the crack of dawn when our younger daughter barged into our room and immediately started demanding breakfast. This wouldn't have been quite so bad if we hadn't been up so late the night before packing everything for the trip (a column's-length topic in and of itself). So in a hazy half-awake state, my wife reminded our daughter to first go potty. “But I want company!” our daughter replied.

Let me digress for a minute to explain our daughter's response. As many parents probably know, you'll do just about anything to facilitate your children's potty training. In our case, it meant spending an inordinate amount of time sitting on the bathroom floor in front of our boudoir-seated child and telling princess stories. The kids eventually learned to go on their own without accompanying fairy tales, but our younger daughter will occasionally still ask for an audience. We usually refuse and encourage a more

“big girl” solo visit to the restroom. But on today of all days, our younger daughter just wasn't having it. So within minutes of being rudely forced awake, we had a full-fledge tantruming child on the floor of our bedroom.

And we still had a whole day ahead of us.

Throughout the morning, our kids vacillated between acting like manic pixies and infuriating drama queens. By the time I had the car packed, I was seriously considering unpacking the car and calling the whole thing off.

Once things settled down and we eventually hit the road, we had a good solid two hours under our belt before we heard our younger daughter utter those words that strike fear into the heart of every parent: “I have to go poop.” Naturally, we were in the middle of one of those stretches where there's absolutely nothing for miles. Sweating bullets, I frantically searched the horizon for a restaurant, a gas station or perhaps even a small roadside shrub and was thrilled when we finally came to an off-ramp that led to an actual bastion of civilization.

My older daughter and I waited in the car while my wife heroically led our younger daughter inside a convenience store. After what felt like hours, I got a text message from my wife informing me that our little girl wasn't feeling terribly well and that this was going to take a while. Without going into all the gory details, let's just say we almost decided to turn around but then realized that we were too locked down in prepaid expenses and had to proceed.

A couple hours later we stopped for lunch at a very packed family restaurant that seemed to be staffed by exactly one person. I'm glad to say we did eventually eat, but not before I seriously contemplated eating my own foot out of sheer debilitating hunger.

Several more hours later, we finally arrived at our first stop on this vacation, my mother's house. From the second Grandma opened the door, our kids became angels. They

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were sweet and charming and shockingly obliging when we asked them to do things like wash their hands before dinner. On top of that, my mother's excellent cooking completely restored us and I now felt better than I had in days. Our younger daughter also seemed to feel much better. So I've coined a new term to describe the effect of a visit to my mother's house: Grandma Magic.

Unfortunately that magic might have been a bit short-lived. Just this morning, my mother was up early and doing a few things in the kitchen while the rest of us were still asleep. Suddenly, she heard the voice of my younger daughter behind her. “Grandma,” she said, “would it be OK if I throw up in your kitchen?”

And the journey continues...

Steve Shapiro lives and works in Silicon Valley, is completely wrapped around the fingers of his two young daughters, and has permanently entrusted his heart into his lovely wife's safekeeping. Prior to fatherhood he was known to appear in the occasional local theatrical production. He now satisfies his theatrical ambitions by entertaining his kids with silly songs at the piano.



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