

## Gee, Dad, You're Such a Dork

by Martin Fredricks

*Originally printed in The Forum on Father's Day, June 16, 2002, as "I'm more and more like Dad"*

"Mart probably fell into the toilet, and Dad's making a list of ways to get him out."



That punch line, originally delivered by my older sister when we were just kids, never fails to bring a laugh at family gatherings. It's a short story that recently took on new meaning for me.

It happened many years ago when the family was out to eat at a fast-food place. Before heading for home, Dad took me into the bathroom. When we didn't return for a long, long time, my Mother wondered aloud what could be keeping us. That's when my sister came out with the zinger.

To get it, you have to understand a little about my father. Since I can remember he's made extensive lists for everything — every day outing, extended family trip or weekend fishing excursion. Extra socks. Extra T-shirts. Underwear, candy bars, fruit, thermoses, water bottles, maps, compasses, rain gear, boots — anything you might need, no matter how critical or insignificant, and with numbers next to each item (not just extra T-shirts, but two extra T-shirts). As far as Dad's concerned, every occasion warrants a list.

It drove us all crazy.

Now I'm a list maker. My patient bride often says to me, a hint of laughter in her eyes, "Do you really think you're going to forget extra underwear for the weekend?"

I'm a dad, now, too. My daughter, Saela Joy, was born last November, and soon I'll be driving her batty. Fifteen years or so from now, as she prepares to leave for a state basketball tournament somewhere, I'll pull out a list of things she should take. She'll roll her eyes and say, "Daaadd, you're such a dork!"

It's going to happen, because with each passing year I get more and more like Dad. In his honor, here's a list or two to illustrate:

I get up and exercise every morning, just like Dad. I sometimes wear a stocking cap to bed (as he's reminded me hundreds of times over the years, 90 percent of your heat is lost through your head). I carry a pocketknife. I pack enough survival gear into our vehicles every winter to last a month, leaving no room for suitcases.

I walk every day and, because I'm getting older, I sometimes find myself stretching in public places afterwards.

Just like Dad, I carry around the bane of every teenager's existence, a red handkerchief. And I'm not afraid to use it. Man, I just cringed every time he'd pull that ratty thing out in public. "Daaadd," I'd whine in horror, "do you have to do that here?" Now I do it myself.

He's been right about so many things. Here's a partial list:

Be prepared for anything. Daily exercise and stretching keep your body healthy. You do lose a lot of heat through your head. Survival gear might save you in a North Dakota blizzard. It's better to have a handkerchief handy than to wipe your nose on your sleeve, especially in public.

Think positive. Appreciate and respect nature. Make time for your family, and some for yourself, too. Be kind to other people, and don't talk about them behind their backs. Help your neighbors, and thank them when they help you.

So, in so many ways beyond the idiosyncrasies, I'm becoming my father.

Yes, some day my daughter will look at me and say, "Daaadd, you're such a dork!" I'll smile at the compliment, because I'll know I'm doing my job, taking care of my kids, teaching them things and keeping them safe.

On my first Father's Day, here's to all the Dads out there, especially mine.

\*