**The Power of Paper and Pen**

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There is something really special about receiving a hand-written note from someone you love. I experienced the power of this first hand last week at a 3-day father-daughter retreat in Colorado. We had each of the pairs write each other a love letter, and then on the last evening of the retreat we all sat around a campfire, with mountains on the horizon and stars twinkling above. They all found a spot to cuddle up together, the dads read their letter to their middle school daughter, and then the girls read theirs to their dad. And believe me, there was not a dry eye in the house.

Many of the girls shared that although they knew their dads loved them, they didn’t realize how much they were loved and how many qualities their dads appreciated in them. As for the dads, it was just a heart-felt affirmation of the special bond between fathers and daughters. Several dads shared how the unconditional love received from their girls was unlike any other they had experienced in their entire lives. And all of this incredible bonding came from the hand-written word.

Girls who come to my summer camps receive a love letter from their parents that we have them read the day they are going home. Everyone gets really quiet as they read the notes, and many tears are shed. It’s a great way to help them transition from the loving camp cocoon they’ve been in all week back to the real world. And it reminds them that even if they have had some power struggles, disagreements, or angry words with their folks, their parents love them dearly.

I encourage parents to create a “letter box” for each of their children to keep any important letters kids obtain during their childhood. Proactively ask people in your child’s life, like grandparents, aunts and uncles, or any adult who is important to the child, to write them letters at significant times; i.e. 13th and 16th birthdays, high school and college graduations, the day of their marriage, when their 1st child is born, when they turn 21 or 40. The letter writers can relate stories about their own experiences at those times in their lives, and maybe give advice about what they learned to best traverse those ages. Think how wonderful and impactful it would feel to a new bride or groom to read a handful of letters from people they admire on this momentous occasion, particularly if some of them were no longer alive to experience it with them.

When my 3 kids were growing up, I kept a running journal for each of them. About once a year I’d take it with me on an out of town trip and write entries about each one on the plane ride. I’d journal about how I saw them at each age, their qualities I admired, things we were doing together, and my vision for them based on the character and interests they were exhibiting at that time. I haven’t given it to them yet, but I think it’s time.

One dad I know is writing a book for his children, outlining his past history and especially what he’s learned in his life. He wants to pass on any wisdom and nuggets he’s obtained through books he has read, advice from mentors, mistakes and failures and successes, and any significant experiences he’s had up until now. He has inspired me to do the same. So many parents never tell their children stories about their past, and in the process lose a great way to connect and let kids know that you really **can** understand what they are going through.

One final thought. Despite the ease that new technology and gadgets bring to writing, I would strongly recommend that your notes are hand-written. Reading a letter in a loved-ones handwriting just feels more personal and special. It’s like they are still there with you, in person. Make love letter writing a new tradition in your family.

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