

Suddenly a Single Father

By Matt Logelin, project manager, Yahoo! Inc, and a blogger on family issues

A few days after my wife died in childbirth, a woman visiting her grandchild in the same neonatal intensive care unit where my newborn daughter slept heard about my story and said, “So...are you going to give the baby up for adoption?” The implication, of course, being that a man cannot provide the kind of nurturing and care that is innate in a woman.

I have to be honest. I worried about a lot of things in the seconds/minutes/hours/days after Liz died. I worried about raising Madeline all alone. I worried about whether or not I'd be able to afford the house we purchased 10 months earlier. I worried about having to someday explain a menstrual cycle to my daughter. But I never once worried that I couldn't raise her as well or better than anybody else. After my encounter with the woman at the hospital, I resolved to be the best parent that ever walked the earth.

As a man and a single father living in a woman's nation, I face an interesting double standard. On the one hand, I often get treated as if I'm completely incompetent when it comes to raising my child. A woman in the grocery store recently admonished me for not putting socks on my daughter. Mind you, I live in Los Angeles and it was 97 degrees outside that day. And on a recent flight—round-trip flight number 22 for my daughter and me—a flight attendant asked me if I was babysitting for my wife. Even the women in my life offer up the most basic parenting advice, as if I've not yet figured out everyday things like diapering and feeding my child.

On the other hand, I get incredible accolades when I accomplish even the smallest feat with my daughter. If her bloomers match her dress, women compliment my sense of style, telling me that their husbands could never pull off something like that. If I can get a hair clip to remain in Madeline's hair for more than 10 minutes, I'm treated as if I've accomplished something on par with solving world hunger. It's as if, because I've taken in active role in my daughter's life, I'm some sort of super parent.

It's not just the people I know or encounter in my everyday life. Society also mythologizes the good, single father. A man who steps up to his role as father is looked at in awe. Mothers? It seems that most people think nothing of the remarkable work done by these women. They're just doing "their" job, right? Women are expected to be good mothers. Men are expected to be, well, men.

I've faced some difficult situations in the 16 months since my daughter was born and my wife died, and though I promised to be the best parent ever, my daughter would tell you that I have a long way to go—as soon as she learns to talk.

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