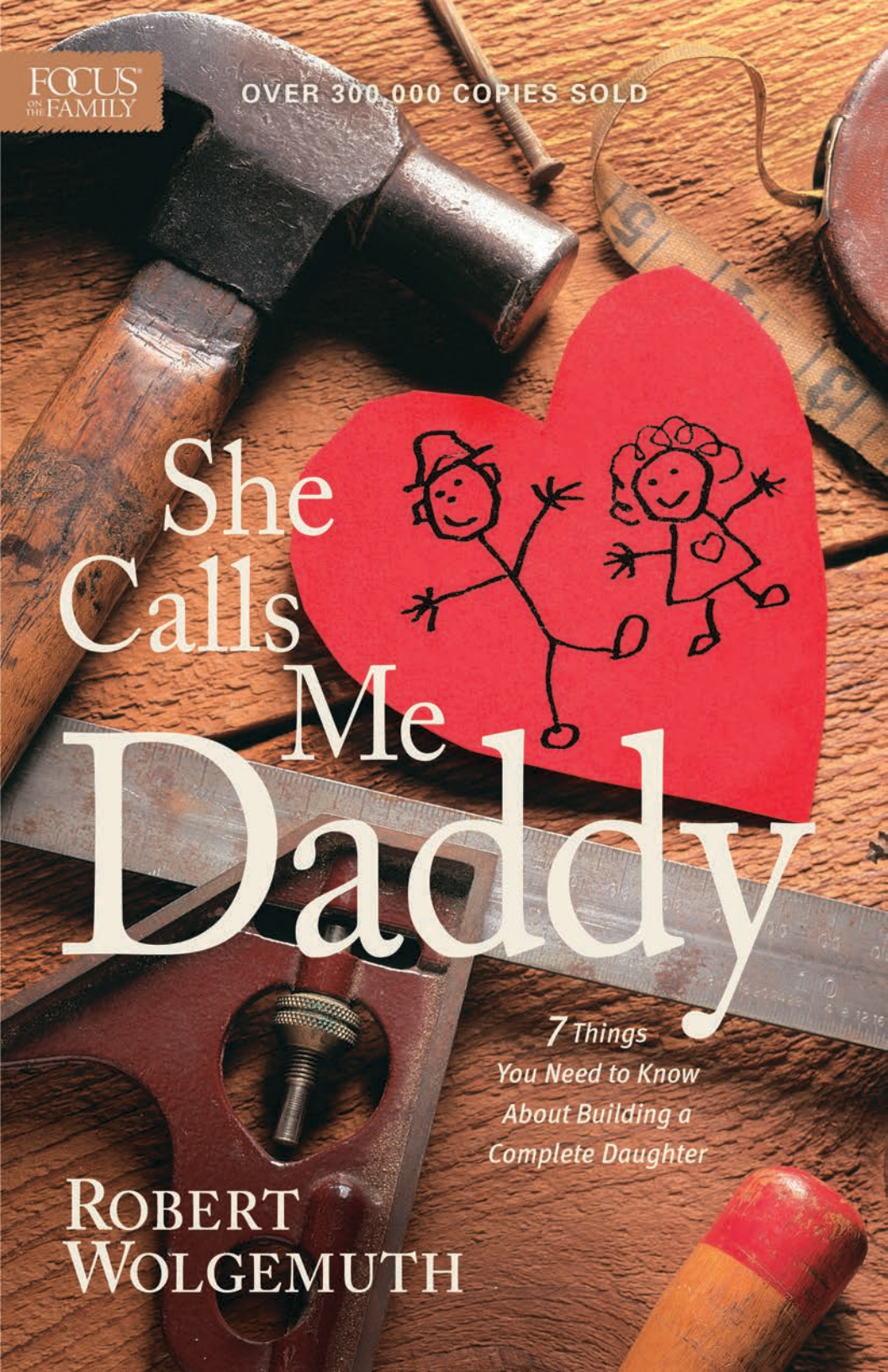


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She
Calls
Me
Daddy

*7 Things
You Need to Know
About Building a
Complete Daughter*

ROBERT
WOLGEMUTH

“It’s been a long time since I’ve read a parenting book that was more enjoyable than this one. Robert Wolgemuth’s helpful advice, coupled with his humor and transparency, is wonderful. Once you start reading, it will be hard to put the book down.”

—GARY SMALLEY, author and founder
of the Smalley Institute

“With a five-year-old daughter, I needed advice, wisdom, and direction. I found it in *She Calls Me Daddy*. Robert Wolgemuth has provided me and other dads with the godly wisdom to raise godly daughters.”

—STEPHEN ARTERBURN, founder and chairman
of New Life Ministries

“As a clinical psychologist, I can assure you that Robert Wolgemuth’s counsel is sound. As a theologian, I can affirm that his approach is solid. This book is filled with profound truth and practical ideas, and it’s great fun to read. What a wonderful combination!”

—RODNEY L. COOPER, PH.D., professor,
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“One of the greatest advantages I have had in life is being well loved by my father. If he were alive today, he would agree wholeheartedly with this book. By practicing these principles, he gave my sister and me a foundation of love and confidence that nothing can shake.”

—DALE HANSON BOURKE, author

“If you knew this man’s daughters like I know this man’s daughters, you would buy this book, read it carefully, and do exactly as it says. You would also give a copy to every man you know who’s raising a daughter.”

—MARK DEVRIES, president and founder
of Ministry Architects


“You want advice on raising daughters from someone who has done it. Robert Wolgemuth and his wife, Bobbie, have done it. I know their daughters, and you need look no further for examples. If you have a daughter, this is the right book for you.”

—JERRY B. JENKINS, author

She Calls Me Daddy



She
Calls
Me
Daddy



*7 Things You Need to Know
About Building a Complete Daughter*

ROBERT
WOLGEMUTH

Foreword by Gary and Greg Smalley

FOCUS[®]
ON THE FAMILY



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She Calls Me Daddy

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Some people’s names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved. However, the facts of what happened and the underlying principles have been conveyed as accurately as possible.

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FOREWORD

As fathers of daughters ourselves, and after counseling with hundreds if not thousands of parents, we have no doubt that girls are very different from boys. And most dads can see themselves in their sons and have some intuitive sense of what their boys need from them—the same things they sought from their own fathers.

But when it comes to girls, that's another matter. Most guys are still trying to figure out their wives—how are they to know what daughters need?

Boys often love to be tousled and teased by their dads. Girls love to be cherished. Boys can be spoken to with single words, half sentences, and grunts. Girls want their dads to talk to them in complete sentences. Boys long to live without their dad's protection. Most girls thrive with confidence when they know their dad will be there.

We fathers can so easily blow it, though. I (Gary) remember when I was driving my then-16-year-old daughter, Kari, to a basketball game to see her boyfriend play. She opened her heart to me and confided that she thought she loved him, and that they had even discussed marriage. How did I respond? Well, after I spewed my soft drink through my nose, I shouted, "I can take the love thing. But if you guys are talking about marriage, that's where I draw the line! You're only 16 years old, for crying out loud!"

As you might imagine, things only went downhill from there. And I confess that spewing soda and crushing your girl's spirit are not how I normally advise other parents to relate to their children, even in times of high stress.

Fortunately for all us dads, Robert Wolgemuth takes the mystery

out of raising daughters more tenderly and effectively. As the father of two girls himself, he learned a lot of lessons that he reveals in this book, making the way a lot more clear for the rest of us.

Let us explain what particularly drew us to *She Calls Me Daddy*. One of the primary themes in our own teaching about healthy family relationships is the importance of honor, attaching high value to those you love and demonstrating it every day in how you speak to and act toward them. Happily, in a nutshell, that describes what *She Calls Me Daddy* teaches dads to do for their daughters. Its seven tools for building a daughter amount to seven great ways to honor your girl, whether she's two or 17.

Dads have always played a crucial role in the healthy development of their daughters. As Robert points out in this book, *the way you teach her and prepare her for life* will have a huge impact on whether she's ready to embrace it and live it to the fullest. *The way you treat her*—and her mother—will set her expectations for how men should treat women. *The lines of communication you establish with her* will give her a way to face the challenges and temptations with confidence and a sense of security.

In this revised edition of a now-classic book, Robert also helps us dads to cope with phenomena like texting and the Internet. We all know the modern world has become a more connected and, in many ways, a more dangerous place. But how technology is used has implications for the father-daughter relationship, too, as you'll soon discover in the following pages.

Back when this book was first published, I (Gary) said that it had been a long time since I had read a parenting title as enjoyable as this one. Since then, a lot more parenting books have been published. And you know what? The things I said then are still true. As Greg now attests as well, Robert's combination of insight, humor, and personal openness makes this a book you'll want to read. Your knowledge of how to be a great dad will grow, and it won't hurt a bit!

You've made a wise decision to pick up this book. Keep reading and you'll reap your reward. Better still, your daughter will be blessed with a smarter, better prepared, more confident, and more loving father.

Could you give your precious girl any greater gift?

—DRS. GARY AND GREG SMALLEY

Colorado Springs, Colorado

P R E F A C E

You can imagine the fun we both had the first time we read our dad's manuscript for this book. That was in 1996. We laughed out loud remembering the stories of our growing-up years.

But what was so interesting was reading the reasons behind some of the things Daddy did with us. As children, we experienced the “what” every day, but in reading this book, we learned the “why.” It was really interesting to look at our dad's strategy in being our dad—kind of like seeing how a watch works after having spent a lifetime just telling time.

As kids, we had the fun of spending the night at the homes of lots of our friends. One of the things we realized was that no two families are exactly alike. Happy families come in many shapes and sizes. Some of what you're about to read will work well in your home, just as it did in ours, and some things will need to be personalized.

But simple as this might sound, there's one important thing we discovered about other families: Some of our friends were able to talk to their dads, and some weren't.

The most important thing in this book is the chapter on conversation. Of all the things our dad taught us, we're most thankful for his conversation lessons. As we grew up, our friends often asked in amazement, “You told your dad *that*?” Our ability to talk with him about our lives and how we really felt has built a bond that's the foundation of our friendship with him today.

This book includes stories about our lives when we were very young. Back then we were our daddy's little girls. Today we are his

grown-up friends. And we're both married with children of our own, including daughters.

As the older sister, I (Missy) was the first to walk down the aisle in 1994.¹ In February 1996, our daughter, Abby, was born. Because of this book, my husband, Jon, had a quick guide . . . and owner's manual. Of course, he had known about *She Calls Me Daddy* before Abby was born, but now he had a reason to read it. And he did.

As the second daughter, I (Julie) got married in July 1999. In February of 2002, our first daughter, Harper, was born. Sixteen months later her sister, Ella, came along.

Even though Jon and Christopher are different men and have fathered their daughters in different ways than he fathered us, they took much of our daddy's advice, which you'll read about in the introduction.

You'll probably disagree with some of what you'll read in this book. That's to be expected, and of course that's okay. If, however, in your disagreement, this book raises some good questions, helping you make progress toward your own effective parenting, then so much the better.

There are two things our husbands have done just as our dad did. First, they talked to their daughters about purity. At the end of chapter 3, Dad describes how he gave us something special that he later presented to our husbands at our wedding receptions. I (Missy) received "the key to my heart" on a necklace, and Dad gave me (Julie) a promise ring.

Second, Daddy loved our mom more than he loved us. He knew that this would represent security to us, even when we were very young and didn't fully understand how loving our mom would impact us. He talks about this in chapter 5.

We really hope this book is helpful to you and your daughter(s), just as its principles were to us.

And thanks, Daddy, for encouraging us to fall in love with our husbands . . . and for celebrating the fact that, just as you love our mom even more than you love us, we love Jon and Christopher even more than we love you . . . and that's a lot.

—MISSY WOLGEMUTH SCHRADER
and JULIE WOLGEMUTH TASSY

INTRODUCTION

Most writers wait until their manuscript is finished before they write the introduction to the book. I know this is counterintuitive—like saying hello to someone you're on the verge of leaving. But when you think about it, a book introduction is a summary of what you're about to read and, until the thing is finished, even the person doing the writing isn't certain of all the twists and turns.

So I've chosen to break tradition and write this for what it really is—an introduction.

In 1995, after a long conversation with my wife, Bobbie, I decided to try something I had never tried before—namely, write a book. I knew what the book was going to be about: raising daughters. And I knew which readers I had in mind: dads. Men who knew nothing from their own experience about what they were doing.

So *She Calls Me Daddy* was written. And published.

At the time, our daughter Missy was 25 and Julie was 22. They were both out of college. Missy was married to Jon Schrader. Julie was working for my company as our CFO and writing songs. Her music company was called Manor Music . . . man or music, get it?

But within two and a half years and in God's sweet providence, Christopher Tassy came along, and she had found her life's partner.

In publishing parlance, *She Calls Me Daddy* became a best seller, launching what I had never could have expected . . . amazingly more books. (The lowest grade I received in high school was from Miss Felgar in literature.) And these books have been wonderfully fulfilling to write. But, as you might imagine, the first will always be very special.

A few years ago, I bumped into my editor, Larry Weeden, at a book

convention. He asked if I would be interested in updating *She Calls Me Daddy*. In his gentle way, Larry reminded me that in the years since 1996, the world had undergone dramatic changes. (Larry is one very smart man.) And the impact that these changes have had on parenting is undeniable. For example, the book made no mention of the power of electronics. When it was written, I had never used the word *texting*, and I could not have imagined actually taking photographs with my phone or posting them on such a thing as “Facebook” so literally thousands of people could see them instantly. Larry was right; a lot had changed.

So I talked it over with Bobbie. She thought it would be a good idea to ask Missy and Julie. They suggested that I talk it over with their husbands, Jon and Christopher, also fathers of daughters.

As it turns out, there was unanimous enthusiasm for updating the book. Not only that, there was an offer from all of the above to pitch in and help.

So everyone in the family took a copy of the original, read through it carefully, and made notes. Then on a special weekend at the Bal-lantyne Hotel in Charlotte, we¹ met and talked through the book, paragraph by paragraph, suggesting changes that needed to be made. Some material needed to be added. Tragically, some had to retire! We wrestled through the concepts and beefed up the faith chapter.

What you have here is the result of this adventure. It’s all our hope that you find this book helpful and encouraging . . . and challenging. These days, the task of being a daughter, and raising a complete daughter, is a big one.



Bobbie and I both had the luxury of growing up in solid Christian homes. Most of our family-of-origin memories are good. Some of what we did with our girls was similar to what we had seen our parents do, and some of it was quite different. We established our own “family normals.”

By the time I wrote *She Calls Me Daddy*, I had been professionally connected to the publishing industry for more than 20 years, so we were surrounded by helpful articles and books, and some of what we did as parents came from them. We also had the privilege of attending many helpful seminars and workshops.

Although some of the information in this book did come from our parents, books, and helpful experts, a great deal of our inspiration during those 25 years came from the Bible. Bobbie is a voracious reader of the Scriptures, and nearly every morning during our daughters' growing-up years (and ever since), she sat on her most comfortable chair with a Bible and a journal. My undergraduate degree was in Bible, and since 1969, I have taught Sunday school. The Bible is my primary resource.

So, armed with the truth of God's Word, Bobbie and I prayed a simple parenting prayer: "Lord, You've entrusted us with these girls. Now, since we're total amateurs, please help us raise them as You would have us raise them. And, while You're at it, please fill us with Your Spirit too."

I suppose it's inevitable that parts of this book will appear to some as Wolgemuth home movies. "Aw, come on, please . . . take a look at just a *few* more pictures from our summer trip to the Grand Canyon!" Frankly, I'm embarrassed at the thought. What we have is a gift from God, including the girls and our relationships with them. Much of what we've learned has come from our failures. In other words, if it sounds as though I have some things figured out, it's only because I made enough mistakes to know what doesn't work. I'm not showing off, believe me. After all, Bobbie and I were thrust into this parenting thing pretty quickly. Bobbie was 21 when Missy was born, and I was 23. In many ways, we were just children ourselves.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Although many of the stories and illustrations in this book refer to me in the singular, I assure you that this job of raising girls has been a

partnership. Not only has Bobbie been an essential ally in the process, but she has also been a reservoir of sound information and advice. Where else could I get inside information about raising a woman than from a woman? And Bobbie has helped me to appreciate that, even in raising daughters, my intentional participation is critical. Parenting is a team sport.

Instead of tracing our experiences and the lessons we've learned in chronological order, this book will take you through seven major themes: protection, conversation, affection, discipline, laughter, faith, and conduct.

Because I'm a hopeless tinkerer—a weekend warrior—a construction theme runs through what you're about to read. When I'm in the middle of a project and have to run to the store for more supplies, I grab a piece of scrap wood or a broken corner of drywall and make a list using the pencil that's usually tucked above my right ear. I do this because if I don't write it down, I'll forget. Don't smile at me. You forget too. So, at the end of chapters 2 through 10—which includes the seven theme chapters—I've summarized the material in a “Builder's Checklist” so you can more easily recall the main points.

You'll find many things in this book that are helpful for raising sons, too, but I've especially aimed these chapters at dads and daughters. According to some of my friends who have sons, there really is a difference. And raising girls is what I know.

Even though my fathering situation has been a traditional one—mom and dad at home with their own natural children—this book closes with an afterword that addresses the unique needs and concerns of dads in special situations. Thanks to friends who are divorced, single, or blended-family dads, I've been helped to understand some important differences in these environments.

After you read this book, if you decide to give it to someone else to read—or buy another copy—find a dad with a *young* daughter. The earlier a dad starts thinking through these principles, the better his

chances will be of succeeding. Yet, I think they'll prove helpful to any dad, regardless of his daughter's age.

My hope and prayer is that God will give you wisdom as you take on this huge and wonderful task of building a girl. Not just any girl. *Your* daughter.

—DR. ROBERT WOLGEMUTH
Orlando, Florida

A collection of tools including a hammer, a saw, a pencil, and a ruler, with a child's drawing of a family on a piece of paper.

PART ONE

Someone
Who
Calls You
“Daddy”

WHAT'S A NICE GUY LIKE YOU DOING IN A BOOK LIKE THIS?

*If I sat here for three or four weeks, I could
not adequately describe just how important
the father-daughter relationship is.*

—DR. JAMES DOBSON

“Are you awake?”

It had been almost an hour since we had gone to bed, but I sensed that my wife, Bobbie, hadn't dozed off either, so I broke the silence with the question.

“Uh-huh,” came her quiet reply.

Then, trying not to sound too worried, I asked if she thought it was about time for us to hear our 15-year-old daughter walking through the front door. “When did Missy say she would be home?” I asked, mustering all the confidence I could to keep my voice from quavering.

“Around eleven,” Bobbie returned, her voice sounding strong and sure. She had decided to put on the same act.

We lay there for a few more minutes, neither of us speaking. Before asking the question, I had checked my nightstand clock. It was 11:25. I knew Missy was late—not a normal thing for her. More silence.

“Maybe we ought to make a call to see if we can find her,” I finally said, losing most of my on-top-of-it tone of voice.

In a flash, Bobbie’s nightstand lamp was on, and she was dialing. A sleepy youth pastor’s wife finally picked up the phone. “Susan, this is Bobbie Wolgemuth, and I’m sorry to call you so late, but have Missy and David left your house?”

Although I couldn’t hear Susan’s answer, I could tell by Bobbie’s tone as the conversation continued that the kids had left a long time before, with plenty of time to be home by now.

“Where’s Missy?” Bobbie said as she hung up the phone, making no attempt to hide her frustration and fear.

Our daughter and her friend David had been at Mark and Susan’s for a Sunday night Bible study. David was a 17-year-old boy who was like a brother to Missy and a son to us. A welcome “member” of our family, David would come and go from our house without ever knocking on the door. Our TV was his TV. Our refrigerator was his refrigerator. We liked that.

But tonight, David was keeping me from going to sleep, and I wanted to know why.

We waited. Eleven forty-five, no Missy. Midnight, no Missy. Ten after twelve . . .

“I’m getting up,” I finally announced. “I’m going downstairs to wait.”

Bobbie said nothing. She was either praying for Missy or planning David’s caning in the mall parking lot.

By the time I made it to the front door, David’s car was turning into our driveway, his headlights sweeping across the front of our house. “Finally,” I said loud enough for Bobbie to hear me upstairs. “She’s home.”

Instead of trudging back up the stairs to bed, I thought I’d wait for Missy to get inside so I could ask her to explain where she had been and why she hadn’t called.

David's car came to a stop, the headlights went out, the engine went quiet, and both David and Missy launched from each side of the car and came bounding up the walk to the front door.

Standing there in nothing but my snow-white Jockey shorts, I quickly came to two realizations: (1) There was no time to dash up the stairs without being seen, and (2) if I stepped around the corner into the living room, no one would ever see me in that condition. In the next room, I found a good shadowed spot.

The front door opened, and Missy came in with David right on her heels. *What's going on?* I wondered. *Don't these kids know what time it is?*

Missy scrambled up the stairs to get something, leaving David standing just inside the front door. For what seemed like a minute or two, he stood there, not having any idea that Missy's dad was just around the corner.

Then it happened. David began to move, and as he did, he started quietly humming. I could tell by the growing sound of the "music" that he was shuffling toward the living room.

I panicked, my mind dropping into overdrive. *If I tuck myself into the shadow next to the piano, he'll never see me.* I was proud of myself for thinking so quickly at that time of the night.

David walked to the doorway into the living room and stopped. Continuing to hum, he scanned the darkness. I felt like a fugitive hiding from the long arm of the law . . . in my own house. I could clearly see him. He could not see me.

Unfortunately, David began to move again, coming right toward the piano where I was standing.

By the time he finally saw me, this unsuspecting, red-headed, 17-year-old boy was about 10 inches away. There he stood, Mr. All-Conference-Student-Leader-and-Everyone's-Favorite-Teenage-Boy. And there I stood, Tarzan of the Living Room.

“Hello, David,” I said casually, as though I had bumped into him at a school function. “What are you doing here?”

The boy gasped, quickly sucking in just enough air to keep from collapsing. His body froze, but in the darkness, I could see his eyes moving up and down, scanning my terrific outfit.

At that moment, Missy burst into the living room. A stuffed animal the kids at church passed around like a mascot—a green snake named “Cecil”—was tucked under her arm.

“Dad,” she exclaimed, “what are *you* doing here?”

Good question.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

Whatever the reason you have this book in your hand, you’re probably a dad with a daughter and you *are* here. Maybe you’re a brand-new father of a baby girl, and you want to find out what you’re in

*Being the father
of a girl can be a
journey into the great
unknown, and it makes
no sense to go it alone.*

for. Or perhaps your daughter has been around for a few years, and although you think you’re doing a pretty good job as the daddy, you’d like some help. It could be that your daughter is just about to step across the threshold into womanhood, and you’re a little nervous.

Whatever the reason, I’m glad you’re here. Being the father of a girl can be a journey into the great unknown, and it makes no sense to go it alone especially when you don’t need to. You’ve spent your whole life as a male, so you know that if this were a son, you could give him a pointer or two from your own experience as he moves through his growing-up years. But this is a girl, and there are two things you know for sure: (1) She’s your responsibility, and (2) you have no personal experience that will help you.

ARTIST'S RENDERING OF THE FINISHED PROJECT

During my years in sales, I visited many corporate lobbies. While waiting for an appointment, I rarely sat down. Sitting made me even more nervous than I was already. This was usually a source of frustration for the receptionist, who would repeatedly order me to sit by gently “inviting” me to take a seat.

“Can I get you something?” she would ask.

“No, thank you,” I'd say without sitting down.

“Are you sure I can't get you something?”

“Thank you. I'm sure.”

Often, I'd slowly circle around those lovely waiting areas looking at things on the wall. Sometimes there were paintings, or plaques of recognition awarded to this company. Sometimes I would see a framed and colorful illustration—an artist's rendering—of the corporation's next building expansion. It was a new wing on the existing building or a whole new building. In either case, given my love for construction, I would be fascinated with those glimpses into the future, studying every detail. Sometimes I'd study the cars that the architects had painted in the pretend parking lots, trying to see if I could identify the models.

Let's say that once the corporation found enough capital to proceed with their new building and all the bids were in, Cousin Larry's Construction Company got the project. If Cousin Larry was as smart as everyone said he was, he would have asked for that drawing to be hung in a place where his employees and subcontractors could see it every day. Maybe in the construction trailer. It would have been a great help to Larry and his people if they could begin—and continue—working on this project, focusing not on the necessary work and details of any complex construction assignment but on the *finished* product—the beautiful results.

The greatest challenge you'll face as the father of a daughter is to

keep from being distracted by the day-to-day stuff—the little duties and challenges and frustrations that can easily capture a dad’s full-time attention. Instead, I’m encouraging you to do what Cousin Larry did. Keep a picture in your mind of what it is you’re building here: a healthy, poised, confident, balanced, and happy woman—a complete daughter who will someday be counted among your closest friends. Begin—and continue—building with the end in mind.

This book will help you do that.

THE PROJECT OF A LIFETIME

Don’t you love Saturday mornings? You go to bed late Friday night, knowing you can sleep in as long as you want because the weekend has arrived. But suppose one particular Saturday morning, something’s wrong. You’re lying in bed wide awake, and there’s no going back to sleep.

The dawning sun hasn’t even squeezed through the bedroom blinds. You glance at the digital clock on your nightstand: 6:11! *So why is it so tough to wake up on a weekday when I have to get up, you think, but now that I can sleep as late as I want to, I’m lying here wide awake?*

The answer is simple. You’ve got a project. You’ve been looking forward to starting it for a long time. It’s going to take a stack of pressure-treated wood, which was delivered this week. You’ve been to Home Depot (or whatever the huge, buy-every-possible-building-supply-you-could-ever-need-under-one-roof warehouse store is called where you live) and loaded up. *Beep*. “Someone in Lumber dial 3-4-4.” The guy in building supplies with the orange canvas bib that said, “Hello, my name is Dave. Can I help you?” was quite that—helpful. Now you’ve got your galvanized nails and bolts, a new extra-long drill bit, and several bags of premixed concrete.

You can hardly wait to get started.

Because your wife *doesn’t* have a construction project this morning,

she is still sleeping. You try to make very little noise. Quietly pulling on a pair of old jeans and crawling into your favorite sweatshirt, you slip out your bedroom door, tiptoe down the hallway so you don't wake the baby, then head down the stairs and into the garage, where everything is waiting.

You and your wife have been talking for a long time about building a deck on the back of the house. You've walked around your backyard many times, surveying the site. You've even stood where the deck will be, envisioning your new view when it's done. And you have one of those oversized, chrome propane gas grills on layaway, waiting for its new home.

Your neighbors have heard all about this deck, and frankly, they're hoping it looks great so they can (have you help them) build one, too.

Projects are terrific.

THIS LITTLE GIRL OF OURS

Because you're reading this book, you've probably stood at your wife's hospital bedside and looked into the squinting, ruddy face of a brand-new baby girl. Not, of course, just any baby girl, but *your* baby girl.

You know the awe, the thrill of realizing she's yours. This is a remarkable other-world sensation, isn't it?

My son-in-law Christopher, a grandson of the country of Haiti, has tawny skin and jet black eyes. His wife, our Julie, has dark brown eyes, so there was no doubt that their first child's eyes would lean toward ebony. The chances for a blue-eyed infant were zero.

A guest-with-daddy-privileges in the delivery room, Christopher stood where he could witness the baby's introduction to the world. Doctors and nurses scurried about. Exhausted from hours of hard labor, Julie pushed.

"Suddenly I saw the baby's face," Christopher told me later. "Her eyes were wide open." He paused and gathered his composure. "Dad,"

he told me that morning, “she was looking right at me. It was like those eyes were saying, ‘So you’re the guy?’”

Many years later, the feeling of that moment is still etched in Christopher’s memory. “I was suddenly a dad.”

This is going to be the most unbelievable project you’ve ever tackled.

For Christopher, even though this happened many years ago, the joy and sobriety of the sight of those eyes looking right at him is still very fresh. Handing him a large, shiny, and very clean pair of scissors, the doctor asked Christopher to cut the umbilical cord.¹ He squeezed, and the cord was severed. Until this instant, the baby had literally been connected to her mother. Miraculously, helping to shape little Harper’s character would now be his responsibility.

You have your own story, don’t you? Go back to that moment in your memory right now. Are you there?

What year was it? What was the name of the hospital? Do you remember the name of your wife’s doctor? What time of year was it? What time of day? How long had your wife been in labor? Were you tired? Was your wife tired? (I’m kidding.)

Okay, are you standing there? It’s an amazing moment—an absolutely breathtaking, speechless moment. You don’t remember ever feeling such wonder.

Perhaps you’re thinking, *Is this really happening to me? Is this little person actually mine? When am I going to be able to take her home? What will I do with her when we get home? She looks so fragile. If I pick her up, will she break? I can barely handle myself. . . . and my marriage . . . now this!*

What I want you to do is to see yourself looking at that baby, just as you stood in your backyard imagining the deck you were about to build. This is going to be the most unbelievable project you’ve ever tackled. You’re responsible to help “build” this little girl into a woman.

Sure, there are others who *could* do it, but you're the dad, and in spite of how you feel at the moment, no one is more qualified than you.

And just like that Saturday morning when you couldn't sleep in, suddenly it's time to get excited about this project—very excited. In fact, I'll make you a promise: This project will give you more satisfaction than any old wooden deck possibly could.

AND WHAT ABOUT TOMORROW?

Now we're going on another journey. This one's into the future.

Your "little" girl has never looked more angelic than she does at this moment. The radiance of her face almost seems to be throwing off light. Her dress is the purest white you think you've ever seen.²

The two of you are standing in front of closed double doors, and she has her arm gently tucked under yours. The organist begins playing, the doors open, and you and your daughter are slowly walking down the center aisle of a familiar place, your home church. You can feel your heart pounding in your temples. The people are standing. You look left and right into the faces of well-wishers. Extended family. Lifetime friends. You have never been more proud. You're having one of those epiphanies where you can almost stand back and watch yourself. You don't remember having the bottom of your feet tingle before, but this is actually happening. It's an overwhelming and awesome experience.

The walk to the front of the sanctuary has ended. You stand silently while the organist finishes the processional.

Except for the tingling in your feet, your whole body is numb, almost trancelike. You've been a guest at so many of these things and seen other dads standing with the bride, but you never expected it to be quite like this.

The minister has finished his opening remarks. You know he's getting close to asking you the big question. You're just about to place your

girl into someone else's care for the rest of her life. For a split second, you panic.

What's my line? What's my cue? What am I supposed to say? Can someone please help me? Your mind screams for the words.

But just as you practiced the night before, when the minister says, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" you calmly speak the words that close the deal: "Her mother and I do."

You gently take her hand from your arm, place it into the minister's hand, and quietly sit down.

In the spring of 1994, Bobbie and I attended a very formal wedding. Brittany, one of our daughter's best friends, was getting married. The church was impeccably decorated with flowers and packed from aisle to aisle with well-dressed guests. The strains of the organ swelled as the bride and her father walked to the front of the church. Everyone stood. It was one of those lump-in-your-throat moments.

As the majestic processional ended, the robed and somber minister opened a small, black book and read a few appropriate and, of course, formal remarks. His booming voice filled the sanctuary.

When he was finished, he invited the congregation to be seated. We obeyed.

Then, suddenly and without warning, the minister broke character. It was almost as though he had wakened from a spell. This big-city-seminary-trained, austere man of the cloth looked up from his little book and straight into the face of the bride's father. "Well, Johnny," he boomed, "I guess this is the end of the road."

Some of the guests snickered. Some laughed out loud. Fathers with unmarried daughters, including me, audibly gasped. I don't remember anything else about that ceremony.

Well, my fathering friend, someday when you take your own daughter for the short walk down that aisle, it *will be* the end of the road for you, too.

For some dads, helping a daughter pack all her grown-up things

into a U-Haul and watching her drive off to seek her fortune will be that “walk down the aisle.” In either case, they’re setting their daughters free. What they’ve done to prepare them for that moment is finished.

This book will help you get ready for that moment.

YOU’RE WHAT?

I fell into this fathering thing unexpectedly. I know how it happened; I just wasn’t prepared.

It was February 1971, just 11 months after our wedding. Bobbie and I were driving to Minneapolis from our home in Chicago to attend a business convention. I was glad Bobbie was able to come with me on this trip, but she seemed unusually tired as our car headed north into the bitter-cold night.

I battled high winds and slippery highways. This was long before mandatory seat belt laws, and Bobbie spent most of the trip stretched out on the backseat, only occasionally waking to make sure I was okay. I scanned the radio dial, unsuccessfully trying to find something more interesting than hog futures.

I listened to Bobbie’s irregular breathing. I could tell this was more than just being extra tired. Bobbie wasn’t feeling well.

I sure hope it’s not the flu, I worried.

The day after we arrived in the Twin Cities, still not feeling right, she whispered her own diagnosis to me. Too overwhelmed to hear herself say the words above a whisper, she said softly, “Honey, I think I’m pregnant.”

The words took my breath away. I couldn’t believe it.

I was on the staff of a youth ministry, and she was a full-time college student. Because we lived on donations and a part-time job that Bobbie had working for the school librarian, our money barely lasted a month at a time.

“What are we going to do?” she asked repeatedly during the next few days. The swirling reality of this responsibility began to sink in.

What *were* we going to do?

After our return to Chicago, Bobbie made an appointment with her doctor. She wanted to be sure. I went along for support.

The only man sitting in the waiting room, I remember surveying the women seated in the chairs around the perimeter of the room. They were at varying stages of readiness. Most were chatting openly with their neighbors about intimate and graphic details of physiological changes and surprises. I could feel the color draining from my face. It was all I could do to hang on.

And then I saw her. My wife of less than one year walked from the hallway through the door and into the waiting room where I sat. Our eyes locked immediately. Hers welled up with tears. So did mine. She nodded ever so slightly. She reminded me of an angel.

PREGNANT ON PURPOSE!

Most of our friends were married couples three or four years older than us. All of them had determined they were going to wait until they could “afford” children. And I guess, without actually discussing it, that’s where we were headed too.

We suspected that these friends, once they learned we were expecting a baby, would be shocked. “You’re pregnant? What happened? Surely this must be a big surprise!”

So before any of those comments came our way, Bobbie and I sat down to talk it over.

“You know,” I remember saying, “even though this really is a total shock, let’s tell everyone this pregnancy was planned. We can’t imagine how things are going to work out, but God has obviously blessed us with this baby, so between you and me, let’s just rest in the fact that it

was God's plan. Let's tell everyone that this baby was exactly what we had in mind."

Bobbie agreed. What else would we say about God's plan? So that's what we decided to do.

And sure enough, friends asked. Some were diplomatic. Subtle. "Hmmm, what an interesting time in your lives to start a family." Others were really direct: "You're what?"

Even more surprising than the pregnancy itself was our confident response. I can still see them shaking their heads in disbelief.

The closer we got to delivery day, the more excited we became. The summer of 1971 was unusually warm and humid, even for Chicago. So we bought a used air-conditioning unit; a friend and I hoisted the heavy thing into the living room window. Bobbie spent most of her last months of pregnancy standing directly in front of its coldest output. I watched as her belly swelled, clearly thankful to be a man.

In mid-September, our little girl was born.

WHAT DID I KNOW ABOUT GIRLS?

I was disappointed. I'll admit it.

Though I didn't whisper a word of this to Bobbie at the time, I really had wanted a boy—a son who would help me with building projects; a son I could tussle with on the living room floor; a son who, by some miraculous quirk of genetic fate, would be the athlete I never was. But it wasn't to be.

In three days, we brought our baby home from the hospital. And in no time, we discovered we were about to go through the adjustment of our lives. That adjustment made the passage from being single to getting married look like nothing at all.

But there was no turning back. Try as we might to return to full nights of sleep and lazy, selfishly designed evenings, they were gone. Forever.

WHO ARE YOU, LITTLE GIRL? WHAT'S TO BECOME OF YOU?

Soon after Missy came home to live with us, I learned to do diapers. Don't smile at me. You had to do the same.

This was before Pampers, so I had to get comfortable scraping the treasure off the cloth diaper into the toilet while safely managing the gag reflex. There were Desitin and baby powder, but, in 1971, no little tabs to cinch the thing closed. Learning to use a safety pin the size of a wrench without sticking her was up there on the scale of difficulty with learning to do crown molding without any gaps. I actually did pretty well with this.

In no time I forgot the nonsense about the boy. This little person was capturing my heart. I couldn't wait to get home from work to look at her and hold her.

Late one afternoon, I was lying on the carpeted floor of our living room, cuddled next to baby Missy. She was on her tummy, a clean cloth diaper under her head, with her face turned toward me. I studied her tiny features—her velvety skin, little turned-up nose, and rosebud mouth.

We talked.

"Do you know who you are, little girl?" I asked. "You're Missy, and I'm your daddy. Do you know how glad I am that you came to live at our house? Do you know how much I love you?"

Occasionally her eyes would squint open, trying to focus.

I raised up enough to lean over and kiss her soft cheek. My hand rested on her back, softly patting. Drool trickled out of the corner of her mouth.

As though it were yesterday, I can remember the breathtaking feeling in my soul, not unlike the moment a roller coaster begins its descent.

"This little girl is my responsibility," I breathed out loud. "I'm her daddy, the only one she'll ever have."

The feeling was overwhelming, but not a frustrated or fearful kind

of overwhelmed. I felt resolved. Committed. Ready to tackle the obstacles that would surely lie ahead.

I remember lying there next to this baby person and whispering, “I’ll *be* your daddy, little girl. You can count on me. I can do this. I know I can.”

And in that moment I added a prayer. “God, please help me.”

My project had begun.

