

Dan Naumovich: Daddy downtime overrated

STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Aug 17, 2008 @ 12:00 AM

I recently became the envy of fathers everywhere when a series of events conspired to shine two weeks of bachelorhood upon me. My wife and kids would be traveling east for two weeks, visiting my in-laws' ancestral summer home on Peacham Pond, Vt.

I secretly was relishing the possibilities of 14 days with no responsibilities, save for work and a handful of chores. No one climbing over me into bed in the middle of the night. No one rousing me awake for a pre-dawn breakfast. Unencumbered sleep, which I've craved for years, would soon be mine.

The dream was somewhat dampened by a lingering feeling that I just might miss the young scamps. I've grown quite fond of them over the years, and I feared that an extended bout of loneliness would interfere with my good night's sleep.

Their trip began with me driving them to Chicago for a flight. By the time we arrived, I was second-guessing my trepidation over their leaving. Three hours in a van with four excited and restless children is roughly the equivalent of two weeks in real time, so after banking this quality time together, maybe I would enjoy the break.

That all changed when we got to the airport security gate. When it hit us that they would be moving on while I'd be turning back, things got a bit misty. And when my daughter, Tessie, began to beg that she be allowed to go back home with me, it turned into a downpour. You'll be happy to learn that their grief was short-lived.

It didn't take long for New England's natural beauty, their grandparents' hospitality and the daily swimming, tubing and skiing to fill whatever hole my absence created in their lives. On the phone, the kids were cordial but often distracted, ending each conversation with a cursory "loveyoumiss-youbye," before tossing the phone like a hot potato to whomever was unfortunate enough to be standing nearby.

I was chagrined. Eight years of faithful fatherhood shucked aside for a little fun in the green mountain sun. It wasn't the way I thought things would go down.

I had imagined, after a day or two away, the kids would start to feel the pangs of paternal separation. A few days more, and they would begin to act out. After an entire week, they would surely be crying themselves to sleep each night and wakening to an ever-deepening heartache when they found that their daddy wasn't there.

If they did harbor any of these feelings, they did a good job hiding them under a veneer of pure joy.

It seemed that I was alone with my loneliness — until Tessie finally broke.

On the phone one day, in the middle of telling me about their trip to the Ben & Jerry's factory, she interrupted herself and said tenderly, "I miss you, Daddy," drawing out the "I" as preciously as Shirley Temple used to do.

Even as my memory fades, I'll forever have that sound bite archived in my brain, ready for replay whenever I'm feeling low, or when she does something that makes me feel like shipping her off for two weeks. For instance ...

I was stowing provisions in the van last Saturday before heading north to pick my family up at the airport. As I closed the tailgate, I noticed something I hadn't before. There, scratched in the paint of our newly repaired Odyssey (It side-swiped a large rock. I wasn't driving. Don't ask.) were the letters T E S S I E. Normally, this would have earned her a good talking to and probably more. Instead, it simply triggered the replay button in my brain, and the anticipation of their homecoming was made that much sweeter.

Next time, I should probably go east with them.

Dan Naumovich is a freelance writer and the author of [BlogFreeSpringfield](#). He can be reached at dan@naumo.com.