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**Raising Strong Daughters**

**By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC**

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When my daughter was born, I must admit there was a distinctly different feeling to it when compared to the birth of my son. Part of me was thrilled, but part of me was unsure of how to deal with a gender that I still couldn't quite understand.

When my son was born there was a clear sense that this was territory that I knew: there will be wrestling, playing ball together, playing with cars and, he has a penis! There was a sense of security from all of this and a deep sense of knowing.

Raising a daughter creates different issues for many fathers; it is even more challenging considering the cultural landscape that exists today.

To better understand these issues, it is helpful to explore the expectations of girls that we have as fathers, many of which may be expectations handed down from our own fathers.

Some men feel a strong need to control their daughters, and expect them to act "nice" at all times.

Others shower their daughters with all of the gifts and "things" that they'll ever need, seeing

them as weaker than boys (therefore not encouraging strength and discipline in them).

It's easy for fathers to treat their sons and daughters differently. They can be rough-and-tumble with their sons...but treat their daughters with kid gloves. This opportunity to wrestle or to play physically with your daughters is extremely important, because it shows them that you believe they are capable enough to handle it. (If your daughter is eighteen, it's probably not a good idea to start now.)

The cultural messages we get are that girls and young women are valued for being beautiful, thin, talented, etc. Girls should also be happy, agreeable and eager to please. This cultural backdrop may be partly responsible for the alarming statistics concerning rates of depression, anorexia, bulimia, and other disorders for girls when they are approaching or have entered their teen years.

So how can fathers overcome some of these barriers and help create daughters who become strong, secure women?

If fathers want their daughters to grow up to be strong and secure women, it is absolutely essential that they like women and that they respect them.

No matter how negative and pervasive the cultural messages are, your daughter's self-esteem is greatly impacted by your attitude. If fathers think that women are weaker and need protection, they will tend to raise daughters who are weak and dependent.

To a significant degree, your daughter's success in life and in love is in your hands.

As fathers go through the process of raising daughters, they may have to question everything they thought they knew about the sexes and the

difference between men and women. How is it that you learn about these things?

You learn by allowing your daughters to teach you about them every day. You learn by not attempting to control or protect your daughters. You learn by opening up your hearts, and not having the answers all of the time for your daughters (or your sons).

If you can allow your daughters to enjoy being female as much as you enjoy being male, you've taken a big first step. If you can also allow your daughter to make most of her own decisions, you will probably enjoy a great relationship with her. You will also know a lot more about women than you did before.

Here are some action points for fathers with their daughters:

- Fully explore your expectations for your daughter. See where you may be too controlling in her life, or are overly protecting her.
- Create special times with your daughter each week, one-on-one, when you can ask her questions about her life and become more fully aware of who she is. Make this time sacred and let her know it's important to you.
- Expect your daughter to be strong and competent; she'll know that you do and will respond accordingly.
- If your daughter is a teen-ager or close to it, explore your attitude about your daughter's sexuality; many fathers are uncomfortable with this and leave their daughters emotionally when they need them the most.
- Be a great model for how men treat women in your relationship with your wife.
- Talk to other fathers who have had daughters, and find out how they have dealt with the challenges of raising a daughter.

## Raising Strong Daughters

Your daughter is depending on your healthy attitude to help her to navigate a culture that is not always positive for girls.

Take a step back and examine your view towards women and girls. Are there changes you want to make?

Your daughter will help you to make those changes if you'll just listen.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, coaches men to be better fathers and husbands. He is the author of "25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers" <http://www.markbrandenburg.com/father.htm> For more great tips and action steps for fathers, sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, "Dads, Don't Fix Your Kids," at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>.

### **I Love To Collect African Art**

**By Julee Mitchelsin**

I love venturing around the world and learning about other cultures. A huge part of me comes alive when I'm in another culture. Ever since I was a little girl I have always been fascinated with the faces of people from other parts of the world and I've been intrigued by the way other people live life. Photography seemed to be the right profession for me because it allows me to travel the world and get paid, literally, to see people and cultures and things. I love it. I also love collecting special things from other continents and nations that I visit. My latest fascination has been growing my collection of African art.

I'll admit that at first, African art seemed a little too strange for my liking. It wasn't typically in my color scheme and I couldn't see it fitting into the home I had created back in Vermont. So on many of my first journeys to Africa I came home without any African art. If you're thinking that it is strange for an artist to pass up any chance to collect art, I agree with you now, but I haven't always.

I learned to love and collect African art when I took my two daughters with me to Africa on my latest photoshoot project there. It was a busy three week trip during which we would be making our way through six different countries. I didn't expect to find much time for shopping, but my daughters kept insisting upon it and so I frequently found myself in the most quaint markets meeting stall owners and finding more shots for my photography project than I ever imagined to.

I had given each of my daughters a set amount of spending money before we ever arrived in Africa, and they had that amount gone within the first two markets we enjoyed. I learned to love African art through the eyes of my daughters. They were intrigued and captivated by the art more than I had expected they would be. Watching them pick up new items and love their look I too began to love looking at African art. I decided that I wanted to forego my need to have everything matching in my home in order that I could collect important art work from Africa, the continent that I had grown to love.

If you come into my home today you can hardly walk through a room without seeing the imprint of Africa somewhere. That's because African art adorns almost every room that I spend time in. I have had a transformation: I went from being someone who practically ignored the beauty of African art to being someone that is enthralled with its beauty.

Julee Mitchelsin is a photographer who gets to travel the world over for her work. She loves it. She also loves collecting new pieces of African art whenever she can. See

for

more details.



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