

Son of the Black Parakeet

Endearing Dads, Printable Pops and one bird's
Path to Fatherhood



By Chad R. Hunter
Cover illustration by James Hunter

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This work reflects the author's present recollection of his experiences over a period of years. To protect the privacy of others, names and descriptions have been changed and some incidents condensed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION 6

INTRODUCTION 7

FINDING OUT, PEE STICKS & THERE'S DAD11

FEAR AND FALLING IN LOVE WITH HAROLD RAMIS (AGAIN)15

LESSON - POP "POP ON IT ALL"20

ALL TYPES OF KITS & LIVE REALLY CLOSE23

WHAT DID FATHER KNOW BEST, PART 131

MICHIGAN CITY & MARIAH'S SING-SONG35

LESSON - MR. MAYA "TO BREATHE"43

THE DELIVERY & MICROWAVE BRATWURST47

CAR SEATS AND SWEATY GARAGES63

LESSON - DM "LEAVE THE ROOM"67

WHAT DID FATHER KNOW BEST, PART 269

HIS BOTTLE, MY BOTTLE & CHUCK CONNORS HELPED BABYSIT72

EXPLOSIVE DIARRHEA & TAKE THE HILL74

LESSON - CDJ - "BECAUSE IT HAS TO"76

BABY POO MAKES GREAT DIAPER PICS & DIGITAL GAGGING78

SLEEP & GOD BLESS THOSE GOATS81

BOPPYS TO THE LEFT OF ME & NIPPLE CREAM TO THE RIGHT84

LESSON - AD "A BULLET DOWN THE HIGHWAY ".....88

STROLLERS & LOSING MY MALL92

ENDING95

ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....102

FROM THE AUTHOR.....104

DEDICATION

First and foremost, thank you God. Without You, I would have no breath of life. Thank you.

Thank you with all my heart to Lizeth, I love you. Without you I would never have known the magic of being a father. Your absolute selflessness during the pregnancy remains the epitome of heroics.

Thank you to all the dads who took the time to not only look after me but to teach me. I hope this book does you justice.

Thank you to the God-sent staff of the University of Chicago whose tireless care and caution helped change our lives forever.

Thank you to my family, who in the absence of a father, still taught me the core foundation of being a man. Val, Kim and Jaime - you have my eternal gratitude and love. And to Mom - if I am half the dad you were, I'll be a great one.

Thank you to my outstanding Beta readers - Rosalba, Susan and Andrea!

Thank you, the reader, who I hope and pray will be touched by these tales!

Last but not least, thank you to Orlando for being the greatest story I will ever be a part of.

INTRODUCTION

I remember my first day of school. I was terrified. I was lost. My mother was reassuring me that everything would be alright. I felt, no, I knew, down in the pit of my stomach that I was ill-prepared for what was coming. That day and the following days ahead with their requirements and their needs were going to eat me whole. Nothing in my short life had given me any of the knowledge I would need to avoid being torn to shreds.

And that same terror returned to me some thirty years later when I found out I was going to be a father.

Orlando entered our lives. And he rocked everything to its core. From the medical hoops and hurdles to the brain-sizzling lack of sleep to everything I thought I knew and didn't, never before in history had 5 lbs. and 5 oz. been so mighty and life-changing. He was like that asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs and changed our world forever. I wondered if that equally devastating space rock was also only a third of a pound?

I have learned one lesson about fatherhood that is unquestionable - when a man becomes a father, he has learned to be one from either the presence of a father or the lack of one. We are made by either example or void - created by the man who

created us or created by the heart-breaking silence of that man's absence.

There is also another truth to fatherhood that I have discovered. And your reaction as you read it will solidify its truth. Ready? Here goes - being a father can be hard. See? You, like so many others who have either read that sentence or heard it just rolled your eyes and said aloud or thought "Please! Mothers have it hard!" And that is one of the main reasons why fatherhood can be hard (notice I said *can* be.) We as a people do not place much value on fathers. Sure, when it's time to play catch or assemble some toy, we've put Dad in those boxes. But when it comes to knowing a child's clothing size or medicine dosage or what clothing to wear or even how that child is doing, the idea that a father can know such things is mind-boggling. We have in our mind's a picture of fathers as (at best) well-meaning but bumbling or (at worst and most often) disinterested and disconnected. And when one hears that being a father can be hard, it is a knee-jerk reaction to throw out a comparison of moms and their struggles.

"Moms have to carry a watermelon for nine months and then push it out!" That is mind-shatteringly painful. There is no logical person that would believe otherwise!

"Moms have to nurse the baby! They have to learn to live without that feeling inside of them!"

"Moms lose their bodies to the pregnancy and then have to try to get it back if they want to!" No man should ever comment on that statement.

All the statements above are true.

Not sure if I can eat watermelon the same now...

But the idea that being a dad can be hard does not mean that being a mom must be easy. Or that one job has to be harder than the other. Both roles of parenting are tough because you are both building a person! You need a permit to build a building! To build a person you just need Marvin Gaye.

If you didn't get that, Google Marvin Gaye music and then ask your parents.

Mother's Day is one of the most commercially successful holidays. It is marketed like crazy nearly a month or two before it arrives. Everyone from florists to travel agents to every store across the land will try to get a piece of mom.

Terrible image there, sorry.

But Father's Day is an afterthought. Even for the best of dads. Even for the cold-fighting, homework-doing, clothes-washing, house-cleaning, child-loving fathers out there.

Sandwiched between Graduations, Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, we've managed to squeeze in a day where we go and buy an ugly tie, some fishing item or whatever drugstore item we think Dad will want.

Mom needs to hear that you love her.

And Dads deserve it as well. One is not necessarily more beleaguered by parenting than the other.

So, go tell Pops you love him too.

Enjoy this book and the stories within. They run out of chronological order and each one has a different theme and lesson. It is my sincerest hope that they will all do the same thing - touch you and the dads in your life.

Chad Hunter

FINDING OUT, PEE STICKS & THERE'S DAD

It was a Friday.

I remember that because my wife Lizeth and I had discussed opening a bottle of wine and relaxing at home after a hectic week. I had food ready, wine chilled and our date night was about to begin.

She felt...funny as she described it. Like she might be pregnant.

I shrugged and said, "Okay honey, hit the stick." After several moments in the recent past where she felt "funny," we had purchased pregnancy kits. One still had a pee-free stick waiting for usage.

Off she went, I waited, I think with the TV on.

Out she came slowly. Holding the pee-stick.

Her eyes were wide. Her mouth was open.

I may have asked her what had happened but I knew. Somehow, even before I had gotten home, I had known.

It had been a long road, a tough one that was full of fear and doubt before things had gotten this far. Doctors, specialists and hormonal battles - and it all was coming down to a stick.

She showed me the lines. I looked at them. And I noticed the pee but I knew not to ruin the moment.

The stick said she was pregnant.

###

The next day Lizeth had a doctor's appointment. I had a meeting I could not miss. I exited as soon as I could to meet up with my wife and her sister who had come down for a visit. I raced down streets, caught green lights (more like orange because they were so yellow going to red) and thought of my potential fatherhood.

My potential fatherhood - all based on the oracle pee-stick.

And in an instant, I had lived its entire life. My unborn child was born, in school, an old person with grandkids, graduating high school, learning how to drive, learning to walk, getting married, coloring outside the lines, eating glue, interviewing for their first job and so on.

It was like a freight train full of experiences running over me. My child's life was a full one and it rode in on a locomotive that ran over me as the tracks underneath it.

I called my brother Jaime and in rapid fire succession told him of my child's life.

My brother paused and told me to breathe.

###

Arriving at the doctor's office, everyone smiled and let me in. I felt a type of stumbling stupor as I watched myself walk through hallways and into the examination room.

I opened the door to the examination room and the doctor said, "There's Dad."

And I looked to my wife and she was smiling and tearing up simultaneously. Gleefully, she said we were expecting.

Suddenly, the world became something I was watching rather than experiencing.

We went to a local sandwich shop. It was known for great prices and even greater sandwiches.

Once again, it hit me. A child. A life that I would have direct influence on guiding.

And I kid you not, the air got thin and hot and my head drifted and my body became something I was nearly looking at rather than looking for within.

The elderly lady working the register looked at us and said, "Someone should get him a chair, he looks like he's about to pass out."

She was right about the sandwich and right about me. Quickly I leaned against the glass display case. I bent forward a bit and breathed deep and slow. I also wondered about that piece of cherry pie on sale. It looked good.

And as I ate my sandwich and pie later on, I wondered if the baby would like cherry pie.

FEAR AND FALLING IN LOVE WITH HAROLD RAMIS (AGAIN)

My wife had been diagnosed with an ovarian condition that would make pregnancy difficult. She had relied on her gynecologist to give us direction on the best route to adding to our family. I had expected understanding and guidance. We received anything but.

The doctor looked at us and said we would most likely either never conceive or have to pursue fertility treatments which could yield results or not.

Fear. This doctor spoke fear.

We traveled home with a horrid sense of dread about us, I swear it was so much a presence I think we bought a third ticket aboard the South Shore train on the way back.

Sure, we had discussed children before we got married and we agreed and promised wholeheartedly that if biological children were not a possibility, we would adopt. And we still stood by that but somehow, the cold reality of our promise then was not only shocking but painful. Not only could I feel my pain but I could also sense my wife's.

I could only imagine at the level of incompleteness that she must have been feeling. I could only dream of, in my nightmares, the nagging cruel sensation of half-existence that

claws at a woman who places motherhood on her checklist only to be told she may have to take it off.

She wanted to be a mom, it was in her heart and soul but she feared it was not in her body.

On the train ride back home fear sat with us and it took the window seat.

###

The research began. The investigating ramped up and most of all, the praying became a thing, not of practice or behavior, but of necessity. I had no medical degree. My understanding of my wife's "parts" was more about enjoyment and was now having to move into the analytical.

But we prayed on and on. And God help me, the fear tried to stay neck and neck with the faith.

During the research of the hormonal issues, we found that there were two specialists in the country that were experts in the field.

One was in Los Angeles; immediately I began simulating the trip in my mind.

The second was at the University of Chicago.

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