

THE UNEXPECTED TROPHIES OF PARENTHOOD

Just before midnight, the whistling outside put me on alert. Then the front door swung opened.

Our son, Barrett, had come home unexpectedly, jostling a large sack. Had he been younger, I might have expected him to extract a kitten or other wayward animal.

"What's in the sack?" I suspiciously inquired. "You'll see," came his mysteriously reply.

His hand withdrew a hefty book. Knowing my affinity for Father Brown and Sherlock Holmes, he had purchased a collection of detective stories for me. No special occasion.

"Is Mom asleep? I've got some things for her, too." Sensing the poignancy of the instant, I hastened to awaken her.

For her the sack produced THE LITTLE HOUSE, a special children's picture book. "I remember how you read this to me when I was little, and I wanted to buy it for you." Then out came another picture book. "Remember MAKE WAY FOR DUCKLINGS, Mom? It reminds me of my childhood."

What stirred the slumbering past I know not, but such moments of pleasant remembrance are one of parents' greatest rewards. Seeking a glimpse into those halcyon days, I browsed an old journal this morning, picking random entries from when Barrett was six. And recalling the particular incidents my scribbles represented, I squeezed my eyes close to see them better.

"I took Barrett to the army surplus store in Little Rock. We also went to my office, the Territorial Restoration and McDonald's. He had a good time and thanked me for surprising him. He also told me that he was glad that I didn't have to work on Saturdays. So am I, for these chances will not come our way again."

"Barrett and I went to Zellner's to get some refrigerator boxes. We cut windows and doors into them to make a clubhouse to play in. This took a lot of time, but he is little only once, and the opportunity to do such things will be gone all too soon."

"Yesterday morning we went to buy valentines. He picked out a card and a bookmark as well as some note cards and envelopes. Then we went to Pinnacle Mountain to watch a presentation on birds of prey, especially eagles."

"Barrett and I went to fly one of his kites. We let out all of our 500 feet of string, and the kite was nearly out of sight. As we rode our bicycles to Gatlin Park, he was singing, 'It's a good day to fly a kite!' I hope he will remember the time I have taken with him."

"Barrett went with me to see Jenny. We played hide-and-seek, had pine cone fights, looked at the Little Dipper, ran, and bought a candy bar. I hope that Barrett remembers our times with Jenny as pleasant."

"Barrett is taking a nap in the tent he bought with his own money. He is so excited."

"We ate out today and then ran through the sprinklers in the front yard. He thought that was great fun!"

"Barrett made such a fine Mother's Day present for Mary. He drew pictures and fixed up a box with a bow. He did it all by himself."

"As Barrett grows, I pray that we will always be good friends. My confidence is in the fact that we reap what we sow, and I have tried to sow the right things into his life."

The trophies of parenthood come when our children return to us in like kind--time for time, laugh for laugh, tear for tear--the costly treasure we labored to invest in them in childhood.