

# Daddytrack

BY

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requires father to cut back on work.

TV commercials show fathers in business suits ducking out of conferences to attend their children's school plays, but we do not see them ducking out of work for the plain-old-vanilla caretaking of their children—the "quantity time" stuff. Support for fathers' involvement in the day-to-day labor of raising children is growing in the work world with the speed of a glacier. Whereas employers may not allow a mother to work part time, they do understand her reason for wanting to. A man who wants to work part time in order to care for his children is looked on with suspicion or, at best, with amusement.

Laurie and I decided to share child care before we were married, well before our son Sean was born. Neither of us wanted to stop working, nor did we want to miss out on this exciting period of newborn growth by being the full-time bringer-home-of-bacon.

In the months before our son was born, we both went to our employers and negotiated a reduction in working hours. We were able to juggle our time so one of us could always be the primary caregiver. Our employers were supportive, allowing us the flexibility to work at home

and not balking at our patchwork schedules. After Sean was born, I worked long hours two days a week while Laurie stayed home with him. On Tuesdays, I was home on the range. On Wednesdays and Fridays we each worked half a day and spent the other half with Sean.

We managed this arrangement for 17 months and then suffered a temporary setback. A restructuring at my workplace and a promotion I never asked for sent me across the bay to San Francisco...full time. Despite an impassioned speech about why I should maintain a flexible schedule, I found myself being a commuter dad, away from home 11 hours a day, five days a week.

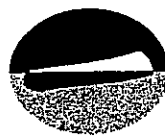
The changes in my work schedule provoked changes in Sean. He began to cling more to his mother. And on the one evening a week that I soloed, he would wander through the house baaing "Mama" like a lost sheep and stay awake until she returned home around 10.

After four months of full-time work—and a lot of grumbling—I found a flexible, 80-percent-time job. Although our situation is tighter and less flexible than it was originally, we have recovered our sense of balance. My relationship with Sean has improved dramatically.

We've been lucky, yes, but the determining factor in our success has been *asking for* and *looking for* suitable work arrangements. Although part-time professional work, job sharing, and working-at-home situations are still scarce, they have nevertheless entered the vocabulary. According to proponents of alternative work arrangements, the most successful route to a flexible situation is to create it yourself and our experiences attest to that. For now, this is more easily accomplished by workers who have already established the trust and respect of their employers.

Our new arrangement is working well for the entire family. Sean is a good-natured, energetic, outgoing, secure child who laughs more than he cries. Laurie loves the balance of playing with him in the mornings and then working in the afternoons. I also enjoy balancing the intellectual demands of work with the emotional demands of parenting. And the quantity of time we have together frees Sean and I from always having an agenda: We hang out, take aimless walks, play on the swings, eat ice cream, or sit on the corner and watch cars and trucks go by.

Although Laurie and I continue to strive toward equality in



It is not news that fathering has changed over the past generation or two, that today's father is more involved in child care than his father was. But although the involved and nurturing father is becoming more visible and acceptable, he is still generally regarded as a helper in the world of child care and housekeeping. He pitches in. He helps *when he wants to*. Fathers are volunteer providers; mothers are the staff. The household with two "staff parents" is still rare, especially when it

our parenting, we realize that it has never been *truly* equal—partly because Laurie logs more hours with Sean, but mostly because of the strong biological attachment between mother and child. Among couples who are committed to true equality in child care, mothers sometimes opt to nurse for just a few months or not at all. For us, the importance of breastfeeding took precedence over any ideological commitment. In the early months, when Sean nursed a lot, our division of duties was weighted toward me doing most of the household stuff and Laurie doing most of the baby stuff. As Sean grew older and began to nurse less, we adjusted our division of labor. We seem to be mirroring what physician Kyle Pruett calls the Jack Sprat theory of parenting: Our contributions are not similar, but rather complementary.

One way we keep current is by having “business meetings” on Friday evenings after Sean has gone to bed. This gives us an opportunity to check how we are doing with our responsibilities as well as to synchronize calendars, schedule child care, balance the checking accounts, and so on.

All is not milk and honey, of course. Quantity time with Sean

translates into a shortage of time for his parents—for romance, for play, for sleep, and for keeping house. We’ve also made sacrifices—we’re renting a house instead of buying one. Career advancement is on idle. And although I know in my heart that nurturing a strong family is more important than owning a house or having a fat paycheck, it’s tough to ignore all the people cruising by me on the fast track.

Actually, the career pressure has been of less concern than the lack of peers making similar choices. One of the questioning voices in my head has nagged, “If it’s so right, how come more fathers aren’t doing it?” I have often felt isolated as a father, a daddy lost in mommyland, especially on weekdays, when I find myself in a gym or on a playground filled with babies and their mothers.

When I was a child, no boy ever said he wanted to grow up to be a father. Perhaps when Sean and other boys of his generation start thinking about what they want to be, some will decide to be fathers. And perhaps, when they ask their employers for a reduced schedule in order to care for their children, they will be met with a knowing smile.



OK, DAD. I'LL JUST STAY HERE QUIETLY GROOMING UP AT AN UNBELIEVABLE RATE, NEVER SPENDING MUCH SPECIAL TIME WITH MY OWN DAD, WHO'S ALWAYS WORKING.





**Dear Mom: This Is the Letter I Would Have Written- Monica Steel**

This letter is powerful one: full of detail and description of the pain that the author has and continues to go through. In this letter, the author comments on the “wonderful mommy-scented” memories that she is losing every time she sees her mom drunk. Your assignment is to write a brief letter to one or both of your parents describing your favorite memory of them. (The memory could be of just them or of a time you had with them). In the letter be sure to let them know how grateful you are that you have this memory to cherish. This letter will be handed in to be marked and it is your choice whether you wish to give them this letter or not.

Evaluation

Sincere thought	5
Description of memory	5
Mechanics	5

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