

Describe Daddy Daughter Day

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8:30 AM on a Saturday and my dad sings his heart out to David Bowie's song "Rebel Rebel." The line, "Hot tramp, I love you so," becomes "Hot *shrimp*, I love you so," in an effort to keep obscene language away from my ears. We sing to each song, and pause every now and then to take sips out of our travel mugs. His full with coffee, mine with apple juice.

By 9:00 AM I've arrived at my art class. The walls are filled with children's work, and the space is just big enough for a couple of long craft tables. At the entrance, a waiting room for the parents. This room is typically empty. Well, *almost* empty. One seat is always occupied. For the full hour, my dad sits on a plastic chair, sipping his coffee and reading the paper. Just waiting. Occasionally, he gets a call from work and steps outside, but makes sure to stay in front of the window where I can see him.

When class ends at 10:00 AM, I run over to him with a piece of paper that probably makes him wonder why he's paying for this. He smiles, "Wow this looks fantastic Emmy, I'm so proud of you." He carries the craft back to the car, handling it gently, making sure not to ruin the piece and break my heart. Success: the paper is transferred with no rips, tears or marks.

We're sitting in the car and we both hear a rumble. It's our stomachs. 10:30 AM and we both know it's time for breakfast. We walk into The Original Pancake House, and head straight to our usual spot. We're met with two hot cocoas right away, seeing as our red-headed waitress, Ashley, knows our order. She sees us at the same time every Saturday, and makes sure to have two spots ready for us. Ashley sets out a kids menu for me each time, but never an adult menu for my dad. By the time him and I finish coloring, two plates of cinnamon french toast come out. Him with the full stack, and I with the half stack. I'm old enough to cut my own food, but I don't. He slides his plate out of the way, and places mine in front of him. With his fork and knife, he cuts all my slices, leaving the syrup to me. By the time he gets to his own food, there's no steam coming off his plate.

We finish breakfast by telling Ashley we'll see her again in a couple days. As we leave, he opens each door for me, and holds it for whoever comes in. He trades the door handle for my hand before walking back to the car. This car ride is shorter- filled with conversation instead of music.

At 11:30 we pull into his favorite car wash. They attach the car to a moving belt and we wait inside, watching the car go through. We stand in the kids section, where every over priced knick knack is on display for munchkins like me to touch. First thing I do is pick a foam ball from the shelf to play catch. We have 15 minutes to try and break our record from last week before it's time to get back in the car.

“Okay Emmy, start counting. Let’s see how many we can catch in a row.” He always remembers the number we hit last time. I beg him to buy me the ball before we leave, but he doesn’t. He never does. He knows me too well. I’ll never touch it once we get home.

Instead, he takes me to the bookstore at 12:00 PM in his newly cleaned car that smells like ocean breeze. Holding my hand, he walks me up to the Geronimo Stilton books. My favorite series. Each Saturday he buys me a new one, so long as I’ve read the one from the week prior. He knows I’ll enjoy this more than a ball.

As the afternoon begins, he takes me to our last stop of daddy-daughter day: PetSmart. It’s 1:00 PM, and in the first 5 minutes we’re stopped by a man we see each time. As I get close to Nala, the nice man’s bulldog, my dad stands and talks for what seems like centuries. It gives me more time to pet Nala. Once we say goodbye, we head for the cats. My dad’s the only one in the family who likes them. With no pets at home, we walk pass the cages saying hi to each cat. He tells me, “All these cats are yours, but this is their home, so they have to stay here.” We spend at least an hour there.

Our car ride home consists of more classic rock, but this time we’re listening to “Godzilla” by the Blue Oyster Cult. He knows the exact time the station plays the song, and makes sure we’re in the car to hear it. It’s one of our favorites.

At 2:15 PM we pull into the neighborhood, and it’s time to switch the XM radio station from 80s Top Hits to Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers Greatest Hits. I love his music except for when he plays Tom Petty. That’s why we listen to this station last. He tunes in for us to hear one specific song: “I Won’t Back Down” As he sings the lyrics, “In a world that keeps on pushing me around, but I’ll stand my ground,” he points at me in the back seat to cue my part. While pulling into the driveway, we sing the lyrics, “I won’t back down,” together.