

Big Ideas

When my oldest granddaughter was four, she carefully arranged things in her world so she could more easily understand what was going on around her. I'm sure you've seen kids do this: "Daddy does the outside work and Mom washes our clothes. Dad's job is to drive us when we go on vacation, but Mom's job is to drive us to school."

"Let's go to the grocery store," I said one afternoon while my wife and I were babysitting. "I want to buy a chocolate cake."

"No," she said, "Mommy is in charge of buying the food."

"She is?" I said.

"Yup, Mom is in charge of the food. Dad is in charge of the garbage. I'm in charge of the attic."

"You're in charge of the attic?" I asked. "It's such a tiny little space. What's up in the attic?"

"I don't know," she said, "but Dad says I'm in charge of it."

"Have you ever been up there?"

"No, neither has Dad," she said. "What are you in charge of, Grandpa?"

Kids have the darnedest way of stumping us old folks. Retired, I hadn't been in charge of much for a while, unless you want to count chores around the house. Of course, no one appreciates the big and little jobs I've done every day over the years. Instead they recall the time I offered to again teach the entire family how to use the upstairs shower so water didn't drip on the floor and find its way to the living room ceiling below. The lesson included a selected volunteer to get in the shower and turn on the water, clothing

optional. Or the morning I insisted on a picnic at the local park in the middle of a blizzard. There's nothing like the smell of bacon frying on a wood fire in a 10 inch snowstorm whipped up by gale force winds. Sure, one of the kids got lost searching for fireplace wood, but we found her before she froze to death.

"Well, honey," I said, "I guess I'm in charge of Big Ideas."

"What are they?" she asked.

"Well, you know," I said, "like when you get an idea that no one else has thought of. Something that just leaves you dizzy with anticipation, that you can't wait to try, like ... like ... flying in a balloon over your house or building a tree fort big enough for all your friends or figuring out how to claim your dog as a income tax deduction."

She looked doubtful and I wondered if I'd made my point.

"Your Mommy would remember my ideas from when she was a girl," I said, offering my daughter as a potential character witness. "Now can we go get that chocolate cake?" I asked.

Out in the kitchen my wife had heard my soaring rhetoric above the normal household sounds, and it brought her into the living room.

"What is Grandpa telling you now, honey?" she asked.

"He's in charge of Big Ideas," said my granddaughter.

"What kind of ideas?" asked Grandma, glancing at me with a look of concern.

"Mommy already told me," she said with a sigh only a little girl can make. "The kind that never work."

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