

St. Louis Dad: A Manual

By Kenneth M. Mitchell

Foreword

As the story goes, my Mom had to leave me, in baby mode, with my dad to go to the store. She was gone a short time, and alas, I did what pediatricians call “poopy in the diaper.” Dad did what any 35-year-old guy in 1965 would do: took me across the street to Mrs. Mays and made *her* change my diaper. And I wasn’t even his first kid—I was his fourth! He made it through his entire adult life without changing a single diaper, and no one batted an eye.

Boy, have things changed. First and foremost, Mrs. Mays no longer changes my diapers. Second, while St. Louis dads may still depend on the kindness of neighbor ladies in this especially friendly town, they are expected to take a more active part in raising their newborns.

I have mixed feelings about this. Those of us who grew up in the late 20th century remember different dads than what we’re expected to be. There were the Cardinal games, the little league soccer tournaments, and afternoons spent fetching Dad and various “uncles” named Kenny, Harry, and Lefty Stag beer from a profoundly decaled cooler. Otherwise, basically Dad went to work, came home, had a beer, ate dinner, and maybe you’d watch M*A*S*H together, but that was about it.

But we have “evolved” and are expected to be more involved in the life of the newborn. Also, as the husband-wife relationship went from noble-serf to partner-partner or even yin-yang, more is expected of us.

Here is where I’m supposed to say that this is an “opportunity” or some such politically correct thing. But this is a guy book, and I’m aiming to tell it as it is: babies are disruptive, disgusting little creatures. But hey! They are *your* disruptive, disgusting little creatures! And there is a reality that the more bonding, the more participating you can do with the newborn, the better adjusted the kid will be. That’s a fact—just recently the World Health Organization confirmed that a child’s growth is influenced more by environmental factors than genetics in the first five years, and the child’s personality is mostly completely developed by then. So consider being part of it all as much as possible.

And I’m evidence that this can be done, that you can be a supportive spouse and loving dad from day one without completely* losing your frickin’ mind.

So I’m using this “manual,” if you will, to basically share everything I wish I knew before I descended into this chaos. It takes into consideration the cultural and social atmosphere unique to the Gateway to the West, and what I hope is even more helpful, specific ideas for what to do with the kids. At the time of publication, there is not yet a bar that also has a playroom for toddlers and a big TV blaring ESPN. But if everyone reading this buys 10 copies, and gets 10 of their friends to buy 10 copies times infinity, I promise to open one. Man, won’t that be cool.

*my therapist insisted on the word “completely” for legal purposes.