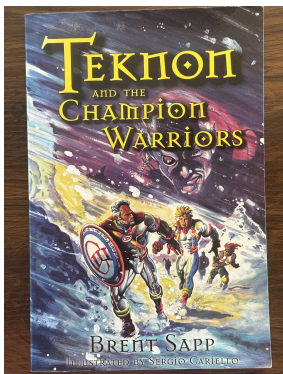


# One of the Best Things I did with My Kids

“*One of my good friends who had four children was impressed that many cultures had a systemic process of ushering children into young adulthood. Jewish culture has bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah. He also found other cultures marked this transition. He set about trying to create something for his first child who was a young man.*

*Brent (the dad) took Casey (his son) out to a Steak & Shake and set before him an invitation to consider meeting with him once a week for a year. He told Casey that he didn't have to do it and he didn't want him to decide on the spot. He promised that they would go out once a week and meet for about an hour.*



*Brent actually took the time to write a book about a father/son adventure that he utilized in his meetings with Casey. It is called “Teknon and the Champion Warriors”<sup>2</sup>. The book covered many important character qualities such as honesty, courage, serving and helping others. Brent, who is a Christian, made use of other things for Casey and him to discuss. It might be a movie excerpt or a passage from the Bible. Brent told me how meaningful these times were as his young son was eager and open to discuss so many things. At the end of the year, Brent planned a pig-hunt for Casey and invited several men who were his friends. Each man took a walk with Casey and shared the most important lessons they had learned in their*

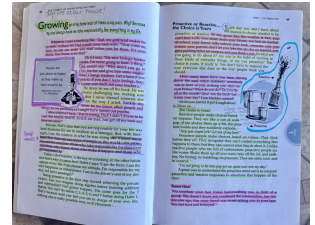
*lives. At the end of the evening Brent presented Casey with a ring that had a symbol he had used in the book.*

*My oldest child was a year and ½ behind Casey, so I was able to hear about this process and consider how to adapt it to a young woman. The book didn't fit well because it was about a father/son adventure. I decided it was more about what we talked about than picking a particular book. I had told my daughter about what Brent had done with Casey and suggested that I would love to do something similar if she had an interest. We agreed to go to Starbucks one Sunday afternoon and I told her I would describe what I had in mind. Once at Starbucks I let her order whatever she wanted. Her drink of choice was a Frappuccino.*

## One of the Best Things I Ever Did with My Kids

*I then described my idea that we would meet on Sunday afternoons unless we had a conflict, and we would discuss a variety of different things that I thought would be of interest to her. I brought a copy of “Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens<sup>3</sup>” which was written by the Sean Covey, the son of Stephen Covey who was the author of the hugely successful book, “Seven Habits of High Effective People.” I told Leslie that we would read the book together to start and only do one chapter per week. After that we would figure out what else might be good to discuss. Like Brent, I told her that she didn’t have to do it and I didn’t want her to decide on the spot, but instead tell me after thinking about it.*

*The next day she said, “Dad, I want to do it.” I said, “Fantastic!” I gave her the book and next Sunday we began meeting and we started with Chapter 1. I was struck by how earnestly she took the process. I noticed that she had used different colored highlighters and had highlighted virtually every word in the chapter with one color or another!*



*The book was fantastic and proved to be a great jumping off point to discuss different topics. The chapters are analogous to the adult book but use teen-oriented illustrations and humor. For example, the first habit is to be proactive (take responsibility) and Sean Covey talks about the 7 Habits of Highly Ineffective Teens. He said to be Highly Ineffective, a teen should seek to blame others when something goes wrong. Leslie and I both laughed and admitted our tendency to try and blame others. I quickly realized that for our time to work well I would have to be honest and admit my own struggles and failures.*

*There were many remarkable surprises as we went through this process. One that I vividly remember was how much more receptive Leslie was to instruction or correction when we were at a neutral setting like Starbucks. For example, I was often bothered by the tone she used with her mom. She loved her mom dearly, but the anxiety of finding one’s way in 9<sup>th</sup> grade can create frustration and anger and often mothers take the brunt of this. When I corrected her at home, she was often defensive and seemed annoyed. At Starbucks we could talk about this in a more clinical manner away from the “heat of the moment”. She actually impressed me with her self-awareness and her acknowledgement that her behavior was often “not ideal”. (You take what you can get!)*

*The book provided a launching pad for great discussions and helped me ask her better questions and to think through my own struggles with the 7 Habits. As we neared the end of the book, I wondered what I would do next. As busy as these kids are these days, I didn’t want to weigh her down with lots of reading and/or assignments. I remembered an old trick from my days when I worked with college students who were involved with Fellowship of Christian Athletes. I would simply ask them to tell me the high point and low point of their week. This almost always launched us into a meaningful conversation. I decided I would use this as a starting point and occasionally I would add in a life lesson or a story that I thought was appropriate.*

*What surprised me was how quickly Leslie turned the table and said, “Dad, what was your high point and low point this week?” I was impressed and quickly recognized that if this time was to be really good, I needed to be somewhat vulnerable too. We had some amazing conversations during these weekly meetings.*

*A couple notes are important to add. There were weeks when our schedules caused us to miss, but this was pretty rare. It happened if she had a study group or some other activity with others. It also happened when our family was travelling or if I was out of town. My point is don’t be too rigid. If you meet 40 out of 52 weeks, that is a win!*

*As we came to the end of our year, I began to plan a father-daughter trip. I didn’t think Leslie would appreciate a pig hunt! We ended up deciding on a trip to San Francisco over a weekend. I planned a lot*



*of fun stuff to simply hang out together (cable cars, Fisherman’s Wharf, etc.). We rented a red convertible. Leslie couldn’t drive yet but I took this picture of her in the driver’s seat. We went to Tiffany in San Francisco, and I let her pick out a simple and fairly inexpensive ring. They had some that were about \$150. Today they would probably be \$250. She was thrilled! We had one casual dinner at a Thai restaurant*

*and one fancy fine dining dinner. It was a terrific trip. I was glad I did it when she was this young. I think she would have picked her friends over her me if I had waited much longer.*

#### **Leslie’s Comments Today Looking Back on Our Meetings**

As a twelve-year-old girl, it was highly motivating and special that my dad wanted to spend one-on-one time with me. I remember looking forward to Sundays and our time to be together just us two. If there were challenges at school or arguments with my mom and siblings, we would discuss them during this time. I certainly remember occasionally dreading the discussion on Sunday after an altercation that week at home (I loved to talk back and argue). Although it was difficult to talk through at times and admit what I had done wrong, it was powerful to hear my dad relate and listen to me. Since we were both firstborns, we could commiserate on those stereotypical tendencies, and it made me feel like we had a special connection.

Removing ourselves from the house and eliminating distractions created dedicated time for me to learn about my dad as a person. Hearing him share his high and low points leveled the playing field and made it far easier for me to share about my life. Certainly, as I got older, it was unique for us to have these open conversations about the struggles of being a teen, including friendship dynamics, my future, and dating. Although it could be awkward at times to navigate those discussions and share, it gave us a bond and built trust in our relationship. I think setting aside this time enabled much of that and gave us an opportunity to get to know each other in a way that I don’t think we would have been able to achieve in our daily, busy lives. It communicated to me two things: 1. my dad wanted to know me, and 2. I could be my authentic self and share about my life, and my dad would always be receptive and in my corner. I hope for my kids, particularly my daughters, to have that relationship with their dad. I am curious if it would work for moms as well!

*Another interesting note: My other two children immediately wanted in on the action. “Dad, how come we don’t get to go to Starbucks with you?” I simply said, when you turn 12, you can go. It was encouraging to see their apparent excitement and desire to go hang out.*

*When Leslie and I returned from our trip I was surprised to hear her ask, “Dad, why do we have to stop meeting?” I said, “I didn’t want to drag this out past when it was fun, and I know you are very busy.” She said, “Let’s still meet when we both can.” And so, we continued to meet.*

## One of the Best Things I Ever Did with My Kids

*There are 20 months between my 1<sup>st</sup> born daughter and my 2<sup>nd</sup> born son, David. Soon David was the right age to take him out and issue him the challenge. This time I decided to use my friend's book. I took David out to Starbucks and gave him a very similar offer and challenge. I again said that he didn't have to do it and I didn't want him to decide on the spot. I gave him the book to look over. He told me the next day that he wanted to meet. On Thursday of that week, he called me at work and said, "Dad, I finished the book!" I was amazed that he had read the entire book in 4 days. This captures the eagerness that is often present at the of 12 or 13 that will likely get displaced with friends and other interests as they get older, which is of course healthy and normal. It is why I urge Dads to do this when their kids are about this age rather than waiting until they are 15 or 16.*

*David and I had a great year of meetings, and I carried over some of the best things that I had done with Leslie who continued to be available often on Sundays. My youngest, Haley, was chomping at the bit to get into the action when she turned 12!*



*David and I planned a father/son trip to California, and we went to see Texas play USC in the National Championship. We delayed his trip for a couple of years after he had finished his year, but we often discussed what we would do.*

*Haley joined the fray, and we too had a remarkable year of meeting. All three wanted to keep meeting if their schedules permitted. As you can imagine, by the time they were driving they were busy, but there were still many times they would meet me at Starbucks for a short connection. Haley and I did our father/daughter trip to NYC. We also did the Tiffany trip and got to see the Broadway show Wicked. We made reservations for dinner at Tao after the show at 9:00. Haley was 15 when we made the trip and looked like she could be older. One hilarious moment happened at dinner when a woman sitting next to us, asked us if we were "together". Mortified, Haley said, "No! He is my dad!" We still laugh about that.*



*These were some of the best moments that I had with my kids. My advice is cook up your own recipe. You don't have to do it as I did it or my buddy did it, but there is a window where our kids would love to hang out with us, and the window naturally closes as their lives get fuller. My advice is to make it a priority and you won't ever regret it.*



## Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> My name is Roger Berry. My wife (Liz) and I raised three children who are now 35, 33, and 32 and are each married and raising kids of their own. We live in Austin, Texas. My personal email is RogerEBerry@gmail.com.



<sup>2</sup> Teknon and the Champion Warriors, by Brent Sapp, can be ordered on Amazon.com.

<sup>3</sup> Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens, by Sean Covey, can be ordered on Amazon.com.