

Holding Daddy's Hand

By Dr. Ray Young

Shortly after my wife Debi and I were married, I quickly learned to enjoy holding her hand. As we would drive in the car, take walks in the park, or sit in church together, Debi would take my hand and hold it. Soon I found myself holding her hand in return. Before long, I found that I would often be the one to extend my hand to her.

In a little over a year, our first child Jennifer was born. As soon as Jennifer learned to walk, I was often holding her hand. It was always in a fatherly role for protection or guidance—walking across the street, walking in the mall, etc. As long as Jennifer **needed** me to hold her hand for protection or guidance, it seemed natural. I never thought anything of it. When Jennifer reached a certain age where she no longer seemed to **need** my constant guidance, I began to feel a little uncomfortable about holding her hand. However, out of force of habit, Jennifer continued to try to hold my hand every time we walked next to each other.

Apparently Debi sensed my uneasiness, but as always she was not willing to be bossy and bluntly tell me what I should do.

Debi waited until Jennifer was about 11. At that time, Debi explained to me that at Jennifer's age she was going to need her daddy's affections more for the next several years. She quietly and calmly went on to explain that a girl of Jennifer's age would feel more secure and confident if her daddy would hug her, put his arm around her, or hold her hand.

I immediately went back to holding Jennifer's hand. Soon, I once again felt comfortable doing so because I realized Jennifer **needed** me to hold her hand.

On Jennifer's sixteenth birthday, we gave her a special party with 16 of her friends. Near the end of the party, I read the following, which I had written and framed to present to her as my gift.

Daddy's Sixteen Memories

1. The way you would laugh with your mouth wide open as a baby.
2. Your little fingers sticking out from under the curtain in the apartment when you were supposed to be asleep.
3. The way you sloshed the milk in your highchair tray all over the wall each time you finished your meal.
4. The package of bologna and jug of pop you would leave on the floor of the hallway in the ray of light from the street lamp when you finished sneaking your snack in the middle of the night.
5. The night you told your mom, "Don't ask me if we went to Burger King, because I'm not supposed to tell you we ate a hamburger."
6. The day you scared the old man at the White Hen Pantry when you eased under his chin and yelled, "Hey—scared you, huh?"
7. All the times you and I worked on your Victory Drill pages.
8. The day I carried you in my arms from Uncle Larry's pond because you cut your foot.
9. All the days you went to school, even though you were sick, because you wanted to have perfect attendance one year.
10. The two-day fishing trip you and I took when you were ten years old.

11. All the times you threw a blanket over Mom's head from the balcony in the cabin in Michigan.
12. When you cried because your undefeated team lost the championship game at the soccer tournament.
13. All the many hours you and I worked on memorizing Philippians and preparing you to say chapter one in Pastors' School.
14. Every "ooh," "ahh," "wow" and "Daddy, I want to see ..." during our sixteen annual trips to the zoo.
15. Your three summers of getting up early and coming home dirty with perfect attendance in the cornfields.
16. And the way you always want to hold my hand or arm when we talk together.

September 16, 1993
Daddy

On my fortieth birthday, my then seventeen-year-old daughter, Jennifer, who had recently graduated from high school, presented me with a framed copy of the following poem which she had written:

Holding Daddy's Hand

*When I was just a little girl,
 With hair in braid or sometimes curl,
 My daddy was the cutest man.
 I loved to walk and hold his hand.*

*I know that Daddy loved me so,
 He always helped me learn and grow.
 My daddy was the strongest man,
 I loved to walk and hold his hand.*

*My childhood has come and past,
 It seems I've grown up quite too fast.
 My daddy is the greatest man,
 I'll always walk and hold his hand.*

*Jennifer Lea Young
 July 22, 1995*

Thank you, Debi, for your warm display of affection by holding my hand. Thank you for reminding me that my daughters need me to hold their hands. (P.S. Debi did all of this in such a way that I had no idea what was developing until I received the poem from Jennifer.)