

WILD PIGS & ELEPHANTS

a boy ... the bush ... and a New Year's resolution

(a father-&-son story from Mike Cooney)

Ah-ha – I'd finally found the perfect compromise! For several days, my eldest son had been badgering me to explore our bush paddock with him. Not quite two acres, it's a great place for adventure, with plenty of eels and possums to add to the mystery ... perfect for a growing boy! Anyway, I'd managed so far to postpone our exploration, claiming I was too busy and promising to do it later. (Ever done the same?) But then, at last, I had a brainwave ...

Pulling out my two-way radios, I gave my boy a quick lesson on how they worked – then sent him off to explore the bush on his own. He was excited: he now had a new toy to play with! And I could now be with him without actually *being with* him: a win-win situation, surely?

I started getting calls on the radio – telling me that he was about to climb the fence ... that he got over successfully ... that he made it to the creek ... that he saw a fantail. And from the comfort of my office, I replied – encouraging him in his quest. He radioed back, reporting on possible sightings of wild pigs and elephants and asking if he could jump over the creek. And I, in my wisdom, told him to be careful "But don't drop the radio in the water!"

Strangely, Mum was horrified when she found out later that he'd been down there by himself – despite my assurances that it was all okay. And it *was* all okay – except that he'd done it alone. What's more, without even realising it, I'd given him the message that 'office-time' was more important than 'father-&-son-time'.

When I reflected later on his solo adventure, I was able to justify myself. After all, let's be real: sometimes we *are* too busy! But when he was telling me about the eel he'd tried unsuccessfully to catch, I kinda wished I'd been there with him.

I mean, *surely* I could've spared an hour or two ...?

Thankfully, this lost opportunity wasn't a biggie. I mean,



I hadn't missed his graduation, or the finals in some sports event. But it still mattered – at least it did to me and my boy! And I realise now that this is probably how it starts ... letting our kids down in the little things, and slowly reinforcing the message that they're a wee ways down the priority chain (even though that may not be what we mean)!

As it happened, New Year's Eve loomed next on the horizon. So I decided to make two early resolutions: (i) that I would not let busyness get in road of quality time with my kids ... and (ii) that I would be a man of my word (if I say I'm gonna do something – then I'd better!).

Those resolutions were tested sooner than I'd hoped when I was reminded how I'd promised to take my boy camping. Again, this would've been easy to postpone – but, no, a promise was a promise!

When I broke the news that we would go camping that night down in the bottom paddock, his little face broke into a huge grin! He could barely contain himself as he rushed off to pack his bag. In fact, it was contagious, and his 35-year-old father started getting all excited too! We decided to invite the whole family (grandparents included) to dinner over an open fire – after which he and I would have ourselves an adventure, with the tent, torches and enough food for a week!

So, after the last calzone had been eaten, and the final marshmallow had been roasted on the end of a stick, and the goodbyes had been said, and the rest of the family had departed, we found ourselves alone – just me and my boy – ready to make some memories.

As darkness fell, we spent time telling yarns around the campfire – that magical place that seems to captivate men and boys. And then, when just a few glowing embers were left, we retired to our tent. I wish I could say we spent the night dreaming of roaring stags and princesses that needed rescuing, however a small rock under my sleeping mat ruined that for me.

But it didn't matter. What mattered was, my boy drifted off to sleep knowing that his Dad loved spending time with him ... that he was a man of his word ...



Mike



a word from Grapevine's founder/editor:

PLEASE HELP US MAKE THIS NEW YEAR THE BEST YEAR YET!

Nearly 27 years ago the Keepers of the Vine vowed to "give families a lift" ... to inject a little fun and hope and wholeness into homes throughout the country. It wasn't a New Year's resolution as such, but it was a promise, a commitment, that we made to each other, to our supporters, to our readers.

I'm proud to say that, for the past two-and-a-half decades, Grapevine has kept its promise ... with each new magazine encouraging Kiwi mums and dads and grandparents and couples to help make this beautiful country happier, healthier and more family-friendly for future generations. Despite the obstacles and opposition we've faced at times, we have not given up. Despite the rocky road we've travelled and uphill battles we've fought, we have not compromised on that early exciting Grapevine dream. And as 2008 gets underway, we're even more determined than ever.

An exciting new edition is being put together as I write. It carries two in-depth features – **'RAISING GIRLS: SUGAR & SPICE & ALL THINGS NICE?'** plus **'GRUMPY OLD MEN: THE IRRITABLE MALE SYNDROME'** – and, as always, we'll be aiming to "give families a lift".

But, once again, we can't do it without you. We hope our 2008 editions will be the best, the brightest, the boldest we've ever published ... and we want to reach lots of Kiwi households that are still missing out on our great little mag.

Would you please help us make this year the best year ever ... by earmarking a bumper-sized February donation for Grapevine? \$1000, if you can stretch that far ... \$500, if that's within your reach ... \$100, if you can afford it ... \$50, if your budget permits.

Please mail it to us a.s.a.p. And please accept our thanks – on behalf of all the Kiwi kids and grandkids who, in years to come, will be the beneficiaries of what we (and you!) are attempting each time a magazine goes out.

John



OUR HEARTFELT THANKS, TOO, FOR YOUR MESSAGES OF SYMPATHY & SUPPORT . . .

In my Christmas newsletter I shared some sad news regarding the tragic loss of our young son-in-law. And, on behalf of my daughter, our family, and everyone else involved, I must express our deep appreciation for the flood of notes, cards and emails we received. I can't begin to tell you how encouraged and uplifted we've felt. Please forgive us for not replying individually, but please be assured that your love and prayers and support have cheered us and supported us through this time of grief. May God bless you heaps in return – JOHN COONEY

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