

A Boy Called Dad

He may have trekked the foothills of the Himalayas and rowed the Atlantic, but becoming dad to three 'lionesses' has been the greatest adventure yet for Cambridge dad Chris Howard. Here he takes a wry look at what children say...

As a dad to three brilliant young daughters (Thing One, Thing Two and Youngest Thing) I often find myself in the middle of the most otherworldly conversations that can only be derived in the brain space of children.

I have become gifted at listening and being genuinely engaged by the logic of innocence and the utterly bemusing questions about the world we live in.

We're in a constant back and forth about why the sky is so high, what colour blue and purple makes and assaulted with questions such as 'Can we go to Scotland?' or 'What does it mean if my poo is so big that I can't flush the toilet, Daddy?'

You see children have this amazing gift to philosophise everything without even realising. They're so inquisitive that no question or answer could possibly be considered silly, and quite right too! It's by far one of the most entertaining and enlightening facets of having the little cherubs.

I know it's easy to dismiss but I have chosen always to walk the avenue of hilarity, and try to understand the idiosyncrasies of each of my children because, after all, they've probably gotten them straight from me!

This was confirmed recently, as I caught myself saying 'If Thing One put her head in the oven, would you copy her then?'

'Thanks Mother' I cringe as Thing Two looks up confused. 'In Scotland they eat small animals called haggis, Daddy,' Youngest Thing chimes in.

'Every day, I ask 'How was your day at school? What did you do? Who did you play with? And (most importantly of all) what was for lunch?'

Invariably I get a few words on the first three questions but an entire novel on the food, with descriptions of the colour of peas, the fluffiness of the chips, and their disappointment that the sausage roll wasn't really a sausage roll because it wasn't sausagey'.

It's then swiftly onto quick-fire questions again



because another child at school has told Youngest Thing something about unicorns being real and once existing wild in the forests of Scotland. She'd read it in a book, so it must be true.

'I'm not really sure they actually existed in the real world,' I say, interrupted by a cry of 'Blurple!' from Thing One, as she answers the question from 20 minutes ago about what colour blue and purple make.

Cue three minutes of manic laughter from Thing Two and Youngest Thing, providing me just enough respite to ask if they've got homework.

'No, we did homework yesterday; you did it with us' they say (again in unison like something from the eery Fright Night movie franchise).

'Did I?' I ponder quizzically, because I genuinely can't remember and suddenly feel guilty that I've not paid enough attention to the long division.

'What was it

then?' I query. 'More than, less than sums and reading, Daddy,' Thing Two confirms, which I receive somewhat vacantly, having no recollection of this whatsoever.

I catch myself thinking about unicorns and wondering if there was in fact a horse with a horn somewhere in the lineage of the equestrian world, but of course my train of thought is interrupted by Thing One questioning, undeterred: 'So, so...so Daddy, do you know why the sky is SO high?'

'Erm... I begin, frantically thinking of something rational and plausible to answer with, before I'm all too soon cut off by Thing Two answering 'So the birds don't hit their heads'.

Well, of course.

I wonder if I actually need to say anything, as perhaps listening really is the key. Even if it isn't, how could I ever not want to hear these mad babblings? It's like being trapped in a stream of consciousness inside a Dali painting; both sublime and disturbing.

As they scribble away in their reading records, I surreptitiously type unicorns into my search engine and discover to my complete surprise that they are in fact Scotland's national animal!

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Read more about Chris's adventures at thecoastwalker.com

