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Kirby: Raising daughters and dads

By Robert Kirby
Tribune Columnist
Salt Lake Tribune

My LDS ward is a young one. Most of the families in it are just starting out. Because of our toddler sprawl, effective parenting gets a lot of Sunday airplay.

Unfortunately, much of the parenting advice is theory being represented as fact by people who only recently emerged from puberty themselves. I hope I'm still living here in another 10 years.

Really good parenting advice is hard to come by, probably because you have to live long enough to recognize it as such, and by then it's too late.

Last week, years after I finished raising my last daughter, I read *A Very Good Guide to Raising a Daughter* (\$12.95, Purple Box Press). Like I said, fat lot of good it does me now.

The book is written by father/daughter team Bill and Jenny Good. I was drawn to it because Bill and I are about the same age, we both live in Utah, and we both raised daughters.

Few relationships are as problematic as father-daughter. The differences in age AND gender make a working relationship with a member of a completely different species far more likely.

We also live in a society where truly close father-daughter duos are regarded with enough suspicion to make mere allegations nearly as damaging as actual convictions.

This is not to say that a healthy father-daughter relationship is impossible to have, only that it seems that way because it very nearly is, especially if you're the father and you think you're in complete charge.

The Goods' book reminded me of a time when I once believed in inflexible rules as a father. It took a long time for me to realize that really effective parenting is more like hostage negotiation.

Love is the hostage. If you want it to emerge safe and sound from this mess, you have to be willing to negotiate everything, including church, appearances, grades, music, boys and curfews.

If you don't think so, then obviously you still believe you can make your daughter more miserable than she can make you. And that just isn't true.

The book isn't just for fathers. Jenny Good points out a number of ways a daughter can get what she wants without the pain of open warfare.

Had I read the book before raising my daughters, I would have understood they were manipulating me. Looking back, it's clear that I was far too busy being in complete charge to realize that I wasn't.

Both Goods make the case that communication more than anything else is the key to a healthy relationship.

But the best part of this book is something I missed back when I was living it: While I was raising my daughters, they were also raising me.

rkirby@sltrib.com

