

IT'S A MAN'S WORLD

by Jeff Campbell

"A Man's World?"

I realized just how far from the truth that statement has been, at least for me



With fall weather and the State Fair approaching I am reminded of a past stroll with my family down midway at the Tulsa Fair, (injecting far too much capital into the economy), I could just make out the rhythm and blues lyrics as Bill Davis' diaphragm exploded in a soulful rendition of "It's a Man's World." I was surrounded by the aromas of Fair food and ever increasing R & B decibels driving home the chorus. Long after we had filtered our way through the crowd, leaving the sounds of Bill and his band smothered out by Carny chatter, the song title was still fresh in my thoughts.

Well, right there, at the Fair, I began to realize just how far from the truth that statement has been, at least in my life. For me, "It's a Kid's World" might fit, or even better "It's a Kid's World Run by Women." Either way I look at it I find myself a minority in this, so called, "Man's World."

Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining. This predicament I've got myself in does have it's advantages. During breaks every year at the Friends of Early Childhood Conference (Oklahoma's largest child development training conference) the men's rest room echoed in it's desolate and barren emptiness making the relieving process a somewhat leisurely ordeal. While the lady's line appeared motionless as it extended out into that dimension where only a ladies rest room line is allowed to go. It was back in the early 70s when Dorothy Berry, of Tulsa Metropolitan Ministries, contacted me about a possible job opening at Crosstown Day Care Center.



This was an intriguing thought. Let's see; I loved kids. At all the family gatherings I always seemed to gravitate to where ever the children were playing. I did have this knack for making up games and stories that seemed to captivate them. And watching their great big eyes and little faces become truly engrossed in my off the wall impromptu entertainment schemes was, I had to admit, sort of fun. But besides all that, I was at an age when going to school, studying and having no money was equivalent to having no life.



So, in February of 1970, I interviewed for, and was actually hired as an assistant in the 4 and 5 year old class. This was a shock. You see, this was the immediate post Woodstock era. I was singing lead for a rock and roll band called "Heavy Water" at the time. And I was the epitome of what the establishment would always peg as a full-fledged 'hippie' upon first sight.

Well, not knowing any better I went to this job interview with holes in my blue jeans and my hair hanging half way down the back of my tattered jean jacket. I didn't know that this was a church run day care center. And I certainly had no idea that I was to be interviewed by the pastor of the church, Rev. Ford, (who, by the way, had suffered a rare disorder a few years back leaving him totally bald from head to toe).

Later Rev. Ford would say that he saw something in me that made him feel strongly about overlooking my appearance and giving me the job. I think he must have envied my massive hippie hair-do.



IT'S A MAN'S WORLD CONTINUED

“I began to receive pressure from family and friends to get out into this ‘Man’s World’ and get a real man’s job.”

Four and a half years later, after school was over and excuses to continue working with children had run out, I began to receive pressure from family and friends to get out into this “Man’s World” and get a real man’s job. A job that would bring in enough money to support a family and maybe “buy a few nice things you can be proud of.”

So, reluctantly, I said good-bye to all the kids and my female cohorts in the business to move on to bigger and better things. Things with real substance.

The post-Woodstock-meaningless-job-hippie-era soon gave way to the I’m-in-the-money-clean-cut-business-man-era. As I moved into management positions I found my self pushing up the ladder of success by pushing more and more productivity out of an already pushed to the limit staff.

Every once in a great while, when things slowed down enough, I would think back to the kids with fond memories, longing for that same sense of worth I felt back when I was wiping snot bubbles while using the grotesqueness as comedy material to a totally captive group of on-looking children. These thoughts, however, would soon fade back into reality as deadlines and quota pressures demanded my immediate attention.

One day, out of the blue, my mother, who was, working for Betty Rowland Nursery School, called to tell me that the little day care center she used to pull my siblings and I past in the wagon, on the way to the grocery store, was soon going up for sale.

I hadn’t realized until that moment, when a childhood excitement overwhelmed me, just how badly I had missed being surrounded by children.

So, in April, of 1979, I left the real world, where I had managed to push productivity to the level of success where we men are supposed to find true fulfillment in our accomplishments, and I purchased a small day care center in Brookside.



I had no idea how enjoyable a cut in pay could be. I had migrated back to my roots.

With a small staff of women I had now traded the pushing of productivity in something I really didn’t believe in, for the task of gently motivating a group of ladies to play with, teach and to make sure each and every child felt loved.

As I began to relax in the midst of my destiny it began to dawn on me why it was my destiny; I could effortlessly be myself around kids and they still loved me. I could act crazy and kids would laugh. I could satisfy my musical aptitudes by playing my guitar and singing ‘learning and activity’ songs to the kids. I could use my motivation skills to encourage teachers to address the needs of the kids as well as each other. But above all, as far as my need to actually feel as though I’m making a positive impact on this world, (on this “Man’s World,”) I can’t think of any better job in existence on this planet where a man could effectively achieve this, than to, first, relinquish man’s ideals of true fulfillment and then enter into a “Kid’s World” and make future adults feel truly loved.