

## BOOK REVIEW

# Dads, Read On

Famed novelist Clyde Edgerton gives advice for new fathers, young and old.

{HUMOR}

## *Papadaddy's Book for New Fathers: Advice to Dads of All Ages* by Clyde Edgerton.

Drawings by Daniel Wallace. Little, Brown and Company.  
2013, 192 pages, hardback, \$24.99.

**I**T'S SATURDAY MORNING. For her own enjoyment, my 9-year-old daughter is singing, quite loudly, in a way I will charitably describe as opera meets Shop-Vac. My 6-year-old is desperately warning everyone in the family that we should under no circumstances disassemble the couch-cushion fort she's built in the living room. I'm sitting here, undercaffeinated, with Clyde Edgerton's latest work, *Papadaddy's Book for New Fathers*. Quirky, funny, and full of insight Edgerton has gained from more than three decades as a four-time dad (his kids range from 5 to 30), the book is a love letter to the perilous and perplexing art of being a father. Where was this book nine years ago? I could have used some of this stuff.

Take, for example, Edgerton's advice on something that's often on the radar of many new parents: making the house safe for the kid. "You will have no time to childproof the house," he writes, "between the time the baby is born and the time it is old enough to aim and spray paint remover into its mouth." Well, what to do? Edgerton recommends that you install some of those little, plastic electrical-outlet covers. He further clarifies that you won't be able to get the little covers out, but the baby can.

That's not to say that Edgerton plays the whole book for laughs. Over the years, he has written letters to each of his children about a specific day or event in their young lives, and he has included some of them in the book. "Dear Ridley, Your big brother, Nathaniel, is three years old, and he likes to kiss your hand and look at you. He wrote a book before you got home from the hospital (with the help of Big Sister) that showed a rocket ship taking you to another planet." The letters are sweet, touching, and make me, as a dad, feel like a complete slacker.

*Papadaddy's Book* even has a few sections of advice for older dads: Edgerton is 69. The man knows his stuff.

"Raising a kid is not a method, or a system, nor does it come from some proven 'technique,'" Edgerton writes. "It's art. It calls for an occasional, if not a frequent, embracing of uncertainty ... Every day for about eighteen years you will be making decisions that require you to work through a knotted mass of information, emotion, and intuition. Much of the time you may be saying, I could have done better."

He's right. New father? Old father? Maybe it's time for a look at Papadaddy's new book. 🍷

— Jason Smith



BOOK PHOTOGRAPHY BY BERT VANDERVEEN

### Advice from Papadaddy:

**1. WHAT TO PACK FOR THE BIRTH:** I'd suggest your wife's ... favorite photo of you that you can tape to your baby's face because she's not going to be looking at you much for a few days after the birth.

**2. HOLDING BABY:** Pick the baby up and cradle him in your arms, fashioned into the shape of a new moon. Or you can hold him like a football.

**3. BABY TOSS:** If all else fails, here's an alternative way to stop the baby from crying after it's a few months old and able to hold its head up: toss it into the air.

**4. POTTY TRAINING:** If your child is asking very intelligent and well-thought-out questions that are beyond you, it might be time to teach him to wipe himself.

**5. TOYS:** Watch out for bungee cords. One may be stretched from just behind the driver's seat in the car, turned loose, and rip your ear off.

**6. PLAYING:** If you're very tired when your child requests playtime on the floor, then you can get down there, doze off, and let him play on you.

**7. FUTURE:** In the year 2200 we'll know far more ... than we do now, and people at that time will be scoffing at some of our baby-raising practices and policy in the same way we scoff at our ancestors for waiting so long to figure out the wheel, or for neglecting dental care.

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