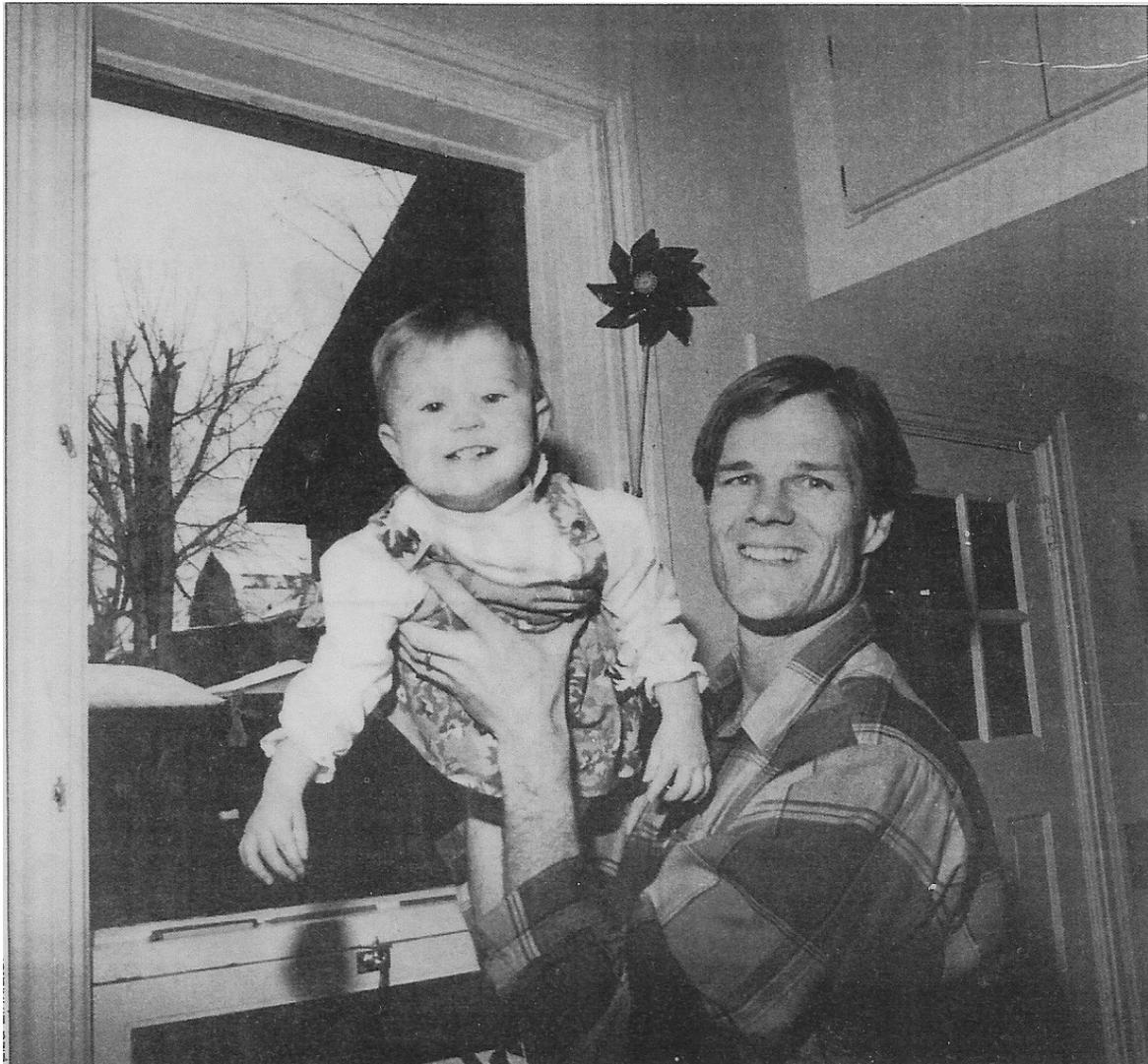


OF CHILDREN, WOMEN AND MEN
Confessions of a Happy Househusband
By Richard Taylor

Ottawa Woman, March, 1987



Liza Linklater

Staying home with daughter Sky gives Richard Taylor an enviable father-daughter closeness

Before our baby was born I used to write secluded at my desk near a wall covered with photos of exquisite paintings and mysterious images that fed my imagination. I gazed out of a window at the vast blue sky. Now, I write from the exotic locale of our kitchen, facing the cheerful smile of a Teddy Bear, surrounded by plastic containers, bits of damp Kleenex and flung food.

My daughter, Sky, is halfway inside a cupboard filled with treasures, her diapered bum mischievously sticking up in the air.

Before I became a househusband I used to think the ideal place to live was alone on an island. My first collection of short stories, *Tender Only To One*, was about the French painter, Paul Gauguin, who abandoned his wife and children to paint in the South Seas. Now I realize that for me, the only place I want to write is right here at the kitchen table. I have discovered the heart of what women have always known and men have been afraid to find out.

Because of our fear of the home and children, men have been excluded from what many women call the most satisfying aspect of life. Like many men, I used to think my life would end with children. I procrastinated through ten years of marriage before finding the courage to be a father. And like many men, as soon the baby was born my love life doubled; my secret longing to touch and be touched was satisfied. I rediscovered a strong need for play, spontaneous laughter and joy. Suddenly the stereotypical male image I had of myself was destroyed, and I was freed to be a person.

I think most fathers feel a similar release from maleness, but househusbands experience an even more dramatic change. Both John Lennon and John Irving have romanticized the role of househusband. The male caregivers I've met are shipwrecked at home because it solves an unemployment problem rather than a burning desire to nurture children. Some actively seek employment to escape the home. But many others have survived the initial shock of the long, long hours and demanding work so that they can appreciate the opportunity of being able to stay at home with their children.

As a group, househusbands live a precarious existence between acute insecurity and pure joy. What began as a last-ditch option (staying at home to take care of the kid), in many cases turns out to be something quite precious and extraordinary. Enter the growing army of men pushing strollers, changing swollen diapers and feeding babies in public - spending whole days alone inside walls with children. Because of the increasing number of househusbands and the persistent demands of modern women, even men who sneak off to work are obliged to help out much more with the children than were their own fathers.

My secluded writing desk is still in the other room with its wall of shimmering images that suggest so many possibilities. But I feel better right

here, from my vantage point in the middle of this chaos in the kitchen. Sky has left her cupboard and is crawling around the fridge and down the hallway. I think I'll just follow her for a while and see what I can learn about the world.

Richard Taylor is an Ottawa write. His first collection of short stories, Tender Only to One, was published in 1984 by Oberon. He has just completed a novel, Cartoon Woods.