

Games

I have many happy memories of "exercise" games Daddy played with Martha, Brother, and me until we got too big for him to continue, even as strong as he was.

I remember best the ones that began with "lifts." Daddy would lie on his back on the floor inside or on the grass outside, placing his hands palms up on the floor behind his head. If I were the lucky child chosen to start, I would step, shoeless, onto his hands. Cautioning me to hold my knees stiff, he would lift me high in the air, ending at the highest spot directly above his head and returning to the beginning position. After what were always too few repetitions of that lift, he would not return me to the floor but would lift his legs and lean me against them, releasing my hands and feet. The trick was over for me; I had to scramble out of the way and take my place on the sidelines. It was Martha's or Brother's turn. Most of the time we would go through the routine several times before we wanted to go on to the next exercise, which was even more exciting.

Facing him, I would lie down at his feet and place my hands next to my ankles. He would grasp a wrist and an ankle in each hand; then he would begin to swing me back between his legs and then toward the front. As I, the pendulum, began to swing, he would lengthen the swing until my face would go high enough to be level with his; he ended finally by releasing my ankles and standing me on my feet, still holding onto my hands. As a favorite variation on that swing, I would reverse my position on the floor, locating my head at his feet and my legs facing away. He again would grasp wrists and ankles and swing me back and forth between his legs. Then with a mighty effort, he would place me on his shoulders, releasing my hands but keeping a safe grasp on my ankles. If we were outside, he would run about the yard before reclaiming control of my hands and returning me to the floor or to the ground, again releasing my ankles so that I could stand. The height of door openings precluded running about the house when we were inside; none of us wanted to bump our heads on those low bridges.

Then, the next in line had a turn. With the example of us experienced children squealing with delight and begging for more, even visiting playmates unfamiliar with our game seldom were hesitant to join in the fun.

A variation on the last stunt had to be performed outside in order to find enough room. It involved my offering, say, my left hand and left foot so that he could swing me full length around and around, like a tethered airplane. Sometimes, but not often, he would swing me over his head onto his back. He didn't do that often, because of Mother's objections that it was too dangerous. I don't remember her ever objecting to any of the other tricks.

These vigorous activities usually began with less vigorous tumbling and tussling on the floor, sometimes only the children, but sometimes with Daddy, too. And ended that way, too, with all of us satisfied and breathless. Today I wonder at Daddy's strength and stamina. I realize he must have started in a small way with one child -- me -- before the others joined the family circle. In fact, one of his oft-told stories was about a rancher who wanted to build up his strength. The rancher began by lifting a hew-born calf over a fence. He continued to lift the animal every day until it was a full grown bull. As a child I couldn't penetrate the illogic of that story, but I only half believed it. After

all, *nobody* could lift a huge bull! In fact, even if Daddy did begin small and gain strength as his children grew, there came a time when he could no longer lift us easily, or, indeed, at all. Even so, the exercises that we did certainly demanded a great deal of strength and endurance by the time there were three of us. As we outgrew the games, he eliminated first me, then Martha, and finally Brother because of our size, and had a vacation of about eight years before he began again with the twins. They enjoyed his play every bit as much as the first three of us did. Alas, by the time my own children were born, he could no longer lift children above his head, and I'm not sure that my acceptance of the risks involved would have been as great as Mother's had been. Several times, he tried to raise one of the boys off the floor, but without much success, and I was uneasy every time he tried. Fortunately, he found other ways to play with them.

I will always cherish the memories of those exciting games when I was very small.

