

SOONER SPOTLIGHT ● ROBERT GRISWOLD

WANTED: Father. Must be able to support family, care for children, cook and clean, be loving partner to wife and mother, playmate to kids. Preference given to dependable candidates.

Fatherhood is certainly a familiar profession but not one whose duties are always so clearly defined, according to a new book by University of Oklahoma Professor Robert Griswold.

Griswold is the author of *Fatherhood in America: A History*, published by Basic Books. The book, timed to reach stores for Father's Day last June, focuses on the history of fatherhood in the 20th century.

"There is a debate in society today over fathers' roles," says Griswold, who is an associate professor of history and women's studies at OU. "Fatherhood has lost its cultural coherence. It's no longer clear what we want, what we expect from fathers."

In his book, Griswold addresses the gamut of fathers' experiences, ranging from the difficulties of immigrant fathers to the devastating impact of the Great Depression on fathers to the reorganization of fathers' lives after World War II. Aimed both at educators and the general reader, the book is based on Griswold's five years of research and writing.

Fatherhood in America has earned favorable reviews by other authors, academicians and such experts as James A. Levine, director of the Fatherhood Project at the Families and Work Institute.

"A brilliant and lucid exposition of the broad range of forces—social, cultural, economic and political—that have shaped and reshaped the definition of fatherhood in America," Levine writes. "Anybody who wants to understand today's so-called 'new fatherhood' should start by taking Griswold's tour of the last 200 years."

American fatherhood has changed enormously in the past two centuries, insists Griswold, who drew upon surveys, magazines, scientific literature, letters to an advice columnist, govern-

"The opinion was that a father needed to be, in a sense, a buddy," the author explains. These "buddies," however, were not required to take on any of the daily chores of child rearing.

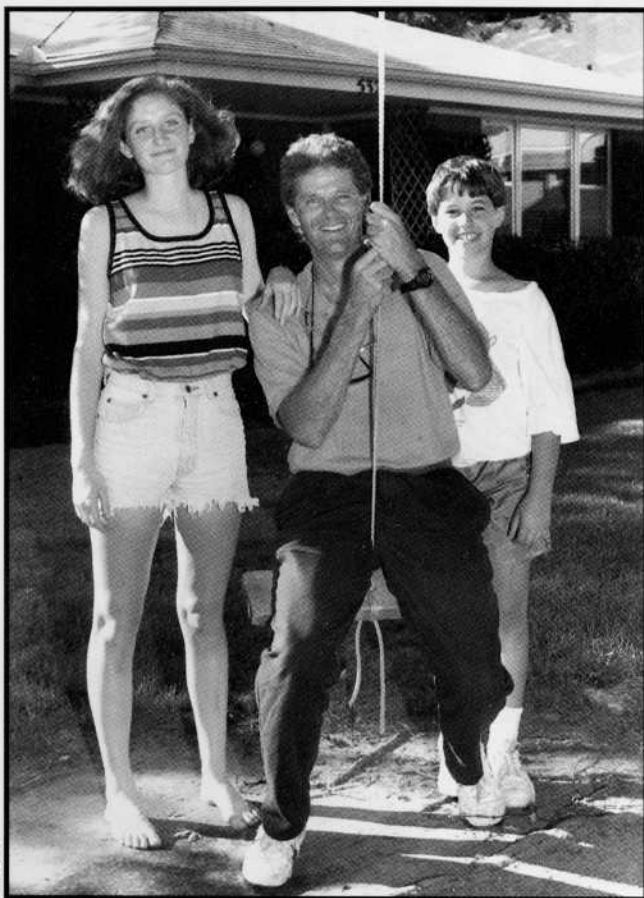
"When men were the sole breadwinners, that brought some obvious responsibilities and some real benefits for men," he says, including higher pay scales and preferential treatment in the workplace. These practices continued even after World War II when more and more women began entering the work force. Working women still were expected to be almost completely responsible for the daily operations of the home. Then feminism finally challenged traditional ideas about fatherhood.

"The emergence of feminism in the 1960s and '70s makes the questions of gender roles open for debate," he says.

With the majority of women today working outside the home, the debate has had tangible results. Many household and child-rearing duties—the famous "second shift" that adds 10-to-15 hours to the average woman's work week—are still squarely on mothers' shoulders, but Griswold contends that the situation has improved.

"Men tend to resist these changes," he admits. "Men are more comfortable being their children's intellectual and physical companions, and sometimes less comfortable doing the physical things that you have to do to keep a family going.

"But with women working 40 hours a week, men can't say, 'Well, you're still going to have to cook, clean, manage the household finances, see that the children have shoes, attend the



Gil Jain

Like other fathers of the '90s, Griswold seeks ways to be involved in the lives of his daughter, Sarah, and son, Peter.

ment documents, historical works, autobiographies, newspaper articles and memoirs for his research.

Until recent times, he says, the word "father" was almost synonymous with "breadwinner." But during the 1920s and '30s, social scientists and magazine editors encouraged fathers to take a more active role in their children's lives as intellectual and psychological role models.

PTA . . . ' What kind of rationale can you make for that? Recent changes have made parenting a negotiable enterprise."

Up for negotiations are such matters as, if a child is sick, who misses work? Who takes care of the house? Who makes major purchasing decisions?

"It used not to be an issue," Griswold says, adding that negotiations are a necessary byproduct of a two-income household and a positive change for women. However, he admits family life can be difficult when every decision must be negotiated.

"Negotiations changed relationships in families. Many people in a two-income family are now uncomfortable with the concept of 'head of the household.' They have to decide what the structure is."

Griswold and his wife Ellen Wisdom, are the parents of two: Sarah, 14, and Peter, nine. They have discovered firsthand the pluses and minuses of family negotiations.

When the children were small, Wisdom was an at-home mother. She now is a social worker for the State Health Department, a job that requires some traveling. Griswold and Wisdom currently employ a college student to pick Peter up from school and stay with him until they return home, usually between 5:30 and 7 p.m.

"Now that we're both full-time workers, we divvy up responsibilities in different ways," Griswold says. "But like a lot of working couples, it can be fairly frantic.

"We have to figure out who's doing what and how we're going to get everything done. There's some frustration with that—we're no exception. There's a good deal of flexibility and negotiations built in. And, there are surprises that come with children."

Barring any surprises, the couple's typical day already is full. However, negotiations allow Wisdom to get in some exercise time while Griswold cooks breakfast, packs lunches and gets the children ready for school. Wisdom takes over the household duties after school, when Griswold usually is serving as assistant coach for Sarah's classic soccer team and Peter's recreational soccer team.



Gill Jain

When not wearing his "father" hat, Robert Griswold explains the historical impact of the role in classes such as the senior seminar, "Gender in Postwar America."

"It enables me to spend a lot of time with the kids," he says. "Like many contemporary fathers, I try to figure out ways to spend time with my children, and coaching is one of those ways."

Griswold finds that fathers across the nation are looking for ways to increase their involvement in their children's lives. Surveys show today's family may include a father who chooses to attend PTA meetings and child-rearing courses and helps with the housework. Some men even have expressed a willingness to cut back on work hours or take paternity leave to care for their children. This attitude of sharing is reinforced and encouraged by popular media that ranges from movies like "Kramer vs. Kramer" to print ads showing dad bringing home McDonald's hamburgers for the family supper.

However, the fatherhood picture is not entirely rosy, Griswold confesses.

Surveys also reveal large numbers of men who desert pregnant women and divorced men who never visit their children or provide for them financially.

"For every dad who's going to a baby-care class, there's another dad who hasn't seen his child in a year or paid child support in two years," he says.

On the other hand, Griswold's research reveals that most '90s men still consider being a good father an important part of their lives. Recent studies have shown that men would rather be known as good fathers than as good workers.

Once, Griswold says, there was a virtual "life map" laid out for men: marriage, family, work. But life has gotten considerably cloudier in the last decades of the 20th century.

"The average father," he contends, "is kind of flying by the seat of his pants."
—Anne Barajas