

# What We Know

## ARTICLES & INSIGHTS

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kristin Ruth is a long-time family law attorney and former 10th District Court Wake County Judge. She represents clients in all aspects of family law, including divorce, child custody, child support, and equitable property distribution. She brings more than 23 years of courtroom and mediation experience to her practice. She is an avid writer and frequent guest speaker at national and international events on issues covering child support and ethics.

## #GirlDad

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In the wake of Kobe Bryant and his daughter's death this past week, I found myself thinking about my Dad and the special times we shared.

One, in particular, occurred on my sixth birthday.

By the time I was two, I knew I wanted a pony. Growing up, my family lived on a farm. Even though we had lots of animals, I would often pretend I had a pony to show my Dad how responsible I could be caring for a pony all by myself. Now that I was turning six and clearly responsible enough to have a pony, I again asked my Dad for one. On the morning of my birthday, I ran out of the house and to the barn to see if my wish had come true, but there was no sign of a pony, only the cows meandering around in the corral. Maybe, I thought, when I am seven...

That afternoon, after cake and ice cream, my Dad invited me to take a ride with him in my uncle's WWII jeep, along with my uncle and brother. I had no idea where we were going, but anytime I could ride in that old jeep, it was a good day. So, we all squeezed into the jeep, with me safely seated on Dad's lap, and we took off down a dirt road, heading to the little town of Smolan where I went to grade school. We drove through Smolan, waived at some friends out in their yards, and headed down Burma Road as we ventured farther and farther from home. After a short while, we turned into a farm located several miles from our home. The farm was owned by Mr. Ostenburg. He met us in the gravel driveway, and together, we drove out to his pasture. I can still remember the look of eager anticipation on my Dad's face as we drove along the winding dirt road that led to Mr. Ostenburg's pasture. I was unaware of the momentous event that was about to take place when suddenly, as we rounded the last bend, I caught a glimpse of the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. There, gathered in the middle of the pasture, were at least one hundred Shetland ponies grazing in the tall grass. As the jeep slowly idled through the sea of ponies, my dad turned to me and said, "Well, Kristin...would you like to pick out a pony for your birthday?" Little did I know, the ponies were for sale at \$75.00 each. At that moment, I felt like the luckiest girl alive, and I hugged my Dad with all my might. It was only a few minutes later when I fell in love with the sweetest, little brown pony you ever did see. She had a white star on her forehead, and I named her Cutie. The year was 1962.

As a family law attorney, I represent moms and dads, and I listen to many parents share wonderful memories with me about times spent with their children. Most recently, I represented a dad in a custody case and he shared with me a picture of him with his little girl, having a tea party together. Seeing that picture of this grown, professional man, sitting on a teeny, tiny plastic chair in front of a sweet, miniature table, sipping tea from a delicate teacup with daughter, no doubt one of many #GirlDad memories he's experienced with his daughter — made me smile.

The unthinkable and untimely passing of Kobe Bryant and his daughter, as well as the seven other passengers who perished on that day, reminds us that even in our busy lives, we must carve out moments to spend with our kids, as sometimes, the most unplanned, spontaneous interactions are the memories that are cherished for decades.

The time spent with our children each day may not seem as memorable as my birthday pony surprise, but we never know what we do or say that may make a lasting impression or a lifetime memory for a little girl or boy.

As a final note, the term "GirlDad" wasn't used back when my dad was alive. But for 89 years, my dad was a husband, father, friend, farmer, postal worker, and now, I can say he would definitely rise to the honor of being a #GirlDad.

*Rest in Peace Dad, Kobe, and Gianna.*

**#GirlDad**

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