



Geckos, Crickets, and Time with Children

By Nancy Thomas

I never imagined that reptiles would have a lasting effect on my relationship with my son.

My son Dallin has always loved reptiles. I, on the other hand, have never liked them. He was allowed to own a reptile on the condition that whatever he chose was able to fit in the hose of a vacuum, just in case it got out of its cage while he was at school. We went through several options, from frogs to iguanas, before settling on two velvety leopard geckos named Fuzz and Diane.

Dallin's new buddies joined our family when he was seven years old. One aspect of owning geckos that I did not anticipate was the need to feed them crickets—live crickets—once a week. For years Dallin and I made “cricket runs.” They were rarely convenient, usually happening late at night while trying to beat the clock before the pet store closed.

Diane only lived for three years, but Fuzz lived for many years, healthy

and happy. Toward the end of Dallin's senior year in high school, he was assigned to give a demonstration for his public speaking class. He prodded my husband and me for ideas. We suggested he discuss leopard geckos because he already knew so much about them and could bring Fuzz in as a prop. Dallin then told us that Fuzz had died.

“Are you serious? When did he die?” I asked in disbelief.

Dallin told us that Fuzz had died a week before.

“He's in my room, but don't worry. He won't stink. He's double-bagged.”

After seeing our astonishment, Dallin explained, “I'm doing an experiment—I want to watch him decay.”

Dallin's experiment turned out to be more than watching him decay. He would stall the process by putting Fuzz in the freezer for a couple of weeks and

then bring him out to thaw and decay some more.

A year later, when Dallin was on his mission, I was cleaning out the freezer and found Fuzz, still double-bagged, in the back. Since I was preparing a package to send to Dallin, I thought it would be funny to pass on his little experiment. I carefully put Fuzz in a box, wrapped it in beautiful black and white polka-dot paper, and tucked it neatly into Dallin's care package with a note that read, “There is a surprise in your package.” Then I anxiously waited for his response.

“I've thought about that gecko since getting it back,” he wrote. “Not so much about the actual gecko, but about all of the time spent on car rides every week to get crickets and run other errands, listening to your ideas, stories, and your testimony while in the car. It was a good excuse to have to go and get



to talk to you (not that I talked much, but I did listen).”

Buying crickets. Who knew? As parents we can’t always plan the timing of our influence. It often just happens. It may be when we are tucking our kids in bed at night, riding a ski lift together, or just running errands in the car. We have to take time to be with our children.

The Savior showed the greatest example of taking time for children. After a long day of teaching the

Nephites, Christ commanded the people to bring their little ones to Him. He knelt among the little children and prayed. After the prayer, He wept. And then “he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them” (3 Nephi 17:21).

Those children knew that Jesus loved them. He willingly took time for them. He listened to them, prayed for them, and blessed them. Those who witnessed this were filled with such

power that the account records, “The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father” (3 Nephi 17:16).

The influence that Jesus Christ had on those children lasted for generations. As we invest our interest and time in our children, even if we’re just going with them to buy crickets, hopefully our influence will last for generations as well. ■

The author lives in Maine, USA.