

Big Questions from Little People

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
August 2014

Where is heaven, Daddy?

“W



hat's fate, Daddy?" my five-year-old, Kai, asked a few months back. *Whoa.*

I was still reeling from the previous week's one-two punch: "Is God real?" followed by "Where is Heaven?"

I'm not at all religious and try to be as objective with my children as possible. Like most parents, I do my best to answer all their kids' questions.

Not all his inquiries are this lofty. "What is the highest number you have ever counted to?" is a favorite the past few months. But then, a few days ago, he hit me with: "What's doubt?"

You're five! Go out and play in the dirt -- and leave the human condition issues to the brooding grownups, I wanted to tell him. He stood there in his Batman pajamas, waiting for my answer.

J.D. Salinger nailed it. He wanted to stand at the rye field's edge and catch the happy, running children when they got too close to the cliff. With two delicious kids, now four and six, I relate at a cellular level. Maintaining that purity for as long as possible is my greatest quest.

Big Questions from Little People

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
August 2014

But, of course, like rye in the golden summer sun, kids' minds grow along with their bodies. As I see it, my job is not so much to catch them from falling, but to help them climb safely down the cliff wall to the roaring sea below, where their ships await (and hopefully, we'll surf some waves together between imminent squalls).

My naked kids splashed and squawked in the pool at my Morningside home, while I flipped a Publix mild Italian sausage on the barbecue and pondered: *Was I fated to return to my hometown of Miami a few years ago after 18 years out West in search of my artistic dreams?*

Was Miami fated to transform itself from vacuous poser sprawl into a New Urbanism cultural mecca just as I landed here with my young family?

Was I fated to meet my wife when a friend told me to check out this cute woman on a website in 2004?

I don't believe in the preordained notion of fate. But I don't believe in coincidence either. Are the two concepts irreconcilable?

"Fate," I told Kai as he dried off, "is something that is meant to be. Doubt is when you're not sure about something," I told my pint-size inquisitor as he smiled at me through a half-chewed bun. *Like doubts about fate*, I thought to myself.

Fate or not, when I saw my wife's profile online, standing with her adorable pixie haircut beside her Mini Cooper on Pacific Coast Highway, I was very intrigued -- enough to move onto her Sausalito houseboat and travel the world with her and marry her and miscarry three babies in one year and then have two perfect kids and live happily ever after (so far).

The new and improved Miami has welcomed us with open arms, and perhaps most important, the open arms of my aging parents. We moved back primarily for them, so that my mother and father and our two boys would know each other intimately. Okay, I admit we also desperately

Big Questions from Little People

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
August 2014

needed some family backup in the general baby-raising duties after doing without in California.

When it came to the God question, I wanted to say, "I have no friggin idea! No one does, and if they say otherwise, then they are offering an opinion."

But I figured I'd save the irreverence until he was seven. And of course, that comment would have been followed by: "What's an opinion, Daddy?"

I managed to scrape through with "God is something personal for everybody. It's what you believe is larger than yourself. Like nature."

My children are both at the age when all these abstract ideas are coming at them for the first time -- from friends, from school, from Disney Junior. They rightly wish to explore them. I fear I'm often ill-equipped. Heaven was a total flail, something about "it's everywhere."

"But is it in the sky?" my lovely boy asked with absolute earnestness.

"Some people think so. Want to make a Lego world?" I leaned in and kissed his round, tan cheeks.

One of these days, when their reality is not 99 percent literal, I will explain to my kids that heaven is indeed real. That every time they look at me with those innocent eyes and ask me a "what is...?" question, I'm in heaven.

That heaven's sanctum sanctorum exists in the quiet refuge of their bunk beds, where I watch them sleep each night, their lithe chests rising and falling with peaceful divinity.

That any place where we are together -- sharing, touching, laughing, sobbing, observing,

Big Questions from Little People

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
August 2014

discovering, or simply sitting silently -- is every bit of everything that is heaven.

Stuart Sheldon is an artist, author, and Miami native. Follow his blog at stuartsheldon.com and [@stuart_sheldon](https://twitter.com/stuart_sheldon).

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com