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## *Fathers go through trenches at baby boot camp*

What can a grandfather learn from a young man who just became a father? A lot—when they go to Boot Camp for Dads.

Claremonter Hugh Menton recently retired from a career in child development and has taken on a new career as babysitter for his newborn grandchild.

“There’re a lot of new gadgets out there,” he explained to the group of “rookies” who would soon be fathers. “Most of my children are your ages so I’ve forgotten a few things.”

Those few things were identified during the 4-hour boot camp that took place at Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center. Led by firefighter and “veteran dad” Kevin Wilton, the soon-to-be fathers shared their concerns about the upcoming births of their children.

Claremonter and veteran dad Charlie Griffiths took time out from coaching the swim team at the Claremont Colleges to bring 2-month-old Charlotte to the group. The men got a first-hand experience of what it would be like to have a crying child in the room as she fussed and whimpered until her dad snuggled her into a papoose-like sling that rested against his chest.



COURIER photo/Gabriel Fenoy

**Cesar Garcia returns to the Boot Camp for Dads class at Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center with his 1-month-old daughter Emily Ann after having attended the class before the birth of his daughter. The 4-hour crash course is meant to teach soon-to-be dads how to better care for their newborns once they arrive.**

“She’s not being a very good example,” Mr. Griffiths muttered as he “shooshed” in her ear. “But, life happens.”

The most common mantra the men shared was how to stop the baby from crying, what to do when it is sick and how to get enough sleep.

“Believe me, you’ll learn your own baby’s cry and what it means after a while,” explained Mr. Wilton, who has a 5-year-old and a 22-month-old. “You can be across the room and hear a baby cry, know it’s yours and know that it has to doodle, eat or is sick—and that’s when you become the problem solver.”

Mr. Wilton has had his share of being a problem solver as he and his wife, Roseanne, raise their daughters. Two years ago, he took the boot camp and returned as a vet to share his fatherhood stories. He’s been teaching the class that meets every third Saturday ever since.

Boot Camp started in Irvine by a fellow who had a large family. As he saw new dads struggle with their newborns, the idea of a boot camp crystallized. That was 16 years ago. Now, guys are filing into the class that gives them tips.

“You’ve got to work out a schedule with your wife,” Mr. Wilton explained to the eager group. “If you do lose sleep, try alternating nights of taking care of the baby with your wife—but it should be teamwork.”

The group chuckled as Mr. Wilton explained his tour of duty.

“Hey, I had a regular route at 2 a.m. that I’d take my baby on to get her to sleep,” he laughed. “And turn the radio on in between stations so you get white noise. It’ll soothe them—drive you crazy for a while—but it’ll put them to sleep.”

One of the most common mistakes young couples make is keeping the house quiet while the baby sleeps.

“They’re used to noise in the womb,” Mr. Wilton explained. “So go on with your life. Use the vacuum and the blow dryer—it’s OK because if they get used to silence when they sleep, any noise will wake them up.”

Two of the young husbands in the class said their wives would deliver cesarean.

“You’ll be Mr. Mom and Mr. Dad because she’ll be hard up for 2 weeks. You’ll be cooking and cleaning, too,” he said, as the two men looked at each other, their faces scrunched with concern.

Cesar Garcia, a UPS truck driver and dad vet who brought 1-month-old Emily Ann, suggested that the men take advantage of their work’s family leave program. He said that the state of California would compensate them up to 80 percent of their salary while on leave. He also offered the men tips.

“Hey, I even shaved my head so I could sleep in a little more in the morning,” he laughed. “But you really need to communicate with your wife about who gets up in the middle of the night because you’ll just lie there and think to yourself, ‘Man, I hope she gets up.’”

Adam Cruz, a dad vet who works at Pomona Valley Hospital, has a 19-month-old baby.

“Whew! The first 4 weeks I didn’t even know what time it was,” he laughed.

As their shyness disappeared, the fellows soon began sharing more concerns, such as a rectal thermometer versus an ear thermometer, when is sex appropriate, what to do about their wives' mood swings and what is the best baby carrier.

"Let's face it, you have an infant and you stick something in their butt, they're going to be fighting you," Mr. Wilton said, shaking his head. "And your wife will be going through a hormonal change, so just be patient. If you want to come home from work and chill out, it won't happen. Your wife has been doing this all day, so it's hand-off time. But, you can have the worst day and hold your baby—all your worries melt away."

Holding a baby became a reality after the group trudged to the bathroom, washed their hands and hesitantly reached out for the small package. After being removed from the sling, Charlotte began to fuss until she was slipped into the arms of Jerry Harris from Corona.

"It felt good," he said, handing her back to her dad. "I wanted to be like a pillow for her."

After reviewing the 5 Ss of calming a baby—swaddling, side stomach position, "shooshing" in the ear, sucking and swinging—the soon-to-be dads reflected on their new information.

"When my baby is born and we look into each other's eyes, there will be an eternal bond," said Mr. Harris, smiling.

Ontario resident Daniel Duran agreed.

"We don't have the bond that women have with their children," he said. "But when I hold that baby in my arms, it'll happen. Then I'll know who it is that's been kicking me in the back all these months. It's amazing to know that I'd give my life for this baby."

—**Rebecca JamesCourie**