

Fathers

know
best

Mel
Gibson
and
Ron Howard
trade tales
about
raising
normal
kids in
Hollywood.
(Is it possible?)

BY SHERYL KAHN

W

ever challenge Mel Gibson to a draw—it's a lesson Ron Howard, his director on the upcoming movie *Ransom* (due out in November), learns the hard way. When Howard volunteers to show a visitor pictures of his kids (Bryce, 15; Jocelyn and Paige, 11; and Reed, nine), Gibson beats him to it. With lightning-quick reflexes, he produces a wallet full of photos of his own clan before Howard can even reach for his back pocket. (Gibson's brood includes six kids—Hannah, 15; Edward and Christian, 13; William, 11; Louis, nine, and Milo, six.) Between takes on location at a Harlem community center in New York City, while Gibson is drying off from a pool scene and Howard is waiting for the next shot to be set up, they swap stories and advice about raising children: "Don't underestimate the power of bribery," Howard jokes. "I play *Let's Make a Deal*



For Howard and Gibson, family means more than any award.

with my kids. When they do something I want, I let them cut my hair—which, with the little hair I have, is a major privilege!"

"You should let them walk on your back if they're good," Gibson replies, not to be outdone. "It's not a bad massage—kids are handy."

What's very clear after spending a day with this pair is that no matter how many awards they've garnered (Gibson recently won two Oscars—Best Picture and Best Director—for *Braveheart*), no matter how many movies or millions they make, both Howard and Gibson are proudest of one thing: being good parents. Over a hearty lunch of steak and rice in Howard's trailer, they face off on fatherhood.

Mel Gibson: Hey! You're Ron Howard, right? I thought you looked vaguely familiar.

Ron Howard: Ha! That's probably just what my family says. ▶

■ CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

(continued from p. 39)

McCALL's: Too much time away from home when you're making a movie?

MG: No, you learn to balance it. It's like any job. Daddy goes to work.

RH: But you do try to take your kids with you a lot, Mel.

MG: As often as possible. I used to take my children with me religiously, everywhere, but now I realize that school has to be considered.

RH: You don't want to totally disrupt their lives.

MG: Right. But even if we're on opposite sides of the country, we remain in close contact, and I get back home as often as I can. Because work or no work...

RH: You make your family your priority.

MG: Exactly. I probably get to spend more time with them than a lot of guys do with 9-to-5 jobs. I just feel as if I need to keep track of what's going on in their lives because they grow up so fast.

McCALL's: And you both have a lot of kids to keep track of.

MG: The Gibson Bunch—I have six. We have to use name tags to keep them straight.

RH: I have four. We both have twins. Mine are fraternal. Yours are fraternal too, right?

MG: I think so.

RH: You think so? You *do* need to take a trip home soon!

“Being a

MG: They could be identical. They look exactly the same. They're 13, teenagers. Enough said.

McCALL's: The terrible teens?

RH: The terrifying teens.

MG: Yeah, yeah, I'll second that.

RH: Are your kids dating? Mine are just about to start.

MG: Yup. Hannah, the 15-year-old, is. And it makes me a little...

RH: Homicidal?

MG: Well, I want to know who my daughter's going to be with.

RH: Do you always grill the potential suitor?

MG: Sure—we do the 20-questions thing. Actually, I had this great idea for how to intimidate my daughter's boyfriends. I was going to have somebody on a film make me some prosthetic teenage heads that I could mount on my wall, with names like Todd and Rex under them, you know? Then I'd say, "Come into the study, son, for

some cigars and port." And the poor guy would see all these faces of the fellows Dad didn't like.

RH: I had a better idea. I was going to learn how to assemble and disassemble an Uzi with lightning speed as I was talking to the kid. Then I'd say, "So, my boy, ever seen

but we have to be fathers in public as well as in private, which comes with its share of problems.

RH: Problems but pluses too. My primary objective is to humiliate my kids whenever possible, publicly.

MG: Really? How?

RH: By being a goofball. Whenever they're feeling a little bit embarrassed by something the old man does, I just take it up about six notches.

MG: I've done that. But one of my kids doesn't care if I act goofy, and he gets me back. The other day, we were in a restaurant. I was teasing my son, embarrassing him, and he decided to teach me a lesson. He got up and started tap dancing on the table, saying, "Hey, ladies! Here's my dad! His name is Mel Gibson! Come on over!"

RH: Oh, God, that's good.

MG: Last time I go to that restaurant.

McCALL's: Do you think you are good fathers?

RH: I try my damndest. And there is no rule book, no definite answer to the question, "How can I be a good dad?" I think it has lots of different answers—I have four of them, one that applies to each one of my kids.

MG: I think there's a delicate balance of being tough and being tender, and it's hard to know when which one is better. Sometimes I think it's okay to get pretty angry and show displeasure if the kids have done something that worries the hell out of me. But

then I beat myself up all the time, worrying, "Did I go too far with that? Did I do that all

wrong and make a big mistake?"

RH: It's trial and error.

MG: Sure it is. I mean, you don't go to school for this, do you? That's why it's good to have a partner. My wife, Robyn, and I go through this together, help each other out.

RH: Same with my wife, Cheryl, and me. We're a team. There's no single disciplinarian. We tackle all the tough stuff together.

McCALL's: Such as?

MG: Talking about the birds and the bees, and drugs. All those touchy topics. But you've got to do it.

RH: Oh, yeah. There's nothing embarrassing about any of that. ▶



Gibson's gal: wife of 16 years Robyn.

good dad is a balance of tough and tender.”

one of these? Can cut a man in half.”

MG: I like that. I'm taking notes.

RH: I think you should just come to the front door like Mad Max. That would just about put the fear of God into any 15-year-old.

MG: I have to try to cut Hannah some slack though—15 is okay to date. I was 15 when I started dating.

RH: My point exactly. Think about what you were like at 15.

MG: Oh, yeah, right. Never mind.

McCALL's: So how do your children react to all of this?

RH: Overzealous parenting? I'm not different from any other father.

MG: We have the same concerns—

■ CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

(continued from p. 40)

I sit down and initiate these conversations—it's sort of testing the waters a little bit, to see how much they already know and what they're really curious about. But I'm open with my kids. I say, "This is a part of life, and it's something that you need to understand." Whatever the subject, I want my kids to be able to come to me and talk about it.

MG: I'm amazed at how much they know. It's gotta be TV.

McCALL'S: Do you ever restrict what your kids see on television and at the movies?

RH: We've been pretty strict about it over the years. We closely monitor what the younger ones watch, but we've eased up on the older ones.

MG: I restrict too, but *Happy Days* is okay, Ron.

RH: Yeah, *Happy Days* and *Andy Griffith* are on the okay list.

MG: What it boils down to, with TV, with dating, with anything, is that you do what you feel and think is right. And you make mistakes—that's allowed. No one is Superdad.

RH: All parents warp their kids a little bit.

“Cheryl and I are a team. We tackle

MG: Oh, I've definitely warped mine. Just ask them. I'm sure they could tell you some pretty bizarre stories.

RH: I wanna hear one.

MG: Well, I used to chase my daughter around the house when she was about three or four years old. She'd be squealing and running, and I'd catch her and tickle her. Now, there were several levels of tickling—agony, torture, human sacrifice—and she'd pick one.

RH: Mel, that *is* warped.

MG: It seems pretty far off the beam, but it was just silly fun. Then one day, she was in kindergarten and the teacher asked what game the children wanted to play. My kid shouts out, "Let's play 'human sacrifice!'" This teacher was probably thinking of having me investigated for demonic worship.

RH: Well, my kids are traumatized by *Star Wars*. Can't watch it at all. When my twins were little, I used to zoom them around the room, one in

each arm, making *Star Wars* sound effects and singing the theme. Now, when it comes on TV, they yell, "Oh, no! Not that movie! Please, anything but that!"

McCALL'S: *Ransom*, the movie you are working on together, is about a father whose son is kidnapped and held for a huge amount of money. How do you protect your kids?

MG: You take precautions, absolutely. They have bodyguards, and I keep them away from the more vile aspects of the movie

photographers hunt us down like animals, follow us all everywhere we go, invade our private lives....

RH: Which is why you can understand how someone like Alec Baldwin would lose his temper and take a swing at someone who was trying to photograph his new baby.

MG: Yeah—two thumbs up for Alec! Ron and I actually sent him a telegram when that story made the news. We said, "You are our hero."

McCALL'S: Would you support your kids if they wanted to go into show business?

RH: I wouldn't allow them to be kid actors, knowing what I know.

MG: You're a rarity—a kid actor who turned out normal. You don't rob banks.

RH: Well, that's what scares me. I am a rarity. I think my parents did a wonderful job, but I'm not sure that it's something you can guarantee. So, have any of your kids been bitten by the showbiz bug yet?

MG: I think so. They've mentioned things, you know? But I forbid it until they are adults. If they want to pursue it later on, fine. My parents supported my decision, and I'll support theirs when they are old enough to make it.

McCALL'S: Has the way your parents raised you affected how you raise your kids?

MG: I think there are things I want to do differently and things I try to emulate. We had a big family—11 kids—and my parents were always there for us. There were rules and chores, and we all had to work. My kids don't know the meaning of the word *work*. They've got it real easy.

RH: That's right. When Mel was just a young boy he had to

walk to school... barefoot... backwards... in the snow....

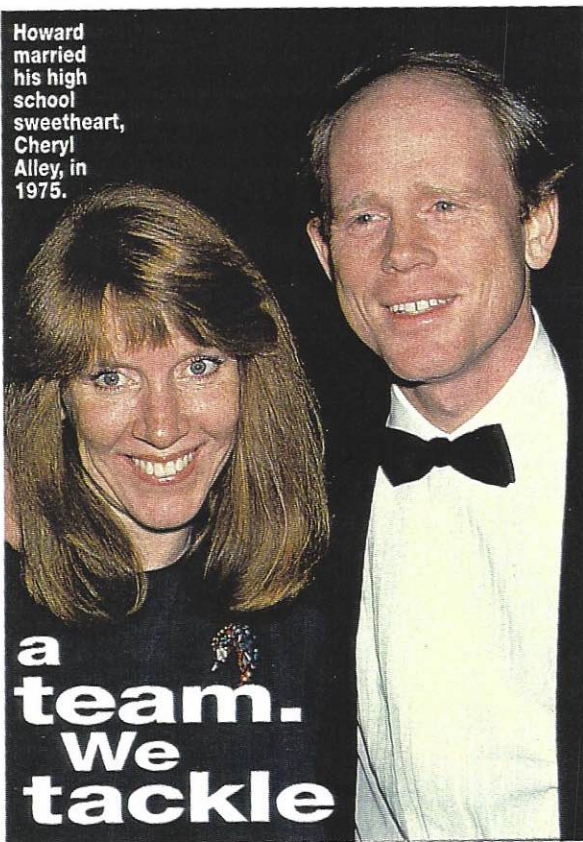
McCALL'S: What have you each taught your children?

MG: Let's see—I taught my daughter to eat sushi.

RH: I tried to teach my son to ride a bike sans training wheels. I was a nervous wreck, running on either side of him, ready to catch him in case he fell down.

MG: Which is what being a good father is about—always hovering just close enough to keep your kids from getting hurt. ■

Howard married his high school sweetheart, Cheryl Alley, in 1975.



all the tough stuff together.”

business. I try to make their lives as normal as possible. It's hard enough being a kid, going through puberty, without having to do it in front of paparazzi and news crews. Also, we don't live right in Beverly Hills. We live outside the scene, as does Ron.

RH: I don't live in Hollywood at all. I live in Connecticut.

McCALL'S: Neither one of you lets your kids be photographed.

MG: No, not if I can help it. It makes me very, very angry, because these kids are not movie stars. They did not ask for this life. And then these