

Parenting advice from a non-parent



Twice so far this summer, I've gone to the movies and been struck by really great fatherly moments on screen. Now I don't know if it was some sort of intentional marketing ploy to coincide with Father's Day or if it was merely a coincidence, but it got my mind going.

I don't want to spoil anything, so I'll just say "Man of Steel" and "World War Z" do some unlikely tugging at the heartstrings.

These fictional fathers act in the self-sacrificing way that I think characterizes really great dads—and moms, too. I don't have children of my own, but I do work as a resident parent at a boarding school, and my job is basically to raise children.

Now, I learned early on never to refer to a woman as "just a stay-at-home mom," and I've noticed there's a certain amount of pride in being a parent. So it's with a little hesitation that I even consider writing this column.

I don't want to step on any toes or offend any parents by comparing my job to their role in raising children, but it has to have some similarities.

For example, I find myself pondering the proper amount of guidance. How much is too much? Obviously I don't want them wandering into the street and getting run over. But at the same time, I worry about giving them so much direction that they can't function independently.

Certainly real parents have these same concerns.

Drumroll Please

Written by Jes-c Brandt

Just how important is it to make children clean up after themselves? Most days it's easier to do it myself, but I know they need to learn to be responsible for themselves.

Of course, it would take three days if I wanted my 5-year-old to clean her room entirely on her own. So I worry that I spend so much time trying to teach them to be responsible that I'm not giving them a chance to play and be kids.

If you've been reading this, hoping to find some answers about parenting, I'm afraid I don't have any. On the other hand, if you're reading along, anticipating a good laugh at a naïve, childless 24-year-old thinking she has any insight whatsoever into the infinitely complex task of raising a child, you just might get it.

Earlier this summer I met a woman my grandparents' age named Mary. She wasn't trying to offer advice about parenting, but she inadvertently did give me something worth repeating.

Mary asked me about my job, and I told her about the children that go to my school. I explained some of our routines and some of our challenges.

She asked me if all the girls cleaned their own rooms. Almost guiltily I admitted that they're all supposed to, but I tend to cut the little ones quite a bit of slack.

It took her a moment to respond, but Mary shared that she had lost a granddaughter in a tragic accident. With wisdom that only comes from experience, she simply said that if she still had her granddaughter she wouldn't mind picking up after her.

There are more important things than a clean room.

I'm so glad I met Mary. And I'm touched that she shared such a personal experience with me. These days, when I wonder if I'm doing things right in raising the kids in my care, I think back to that conversation.

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It's not worth frustration when the house is a mess. Each day I aim to enjoy the precious little ones and make the most of the limited time we have together. It's not easy to admit, but sometimes that's hard. At the end of the day, I just hope I've shown them they're loved and cared for, and I know in my heart that's what is really important.

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