

Reaching Perfection in Motherhood

By Jacquelyn Horne

Being a perfect mother is like being a perfect teenager, you don't figure out how to do it until you've been through the process, then it's too late. But don't lose hope, your grandchildren will benefit.

Looking back on my life as a mother, I realize that the most perfect period in raising my children was during the first three days while we were both still in the hospital. (Mothers today don't have those precious three days anymore. They're sent home with the little bundle of hope (?) before they're ready to cope.)

But, I was privileged to have three days to learn how to diaper, feed and wrap my baby without carrying it upside down. Then I was launched into at least eighteen years of "practicing" motherhood. (Hey, If doctors can practice, why not me?)

I'm thankful for one thing; I didn't make mistakes while raising those little bundles of joy. I just had many "learning challenges" while they set the pace of life--their's and mine.

I experienced my first learning challenge when my eldest son was born. Not having traveled this road of motherhood before, I was careful to listen to all the advice coming my way. Such as: "Keep him on a feeding schedule, or you'll be sorry." And "Don't rock him or he'll never go to sleep on his own." Along with the famous, "Don't let him sleep in your bed or you'll never get him to sleep in his crib."

What did I learn from following this advice? --Feed him when he cries, rock him to sleep when he's fighting the sandman, and take him to bed with you if you want to get any rest at all.

As my three boys and only girl grew older, I was advised to "treat them all alike". It worked--at least for a while. On one occasion, when the baby, under a year old at the time, got himself into trouble, I scolded him. I hurt his feelings and that small baby face "puckered up" and cried real tears. When I looked around the room, all three of his siblings were crying too. So, I guessed, this treating them the same was a good idea.

But fairness became more difficult as they got older, because they didn't all respond alike to me. They each had their own way of reacting to life's situations. Not that they were always champions, but somehow, I never felt like a winner in the end. Each conflict was on their turf. They seemed to set the rules, and I never had an "at home" game. It was usually "rained out". Tears are ammunition used by children to win wars.

They seemed to be constantly ahead of me. For instance, my second son was completely honest and forthcoming and used it against me. When the policeman knocked on the door to tell us he had been seen "popping" Christmas bulbs on the concrete walk--bulbs he had "borrowed" from our neighbor's outside Christmas tree--he confessed immediately. Leaving me no space for interrogation.

My daughter, on the other hand, seemed to have a crisis every time judgment was pending. She developed an instant "tummy ache" which changed the subject immediately. Once she even broke her arm. (I'm not saying she did it because she wasn't supposed to be riding the bike, but it was mighty suspicious.)

Then there was the time the sliding glass door leading to our patio was broken. Being a good mother, I had it replaced right away to insure that nobody got hurt. I didn't learn until she was grown that she'd "kicked" it in, because her brothers had locked her out of the apartment.

My eldest son turned out to be a very well behaved child. When he was sixteen, he ran away from home and was picked up in Daytona Beach, Florida. The authorities called us and said they would put him on a specific flight home and that we should meet the plane. Without informing us, they sent this runaway from Florida to Delaware on an earlier flight. But, humble

son that he was, he was sitting obediently (and alone) in the waiting area of the airport when we arrived. He waited two whole months before he relocated again.

Two of my boys taught me how to be frugal and the value of "stolen" moments. Together, they shared the responsibility of bringing in fireplace logs every evening after school. They were given an hour to go into the woods behind the house and gather firewood to their hearts content. They determined that if they gathered enough wood on Monday and hid it in a pile far back in the woods, they could then spend each work hour the rest of the week playing unsupervised war games. One of them grew up to be the best financier of the four.

My youngest son, after the original scolding at babyhood, became the family pet. Since he got away with more antics than the others, he cultivated a habit of telling little "white prevarications". He once turned to his brother and faking an upset stomach, proceeded to "throw up" on him. His brother jumped up and started brushing off the offending "throw up", only to realize that it was a joke and there was nothing to brush away. I ran into the room to see why the house was being torn down, only to find one angry son and one rolling in the floor laughing. The family pet didn't seem to "get it", that he was the only one laughing.

That's probably one of the reasons we didn't believe him when he announced that the beautiful, fluffy collie, recently given to us by a friend, was multiplying in the doghouse. It took an actual sample, a cute-as-a-button newborn puppy, to convince us.

He ended up becoming a pastor, and people don't listen to him now either.

But, I wasn't the only one learning. I taught them something too. Like the numerous times we'd pull into the yard and my husband and boys would dart out of the car and run into the house without a backward glance. I would sit there until one of them missed me (usually about supper time). Ultimately, they'd remember that it was good manners to open the car door for Mom and other ladies. (Teenage boys never consider Mom a lady. She's just Mom.) One of them always came rushing out with an apology and a hungry look. (Clearly it worked.) They now open doors for their wives and other ladies.

Through the years, I've developed into a perfect mother. So I'll share the secret with you inexperienced mothers trying to learn the ideal solutions to motherhood: Don't listen to the advice of others who did everything wrong while raising their own children. Listen, instead, to your heart. It will never steer you wrong.

God looketh upon the heart. We can learn a lot from him.

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