

Children as Our Teachers

Most of our life's lessons, we learn through those older, wiser and more learned than ourselves. We stumble through life collecting other valuable tidbits mostly through trial and error, learning also from the various bumps and bruises we sustain on the long hard journey to become adults.

When we become parents, the baton is quickly passed. Then, drawing on everything we know and have learned and experienced, we evolve into the first of many teachers our own precious children will learn from.

What is both amazing and priceless is that the most valuable lessons I have ever learned have come from the very children I love most and was entrusted to teach ... my own. One of the most important lessons came from my oldest daughter, Carrie, when she was five years-old.

Like most parents, my protective instinct was highly developed. I would have literally given my life for any one of my children. Thank God, that was never necessary, but here is what I learned:

We were living at the time in a neighborhood in Elmhurst, Illinois. My two oldest daughters, Beth, three, and Carrie, five, played routinely with two little neighbor girls of about the same ages, who lived directly across the street from us. Their mother and I took turns having the girls play at our houses.

On one particular day, Carrie was riding her bike with training wheels on the sidewalk across the street with her friend who was on her own bike. Her mother kept a protective eye on them from the porch.

At one point, I noticed one of the young neighborhood boys walking with his mother towards the girls. The boy was known to be rough and we had all experienced his bullying at one time or another. I felt the girls would be safe, but as a precaution, I kept my eye on them across the street, especially Carrie, by peeking out my front window every few minutes.

As the two mothers were talking, I watched the boy walk over to Carrie, who was

on her bike. He put his hand on her handlebars and tugged hard on the bike. Carrie said something to him as she struggled to keep her balance, but he continued to pull on the bike even harder, obviously trying to make her fall off. Carrie again said something to him and I could see that she was getting agitated. My maternal instincts came alive and I ran to get my shoes.

As I hurriedly jammed my second sneaker on and was tying it, I peeked out again. Carrie was now off her bike, looking up at the boy and saying something to him. Suddenly, he hit her.

Like a bull, I saw red. I was on my feet and headed for the door, when the most surprising thing happened. She decked him! He fell backwards onto the grass, holding his hand over his nose. I stood in the doorway watching with my mouth open. My chin, I'm sure, was somewhere on the floor. Then very calmly, Carrie walked over to the boy, put out her hand, and helped him up.

As hard as it had been for me to watch, I had learned a valuable lesson that day from my five-year-old daughter: children must be allowed to stand up for themselves and to fight their own battles. As a mother, I felt so incredibly proud of her, and so very humbled by her actions. What would she have learned, had I rushed over there and reprimanded either the child for his bullying, or his mother for allowing it?

Knowing Carrie now as a woman and a mother, herself, I feel a grateful, overwhelming joy in all that she has become. She still is one of my most trusted and beloved teachers ...