
From Childhood To Parenthood And Back

Contributed by Sue
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"Parenting Invokes Childhood Reflection" In the summer of '75, my family moved from a city to a classic suburban neighborhood. We had a big family and met other families with children of every age. We were allowed the run of the neighborhood, creating fond childhood memories. Across the street from my house was an elderly Russian immigrant family. The mother and father must have been in their 80's and their only son must have been in his late fifties. While the rest of the neighborhood was bustling with big, active families, they kept to themselves. No one had any real idea what their story was, but as a child, I speculated a few things. The son was a mystery. I went on the fact that he was an important scientist at a local company and he lived in a big old house with his parents. He was cranky, mysterious, and, most of all, I knew he didn't like children. Many things were blamed on the cranky man of mystery. When my cat (one of my many) went missing, it was rumored that he ran it over in his driveway (several times) and threw it away in the trash. I sat and stared at that house and wondered why he didn't like children. It really disturbed me. He was a child himself at one time. How could he not like what being a child is all about? My parents had cocktail parties every once in a while. All the neighborhood grown-ups would come. One year, several years after we moved in, the cranky man of mystery was invited to attend. You could imagine my curiosity in seeing him at a social situation at my house. I watched him from the kitchen. At the time, I thought I was being rather inconspicuous, however, I bet he knew I was staring at him all along. In retrospect, it must have made him very uncomfortable. After assessing the situation from the kitchen, I realized he was on my turf and I wasn't afraid of him. As a matter of fact, I took it as an opportunity to get to the bottom of this (the investigative reporter in me). I went to say 'hello'. I thought I should. I couldn't help but to theorize that if he could just see how nice kids are, he would have a change of heart. I was overbearingly kind to him. After all, I couldn't just blurt out the big question, 'Is it true, you don't like children?', but I wanted to. I asked him about the missing cat, instead. He pretended he didn't understand, but I knew that he knew, and I wanted to let him know that I knew. Turns out, he was delighted to be there, among other adults, but he was not amused with me dotting over him. I took it for fact, he doesn't like children! I promptly reported my findings to the neighborhood kids. What disturbed me more than anything was thinking that he didn't like children. For years, the question stayed with me. Was it just some children, or all children? I never found out for sure. As a child, I would say, "When I'm a grown-up, I'm not going to yell so much at my kids. I am going to give them what they want, so they will be happy." As a parent, I don't actually do that, but I try to see things through 'my childhood eyes' when trying to understand my child's point of view. Without doubt, my mysterious neighbor was a respectable scientist. He led a low-key, responsible life with his parents until they died. He married eventually, but never had children of his own. I think he had a difficult childhood and despite his career success, and was weary of having children. I respect those who make a conscience decision not to have children. They must know their limits well enough to not give in to the idealism of parenting. I always wanted to have children and was fortunate enough to have two, but two is enough for me! It wasn't until I actually had children of my own that I realized why people are uneasy around children. Children are messy. They have no regard for germs, they are temperamental and time consuming. But I know the importance of providing a happy, nourishing childhood for each of my children, despite the challenges they present. Using an instinctive balance of fun, nutrition, adventure, discipline, respect, discovery, playtime and a worthwhile education, we are building our children's foundation for the rest of their lives. It's our responsibility as parents. If we don't enjoy their childhood, neither will they.