



1 Thing Modern Parents Are Doing SO Wrong

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“Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset,” sang Topol in *Fiddler on the Roof*. “Swiftly fly the years.” And in the twenty years that have swiftly flown since I graduated High School, another generation has been born and grown up. Yet the modern parenting style seems oddly familiar. Not new, fresh and enlightened but old, threadbare...and loathed.

“Your parents were so *modern*,” my boss gushed when I was in my late twenties. I was shocked, but now? Oh! *Now* I see it! I see the parents of today making the one big mistake *my* parents made when they bucked the trend and did everything *differently* from “normal” parents. The screw has turned...and as Bert the Chimney Sweep said so charmingly in the original *Mary Poppins*: “I feel what’s to ‘appen, all ‘appened before.”

It all starts with an obsession with “safety.”

You know you’re an old fogey when playgrounds irritate the crap outta’ ya. The other day, I found myself driving past my childhood playground and couldn’t believe my eyes. They’ve *ruined* my park! This culture’s obsession with *safety* has ruined childhood. Back in my day, Sonny, at the bottom of the slide there was dirt! When you came home tired, filthy and happy from the park, the water ran brown in the sink when you washed your hands. In Winter, we skated under the stars while the train blew it’s whistle as it chug-chug-chugged past the park and the electricity sang in the wires. It was magical.

Now, playgrounds have this spongy, rubbery, plastic *stuff* on the ground and something that looks like a Pool Noodle on the top edge of the fence. A kid can’t get dirty if they try! And where are the sandburrs!? They can’t grow in rubber. Sandburrs are part of childhood. If you never get a sandburr, how do you know your Daddy loves you because he pulls out those prickly things screwing their way through your dirt-crusting socks with his bare fingers.

Don’t even get me started about the “play” equipment nowadays! Not a splinter to be found anywhere. It’s all brightly colored plastic for mental stimulation! In *my* day, park equipment was made from two things: metal and wood. The metal froze in winter (and yes,

I did stick my tongue to it on a dare.) The wood smelled delightfully of creosote and gave off splinters. But it was worth it because you had *so...much...fun!!!* You didn't *need* vivid colors for mental stimulation because your own imagination was far more vivid.

How do kids have fun nowadays when they're wearing so much padding they can barely move. Call me kooky but *since when* do you need knee pads to ride a bike *with the training wheels still on!*? Sure, you may fall off and skin your knee. Of course! You're supposed to. That's part and parcel of childhood. How else will you know your mother loves you if you never skin your knee so you never experience the transcendent love of having your mommy wash the wound, carefully sticks on a Band-Aid and then kiss it. One kiss from Mom and the pain was utterly gone and you *knew* you're loved. You don't remember the pain; you'll *always* remember the kiss. In fact, science has proven that kissed boo-boo's heal 10x faster than un-kissed boo-boos. (Well! They've got the time and money to study *everything* else. Why not that!?!)

Why have all the dirt, the sand, the creosote, the splinters, the sandburrs, the sunburn and the charm gone out of childhood? Safety. The world finally caught up to my modern, paranoiac parents' obsession with safety. Safety and germs. I was the first kid in my town to wear a bike helmet (a horrible contraption that looked like half a polystyrene Christmas ball; not the cool kind they have now.) I could pet a dog, but had to wash my hands immediately afterwards. I could go outside in the sunshine, but not without a hat and either long-sleeves or sunscreen. I could enjoy a school potluck party, but only if I used an antibacterial wet wipe first and didn't eat any of the homemade food. When I grew up, I could date but only so carefully that guys asked, quite seriously, if I was in the Witness Protection Program. My husband didn't even know my last name when he proposed to me!

What scares me is how normal modern parenting sounds to me even now. Back in the day, I was "that weird girl." The world grew up. Helluva a shame.

Safety, like God, can be exploited to any end. You can no more argue with safety than you can argue with God. The word "safety" need only be trotted out and every other idea, motive or wish will bow before it. Childhood, freedom, creativity ... all have fallen to the demi-god of "safety." I know. I lost my youth, my dreams, my opportunities, my hope and almost my will to live to "safety." It was the one word trotted out to keep me perpetually *stuck* which is what I fear and see happening to the next generation. They're *stuck*.

This exploitation of "safety" isn't loving and kind. It's ultimately selfish. That's why I *love* the lyrics of the *Abba* song in the christening scene in *Mamma Mia 2*, "But I know I don't possess you, So go away, God bless you." Parents obsessed with safety are incredibly selfish. They appear to be worried about their children. Actually, they're worried about their own fragile egos ("My kid's the *best!*") and their elder years.

Now, don't get me wrong. I like my self and my family to be safe but I won't sacrifice their spirit, their humanity, their character nor their *joie de vivre* on that altar.


Way back in the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin is supposed to have written, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."

I fear we are raising a generation of cowards who will always choose their own personal safety above every other ethic. "Life, liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" means nothing to them, it has no context. But they understand safety. Because they've never had a sandburr bite their ankle nor left part of their knee skin on the sidewalk. Because they'll *only* drink bottled water and if they forget their favorite bottle at home, their dotting parent rushes to their school just to deliver their favorite bottle. Their kid wouldn't *dream* of sipping from the school's water fountain! (True story!)

No wonder they prefer playing video games in their parents' basement to real life. It's "safe." It's *easy*. It's *addictive*. We're following directly in the footsteps of the Japanese epidemic of hikikomori: adults who won't leave home, won't get married, won't have kids and sometimes won't even leave their bedrooms for years on end because we're not *raising* the next generation: we're *ruining* it with our obsession with safety.

We've raised a generation of cowardly, selfish, perpetual kids who are subsidized and coddled well into adulthood because, psychology assures us, their brains aren't fully developed until their mid-twenties. Well, a bunch of eighteen-year-olds went out and did something pretty damn unsafe in the 1940s: they fought a World War and then came home and went to work building relationships, marriages, families, businesses, prosperity and a strong nation in the *real* world, not the virtual one.

I can rant about this because I was raised much like a millennial (*sans* social media). I know just how bad it feels and how *hard* it is to become a normal adult after years of so-called "modern" parenting. *Pfffft*. Gimme good old fashioned dirt, sunshine, sandburr and skinned knees any day!

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