

HOW TO COPE WITH
BROKEN
PARENTS

A GUIDE FOR NEGLECTED TEENS

BY TIM BROST

This pre-release version of *How to Cope With Broken Parents* is only temporarily available. Anyone may read, review, and submit a formal critique of the work. Please contact the author before beginning any serious examination.

Unless otherwise noted by the author, all references to people and historical events herein arrived through pure imagination. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, is coincidental.

Printed in the United States of America
Copyright - 2021 - All rights reserved.

Copyright - 2021 All rights reserved.
No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned,
or distributed in any printed or electronic form without permission.

HOW TO COPE WITH
BROKEN
PARENTS

A GUIDE FOR NEGLECTED TEENS

BY TIM BROST

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Darby and Zack for their assistance
and encouragement during the first draft.

Substantive Contributors Are Listed Here

Jamie Brooks

First Readers

Daniel Halliday

Author's Note

Writing this guide was far easier than getting it into the hands of
the tweens and teens that might benefit most from it's contents will
ever get.

Guideline Contents

Who Should Read This Guide	1
The Social Contract.....	4
Situational Awareness	7
Strategy	13
Our DNA.....	19
Nutrition and Healthcare (Jerome’s Story)	29
Roles, Rules, and Responsibilities (Jennifer’s Story)	40
Blame and Resentment (Cindy’s Story)	53
Time and Money (Ava’s Story)	65
When Being Good Isn’t Enough (Chance Walker’s Story)	77
Abandoned, Abused, Neglected (Lil Buck’s Story)	87
Sexual Abuse (Mark’s Story)	104
Adulting (Tyrel’s Story)	117
Walking on Eggshells and Living with Secrets (Carl’s Story) .	123
Violence (Jimmy’s Story - Trigger’s Story)	129
When Parents Break (Marsha’s Story)	143
Looking Back (Paul’s Story)	147

Who Should Read This Guide

Children should not have to train their parents, but sometimes things go wrong. We might not know what is going wrong at home. We don't have the experience and training to put our fingers on the exact problem, but we know. We know that something is not right. This guide will help you understand your situation and develop a strategy to take the next right step.

By the way, parents can also learn this guide. This guide is not a parenting guide. It won't tell you how to get your son or daughter into the right schools or set them up for a successful career. It is more about keeping the home healthy, happy, safe, and violence-free, and it is written primarily from the child's point of view and to inform that view.

Have you ever heard the phrase, social contract? The idea of social contracts is discussed in the first chapter. It means there are written and unwritten rules about how we should behave toward each other. For example, in the United States, we have hundreds of formal documents describing how we should think and act. Above all, our Declaration of Independence says we all have the right to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." That is a well-known formal statement that is spoken many times by many people. It is even written on some buildings.

We have unspoken agreements as well, and there are hundreds of rule books. We all live by a set of rules, even if we don't realize or agree to it. Some of the rules have that word right in them. There are business rules, hard and fast rules, rules of thumb, unwritten rules, unspoken rules, and even something called a promulgated

rule. Promulgated rules are very clearly defined and communicated so that everyone knows what rules they are governed by.

Some rules don't use that word. Norms, principles, and morals are like that. Many of the rules we live by are more like guidelines. They are open-ended and apply to everyday conduct. For example, it is customary, to be honest. That is one of the principles we should all strive to live by. The golden rule says we should treat as we would like to be treated ourselves.

And there are member rules, policies, procedures, and requirements we will encounter in the job market. The military and police use rules of engagement. Here's the best one. Be kind to one another.

If we are in a home where social contracts are broken, we may be so distracted by everything going on that we never stop to figure out what is happening and how to change our situation. Our awareness of what needs to be thought about and fixed is messed up.

Chapter two has a list of random statements. The secret sauce in chapter two is that some comments may grab your attention. Things that happen to other people are not as interesting as reading about the problems we are living with right now, but we can feel empathy for those going through trouble. The list in Situational Awareness gives us all things to think about.

Scientists are doing some amazing things these days. They have mapped the genetic code for human beings. There is no way for most of us to understand how they did it. Maybe you will study science and learn all about genetic code. A brief overview of how our bodies came into being will help us think about nutrition and health. And if you are wondering if the chapter on Our DNA is sex education, no. It is not. That chapter briefly describes how we came to be from the

atom up. Nutrition and proper healthcare are so important that there is a chapter on that all by itself. As you read on, remember. This guide is about behaviors in the home.

Society doesn't work without rules. We all have a role to play. Some of us do it well with the laws we agree to live by. Others do not. We learn rules from our parents, from school, from watching television and from our friends. We can learn from reading, too. Understanding our role in society and the rules that come with that role is very important. Understanding when our parents are not living by the laws society placed on them is essential. When we stop thinking of ourselves as children, and think of ourselves as adults in training, something extraordinary happens. We begin taking responsibility for our actions, making plans for the future, and usually, we start testing strengths and limits. We explore what it means to be an adult long before our age in years says we are.

The rest of the guide opens doors to many of the things that go wrong in families. If you feel uncomfortable in any of the sections, ask yourself two things. Should I go on, and if I do, am I open to experiencing uncomfortable truths.

This guide helps anyone recognize what may be wrong in their home and needs to change. The stories and ideas in various sections of the guide may feel very familiar or not familiar at all. In other words, a few chapters may be like looking in a mirror. Different sections are more like peeping over a fence and into the neighbor's windows.

Everything in the guide was included for a purpose. That may not be clear to you in every story because each story was written for a different kind of person and situation. Just keep going.

Finally, there is a section called Strategy. That chapter identifies

tools that can be used in many situations all throughout your life. Every chapter ends with a brief comment on which strategies apply.

The Social Contract

When a household is constantly worried about money, dangerous behavior, a dangerous neighborhood, food, and a whole list of other stressful things, there is little energy left to cook, clean, do the dishes, paint a bedroom or even walk the dog. There are thousands of excuses why dinner was late, breakfast is skipped, why no one in the family has seen a dentist for a couple of years, why mom quit taking her medicine or why the car broke and could not be fixed. A social contract is not always written out. You don't sign a piece of paper when you are born, but your parents did. They signed off on a birth certificate and entered into a social contract. That unspoken agreement is governed by common sense and even laws.

Parents are to provide for their children from birth until they are ready to care for themselves. The agreement begins even before you take your first breath. Mothers carrying children through pregnancy live by rules and suggestions. They should not smoke tobacco or take street drugs. They should not drink alcohol. The mother's diet is essential even before you are born. If you think about it, they are responsible for feeding you from the moment you are conceived. Not through the mouth, of course, but proper nutrition begins way before we are born.

Parents change your diapers, feed you, hold you, comfort you when

you are uncomfortable, and look after your health and well-being. Every parent messes up sometimes with all these obligations. Still, if continually they mess up by leaving their baby in a crib alone too often and don't feed it correctly, that is wrong. They should care enough to carry it in their arms and talk to their baby lovingly and reassuringly. If they don't do all that and more, they have broken the social contract.

Some families are so stressed out that the parents don't even notice how the basics of life are slipping away. That's not an excuse. Just because we get stressed out over life does not mean we can tear up that contract. Again, there is no piece of paper to shred, but you get the idea.

Don't misunderstand what is being said. Home is not a war zone, but there are always conflicts. A lot of families these days worry about money. Sometimes there are troubles with drinking, drugs, bad choices, and anger. This guide helps anyone recognize whether their basic needs in our social contract are being met. It gives suggestions for what to do when you realize that things are not right.

Kids don't usually have any control over families, but they have needs. When a child dominates in a family, it's because they have special needs, are mentally unstable, or in some cases, are filling a vacuum left by their parents. That means that if a parent is not doing their job, one of the children might. Sometimes a grandparent has to step in.

Families are the first and most crucial step in creating a great life. If problems at home get in the way of development, everything from then on is more complicated. It's like interest in a bank. If there is no savings account, if no money is set aside to cover future needs, there will always be money trouble. If money is set aside, it earns

interest or pays dividends. It's like that with the family. In learning families, tools and resources are gathered up for the incredible journey through life. When a child leaves a learning family, they are eager and ready to take on new challenges. In dysfunctional or codependent families, children leave home exhausted and confused about taking care of themselves.

Okay, that last paragraph used some big words, namely, dysfunctional and codependent. Dysfunctional means precisely what it sounds like. A family that doesn't take care of things properly doesn't know how to function. A codependent family is one where family members have unhealthy attachments. A codependent mother, for example, might attempt to control every little thing their child does, sees, touches, and even thinks about.

Parents should help their children grow up happy and prosperous, even if they are not. Good decisions made by parents help their children to succeed. Bad choices are wasted opportunities. The decisions we make today have an impact on the rest of our lives. Every problem ignored makes things more difficult later on.

This guide teaches us that being messed up is as common as fingernails. We all have problems to work through, but a few types of problems are horrible. Temporary problems are just part of life. But if in a year or two the same problems are still an issue, that is different. This guide helps us identify problems that are going on right now. It also allows us to recognize the basic needs that have been overlooked for a long time. If basic needs are not being met, then it's time to do something.

Right now, let's say you are worried that your parents drink too much. Dad might get crazy angry when he's drunk. Is this a big problem in your life right now? Maybe not, but in a year or two, who knows.

The social contract implies that parents should not be using drugs nor alcohol to excess. Dad might get traffic tickets because he drives under the influence of alcohol, or he might pick you up at school so drunk he should not be driving at all. If that is the case now, he could lose his driver's license or worse. If things grow out of control in a few years, he could even be arrested for doing something he would never ever do if sober. Sorry if that worries you, but as you will read about other people's lives, it happens. For now, just be happy things haven't gone that far. Focus only on the things that are really happening and don't worry about things you may read about in other people's lives that are not happening in yours, and here is another significant point to remember. Life is not always cruel. Things are not always bad. Most of the time, life is excellent!

A fascinating man once said he is the victim of things that never happened in his life. That's crazy talk. But there is a lesson to be learned in his words. It is easy to get carried away with worry about what might happen. Focus on what is actually happening to you right now. What might happen is that everything works out just fine. Remember that, too. Work to make your life safer and healthier one thing at a time, one day at a time, and you'll probably live a long and happy life. When the social contract works, and you try your best to do your part, life usually works out. This guide will get you started.

Situational Awareness

Being very aware of what is going on around and in us is called Situational Awareness. This section features a list of totally random statements. Some of the comments may not apply to you. Most will not, but everyone finds something that fits behaviors in their family, school, or neighborhood. After you read through the list, close your eyes and recall the two or three statements that seem to fit. Whatever feels essential right now is probably going to remain important for a long while. This guide will help you figure out what to do if your situation requires action.

- All parents sacrifice some things for their children. Some parents use their children to make their own lives better.
- Most parents are just trying to make it through the week and protect their children from problems. Some parents push their problems onto their children as if their kids were at fault.
- Authentic parents break their own rules sometimes and forgive the children that violate a tradition now and again.
- Sometimes parents wish they could escape the problems in their family, and so do their kids. In a healthy family, nearly all issues get resolved and don't get repeated very often. In an unhealthy family, the same problems show up over and over.
- Grownups are almost all really good at some things.

Unfortunately, even skilled people can be failures at raising children.

- Parents that don't provide structure in the house lack structure in their own lives.
- Adults that complain about their bosses, the government, the police, everyone who has power over them are often the same parents that demand absolute respect and loyalty from their children.
- Sometimes parents pretend they are happy to see their kids, even when they are preoccupied. They smile and make jokes. Children should also occasionally pretend to be glad to see their parents. It's better to smile than sulk around the house in a bad mood. Bad moods are infectious.
- Proud parents share the basic human need for attention. They even go overboard. Selfish parents don't show any interest in things that don't directly concern their well-being.
- Parents are told to keep their worries to themselves, but children can sense when things aren't right. Even if we don't go into details about our problems, we should be willing to tell our parents or children that we are just feeling grumpy or depressed and will get over it soon.
- If a child goes to their parent with troubles, and the parent overreacts by making a big scene at school or with their kid's

friends, it becomes less likely that they will talk about their troubles in the future.

- Children and their parents should always try to see things from the other's point of view.
- Parents tend to see things in a more comprehensive view than their children. After all, they have a past that becomes part of nearly every decision. Kids live in the present and see what is right in front of them.
- Good parents encourage their children to take responsibility for their decisions. Bad parents don't do that. They just give orders.
- Good parents admit when they are wrong. Bad parents never apologize.
- Generous parents are consistent with their rules and frequently praise their children for good behavior. Power-hungry parents are never clear about the rules. Instead, they just fly off the handle when they are bothered.
- Honest parents admit when their children are better at something than they are. Arrogant parents degrade their children for every failure.
- Wise parents don't expect their children to be perfect all the time. Selfish parents hardly ever think their kids do things well.

- Involved parents work with their children as a team. They engage in all kinds of projects, even projects that were not their idea. Other parents are too busy or don't care.
- Skilled parents teach things to their kids all the time. They are patient with their children and don't expect that anyone gets things perfect the first time. Bad parents think a school education is enough. They don't teach how to use tools, throw a ball, wind up a hose, or mow the lawn. Unskilled or overly busy parents don't teach much. Sometimes they don't know themselves.
- Considerate parents have their kids' backs, no matter what. It may not always seem so, but secretly they watch over their children as their children learn to cope with the consequences of their actions.
- When injured or in dire trouble, who do you really hope will show up? Your dad? Your mom? Both? A brother or sister? Emergency Services? It's important to know someone who can handle whatever comes and is competent to help you.
- Holiday parents go crazy on birthdays and Christmases, then seem to disappear for the rest of the year. Consistent parents are a gift in themselves.
- Smart parents engage in conversation about anything and everything, all the time. Distracted parents are always inattentive. They can act bothered when you want to talk.

- Cool parents show respect for the things their children love and love to do. Uncool parents will take their stuff away just because, or even laugh at their children's ambitions.
- Weak parents tend to panic in a crisis. Their children end up having to calm and take care of them rather than the other way around.
- Caring parents don't have to be right or win all the time. Bad parents are never wrong.
- Loving parents encourage their children in almost anything they want to try. That's even true when their kids sort of suck in the beginning. Bad parents turn their heads away or yell at their kids for not trying harder. They may even say how disappointed they are.
- Wise parents don't use guilt and shame against their kids. They know it can leave them damaged for a lifetime.

The rest of these random statements are apparent to most of us. They are part of our social contract, but they need to be here just the same:

- Good parents are not hooked on hard drugs
- Good parents do not commit crimes that could take them away from their children
- Parents should never attack anyone in the house with their fists

or a weapon

- A parent that sexually abuses their child should be removed from the home
- Caring parents never willfully abandon their families
- Faithful parents don't give up on their children, no matter what.

Strategy

It's time to discuss what the title of this guide means. *How to Train Your Parents* could have been titled how to train your egocentric obnoxious, overbearing brother or how to teach the idiot I married, but that's not what this guide is about. It was specifically written to help tweens and teens concerned with their parents' behavior. The sections above on the Social Contract and Situational Awareness are there to help the reader assess their status within the power structure of the family. A chapter later in the guide reveals the Roles, Rules, and Responsibilities that we live by. It dives even deeper into the subjects we learned about social contracts.

The phrase, How to Train Your Parents sounds like you need a slide deck and textbooks, but that's not it. You don't tap your father in the chest with a pointed, angry finger, then tell him to sit down and start lecturing him on proper behavior. That would be an exciting thing to observe through a neighbor's window, but no. Kids are not in charge of their parents. We are not the teachers in that way.

The social contract says that parents are in control. They are supposed to do all the training, and yet here's a secret. Parents say all the time that they learn more from their kids than from anyone. How is that possible?

First big tip. If a parent can learn from a child just as much as a child can learn from a parent, that means they must sometimes be receptive! Most parents actually listen to their children quite often, especially when the topic is critical. They pay attention to the things their children do more than children think they do. Are my kids okay? What do they like and dislike? Even when they absolutely don't seem to care, some part of them is open to having a conversation about serious issues.

Training is already a two-way street. This guide teaches you how to recognize when something is a problem and even helps you with strategies to change the situation.

As a child, you are not ultimately in control. Honestly, that's not your job, and you wouldn't want it at such an early age. Some sections in this guide show how many problems families can get into when children are forced to assume too much responsibility. One of the most important things about relationships with parents is to remember that they are learning from you. They may not always agree with your requests and strategies to get what you want and need. Habits are hard to break. But remember. They are almost always paying attention at some level, even if they seem unable to pay attention to anything.

Here are the tools for training parents.

In this guide, we call them strategies, but that's just because it sounds cooler: The strategies you can use are, Catharsis,

Awareness, Knowledge, Credibility, Agreement, Accountability, Encouragement, and Reward. That's a lot of tools, and it's far better to have a lot of tools you can use than to just get mad. Getting mad hardly ever works, and we want to focus on what does. At the end of many chapters, we revisit these strategies and apply them to the material we just covered. First, here is more about each strategy:

Catharsis

The dictionary defines catharsis this way. It is “the process of release, thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.” Wow! I believe you can see how that works from your own experience. When you have finally had enough of something, you might even uncontrollably start to cry like there is no tomorrow. When an abusive parent realizes that their behavior is very wrong, they feel horrible and can't say sorry enough. That is catharsis. But catharsis is not enough. It's just one point of evidence that people are becoming aware of what bothers them. In other words, catharsis is proper, but it doesn't mean that a long-held lousy behavior will not come back again. Many abusers say they are sorry and then do the same things all over again in a week or two.

Awareness

Are you aware that Abraham Lincoln is in the Wrestling Hall of Fame? If you've studied Lincoln, you probably do, but most of us had no idea. The point of awareness is that if someone has no idea they are doing something that annoys or even hurts others, they will not change. We don't work on change if we are not even aware of what needs to change.

Knowledge

As soon as most people are aware of an exciting thing, they want to

know more. Let's continue with Lincoln as our example. If you do the research, Lincoln actually won around 300 wrestling matches. At least, that is what Carl Sandburg's biography of Lincoln says. He only lost one wrestling match. When you tell a parent something about yourself that they didn't know, especially if it involves your safety, health, and development, they should naturally want to learn more.

Credibility

Credibility just means that after someone is aware of something and learns more about whatever that is. Questions arise as to whether the information received is credible. They may also question whether this new piece of news really has anything to do with them.

If you don't know, Carl Sandburg is a pretty credible source on Lincoln. When he says that Lincoln earned an "Outstanding American" honor in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, we can believe him, yet we still may not know what that has to do with us. If we are interested in becoming a wrestler in school, the information is more credible. If that is true, we might even want to do more research to determine how he did it.

We can't know when our parents believe us. No one can see into the mind of someone else. For that reason, the strategy on credibility says that we should only ever talk about how our parents' behavior affects us, not that they should change their minds about their behaviors. This is the second vital thing to remember. Parents are usually open to learning from their children, and it is always better to begin difficult conversations by talking about the things we know for sure. We know for sure how we feel when someone hits us. We know how we feel when we don't have enough to eat or suffer from a toothache.

Agreement

Let's say something is really bothering you and for now, use that toothache as an example. You bring it up with your parents to create awareness. They don't know you have a toothache unless you tell them. They ask you which tooth and how much it hurts. That's them trying to gain knowledge. You tell them which tooth and describe the sensation. Hey! You crying from the pain is enough to make this a credible situation, right? What comes next? Next comes a plan to do something about it.

Now, if your father says, suck it up. We don't have the money, that is something you can understand. If your dad runs to the garage for a pair of pliers, OMG. No way. What will probably happen is that one of your parents will say they will get an appointment for you, that is an agreement you can live with.

Accountability

When you or someone else makes a promise, especially for something as serious as a bad toothache, the commitment needs to be kept. That's called accountability. One of the strategies you need to use when dealing with bad behavior, wherever that behavior comes from, is accountability. Remember, you are not in control of your parents. They are in control of you, so holding them accountable is more complicated. You can't put your mother in time-out if she doesn't follow through on a promise. You can't send your dad to his room or say he's grounded.

Holding people accountable to their agreements is not always easy. Some sections in this guide give more information about that situation.

Encouragement

So how do you enforce accountability when you are not in control? Encouragement and reward. You can focus on one side of that old cliché about the carrot and the stick. You don't have control of the stick. Punishment of the parent is not possible. But you do have some ability to offer the carrot. You could agree that if a parent changes behavior that annoys you, you will change one of the behaviors you have that bother them.

Reward

Some parents reward their children for doing nice things or achieving specific goals. Rewards can include an allowance, a gift, or an experience. Rewarding parents is possible, too. The most basic type of reward is the easiest, and it's practiced every day worldwide. The words Tak, Grazie, Spasibo, Merci, Danke, and Gracias, are all ways of saying thank you.

When we do something nice for other people, we expect a thank you. It feels good to be rewarded this way. More than a respectful gesture, it can be a strategy in dealing with difficult people. Everyone likes to be informed and rewarded. It's in our DNA.

Our DNA

We are made of skin, muscle, tissue, bones, and a whole lot more. But why this skin? These bones? What about these imperfections? What do genes, chromosomes, and DNA have to do with how we are made? If you want to train your parents, separate who we are from what we do.

Science informs us about who we are at birth. The most essential breaths we will ever take are the first and last. Nearly every breath accompanies a decision. What to eat? Where to go? What am I going to do right now? What will I do later, and what will I ever do about feeling stuck? Who we are at birth tells us a lot about who we will become later in life and the challenges we might face as we grow.

In our near future, and already for some of us, automation plays a significant role. Many of our jobs are becoming automated. Most cars are built by robots, as are components in machinery. The effect this has on families is becoming a massive question in many circles. Understanding what will happen to us because of automation is even more difficult than understanding our DNA. Shortly, maybe in your lifetime, new discoveries will change how we treat diseases of the body and may even give us insights into how our brain handles different situations. For now, let's understand the bodies we were born into.

There are three sections below. The first section is about science, and it is hard to explain all of that in a few paragraphs. If the first section is too hard to read or boring, go to the second. The second section is easier to read. The third section is the easiest to understand. All three areas get to the point in different ways. Read them all if you can, or

take your pick.

The Science of Who We Are

The stars, planets, minerals, animals, and people are all made of atoms. Atoms are so tiny they can't be seen without an atomic microscope. When a few atoms get together, they form elements. There are 118 elements the scientists know about, and the hunt is on for number 119. Become a chemist, and you might be the person that discovers that new element, or maybe you'll find number 120.

Elements have names like carbon, sodium, argon, helium, and iron. When the elements get together through chemical bonds, they form fascinating molecules called compounds. Compounds get names, too, like Bill, Mary, and Sherise. Just kidding. Sulfur dioxide and hydrochloric acid are actual compounds but not nearly as cool to us as the amino acid compounds.

Amino acids are organic compounds, which simply mean that they are the stuff all living beings are made of. They are what we are made of. There are just over 500 versions of amino acids, but only about 20 are found in our genetic code.

Dogs have 19,000 genes, give or take. 14,200 of those genes are similar, or even the same, in dogs, humans, and mice. People have roughly 25,000 to 30,000 individual genes. That's like crazy, right? Genes are found in chromosomes, and chromosomes are in every cell in our bodies. They are the rule makers for what hair and skin we will have, how our bones and muscles are formed, and even how we behave. There's more to it, of course. We could talk about proteins and such, but basically, thousands of genes are present in every chromosome, and chromosomes are located in our cells. Genes and chromosomes together make strands of deoxyribonucleic

acid (DNA). Sorry. That is the most challenging word to sound out in the complete guide. Forget about it. Just say, DNA. DNA is used on television and in the movies to find out who committed a crime. Doctors use it in specialized medicine.

We all have a unique genetic code that can be found in the cells of our bodies, and the code comes from our parents. Our parents got it from their parents. Their parents got it from their parents. The genetic code in each of us goes thousands of years back in time. A sample of our DNA can tell us where our ancestors came from.

I said there was no sex education, but fathers create sperm and mothers produce an egg. Both the sperm and egg are single fantastically marvelous unique cells. When they get together, they form what scientists and doctors call a zygote. The zygote combines the DNA from the father and mother into everything needed to create a baby, and that baby is the product of generations of people with all their problems and beautiful traits. Have you ever looked down a railroad track? Below your feet are the solid wooden ties that the rails sit on. As you look far into the distance, it seems as if the tracks merge into one. Imagine that the tracks represent your ancestors. Where they seem to join in your vision, far down the tracks, that's you! The idea of those railroad tracks may come up again later. The use here is that we all carry the genetic makeup of many generations.

We can't change that we are made up of atoms, compounds, molecules, genes, and chromosomes, nor that we share DNA with our parents and their ancestors. We can't change the rules of how we were made, though scientists are working on some exciting adjustments. We don't have control over our looks, but we do have some control over how we think about our lives. We are at our best when we learn to live with who we are and work on what we choose to do.

Another Way of Saying the Same Thing

Look around you. The trees, plants, animals, rocks, and rivers are all made up of atoms. Do you think trees or rivers worry about what they look like? Does the tree wake up in the morning angry that its leaves are not as large as some other tree or that its bark might have imperfections? No. Does the river wish it could be a lake? No one these days thinks rivers and rocks care about all that.

Every living thing is unique. We should never feel ashamed of who we are, even if others make fun of or criticize us. It's easier to say that than to do, but it's true. You know it's true. We can learn better ways to think about ourselves, and it starts with thinking about others differently. When we stop judging others, a magical thing begins to happen. We stop judging ourselves. We stop blaming others and resenting who we are. Do you see how that works? If we practice judging, we get better at judging. Judging things all the time is infectious. Pretty soon, we are frustrated with the person we see most often in the mirror.

The Last and Easiest Explanation of Who We Are

The entire universe is made of atoms. We are made of atoms, and everything in the universe has the right to be here. We have a right to be here. What would the universe be without stars, planets, moons, and gravity? What would our world be without the oceans, mountains, rivers, lakes, and forests? The universe includes plants, bugs, animals, and humans. Where would we be without birds in the sky, worms in the ground, bees and their honey, and even dogs that chew the sofa? Where would we be without friends? Where would our friends be without us? If you think the world would be a better place without you in it, well, you are definitely wrong, and this guide is for you. You belong here! You are wanted, trusted, and loved by many people, even if you haven't met them yet.

12D8-George's Story

12D8 was launched in the spring. They were all very excited to make the trip from factory to domicile, whichever method of travel didn't matter. The first 300,000 of them went first by air to hubs in Europe, Southeastern Asia, and the United States. They were distributed by truck to their new homes. That is how 12D8 became a member of the Johnson household.

12D8-George activated his location features moments before touching the doorbell at his new home. Minutes later, the door opened, and he scanned his new family as they all said hello, everyone that is except for the family cat, Tuna.

May we just call you George? The mother asked? 12D8-George, now just George, said of course and reached out to touch the mother's hair. His sensors identified her as 32 years, 184 days, 9 hours, 27 minutes, and 16 seconds old. She was lacking zinc, and her iron levels were low. "How are you feeling today?" George asked, briefly touching the side of her neck.

"Very well, thank you, George," she said. The mother's temperature was 97.9. her blood pressure was a bit high at 137 over 80, and she had a pulse rate of 165, which was a bit high for her body mass index and age, but not requiring comment.

"And you, sir? How are you? I read that you prefer football to chess," George said as he smiled and extended his hand.

The man chuckled at the joke and shook hands with George. His heart rate read within range, but there was a faint irregularity in rhythm. Coming from a Mediterranean lineage that was unusual but not uncommon for second-gen residents in the U.S. A poor diet, lack

of exercise, and increased environmental stressors accounted for the change.

“My name is Beth,” the third unit proudly stated. She stood 129.54 centimeters tall, weighed 38.54 kilograms, needed braces that would cost the household \$2,680 after insurance, spoke with loud enthusiasm, and apparently enjoyed wearing clothing at least two sizes too big. “Pleased to meet you, Beth. Are you my sister?”

George smiled and touched her on the forehead as she laughed. “No, silly. We just met.”

“My mistake. How silly of me. Maybe next week I can be your brother. I would like that very much.”

“He’s funny,” Beth said, grabbing her mother’s arm.

“And smart,” her father said.

“I’m not as smart as the three of you, but yes. I’ve picked up a few things. If you don’t mind, can you show me where I will rest? It’s been a long trip.” As he spoke, George scanned the living room and performed a 3D scan of the home. The map range pipeline identified two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a small room with electronics, their office, a living room, a kitchen, and four closets. He added, “Perhaps the hall closet? I see that it has an outlet. If you prefer, I would be perfectly at home in the garage between the freezer and father’s workbench.”

“Ha! See? I told you he was smart.”

“Oh my,” mother said.

“You can rest in my room,” Beth said. Her happiness at meeting this stranger and inviting him into her life, combined with a continuous rocking motion in her left foot, bordered on obsessive-compulsive disorder. Either that or she was experiencing anxiety for having to use the bathroom.

“I’m sure George will feel more comfortable in the garage. What do other families do, George?”

“What other families do is unimportant. Someone choose.”

“My room!” Beth yelled and grabbed his hand. She immediately led him away from her parents toward her room.

The parents did not protest. Their laughter was as good as an agreement to George. He followed Beth to a small bedroom with pink walls, two white curtained windows, a closet, a bed, a dresser of drawers, and approximately three cubic meters of toys and clothing scattered on every imaginable surface. A quick scan showed the most wear on a stuffed rabbit. “What is her name?” George asked.

Beth ran to her bed, picked up the rabbit, and brought it to George. “This is Truffles.”

“An excellent name. Pleased to meet you, Truffles,” George said.

“I only have one bed,” Beth said.

“I don’t sleep in the same way that you do. I prefer to stand. Would it be all right if I used this spot between the dresser of drawers and the window? We can move the pictures behind me if that is desired.”

“If you say so. I prefer to lay down, myself,” Beth said and watched

George remove a small cylinder from his pocket. He unfolded a coil of electrical cord and plugged it into the outlet next to the dresser.

“How long will you be here?”

“I can stay until you are 18. After that, I will either return to our factory or move with you to college or wherever you want. It’s up to you.”

“Cool! Do you play checkers?”

“I play checkers, chess, go, bat gammon, Monopoly, Risk, fish, poker, gin, gin rummy, and 3,284 other games.”

Beth’s mouth dropped open, and she started to laugh. “Can you play hopscotch?”

“I can play hopscotch,” George said and demonstrated a few moves. Beth imitated him for a while, and he changed his movements. “Can you do this?” George said and balanced on one foot. How about this,” he said, extending his arms to full length. He touched the tips of his index fingers together.

As Beth imitated him, he completed a full kinesiological exam, including an assessment of biomechanics. The exam detected dystrophy in her left calf possibly indicated inadequate blood flow or early-onset rheumatologic disorders. George recorded his review into a diagnostic workflow regimen and marked it for follow-up in three months.

“When do you like to study, Beth? I think it would be best for us to do some of that in the mornings and early afternoons.

Beth grimaced slightly. “Well, I don’t really like to study all that much. Can you ride a bike?”

“Riding bikes is study.”

“Really?”

“And so is walking, running, throwing, dancing, hopscotch, learning languages, learning math, talking about the stars, moons, and planets. Everything we will do together from now on is a form of study.”

“Really?”

“But I have a different word for it. Study sounds like work. From now on, let’s just call it living.”

Lessons and Strategies

We are not robots. We are human beings. It would be very cool if everyone had George in their life to guide them, train them, teach and be a terrific companion, but we are not robots. We have to figure out all of that stuff on our own. Usually, that means we need people in our lives that care for our well-being.

The best way to get over feeling frustrated about how we were made is to stop judging how others are made. If there is no other lesson learned from this section, that is the one to remember. If we can accept how everyone else looks, then we should acknowledge how we look. Doing so gives us more time to do what we really like to do and spend more time with the people who share our perspectives. What is that point of view? Everyone is made of atoms. Everyone was born and will one day die. Their bits will return to the earth and join with other particles to form molecules, compounds, and

maybe even genes. There is no need to spend life blaming others or ourselves for the things we have no control over.

Two of the strategies you may want to consider are awareness and encouragement. When you have a parent that worries too much about how they look, let them know how you feel about how you look in a non-judgmental way. Share their concerns. Give them a tip about learning to accept how others look. We can't change how we looked at birth, but we can work together to understand the things we cannot change and work together to change the things we can.

Nutrition and Healthcare

Robots need electricity. People need food and healthcare. 73 percent of adults in the United States are overweight. In 2020, four out of ten people living here were so heavy they got classified as being obese. Oh my! Nearly 20 percent of children are even obese. Mississippi has one of the highest obesity rates in the country, and here is why. Mississippi is one of the poorest states. If we don't have money for food, why are we gaining so much weight? This is where training your parents is so necessary.

When we don't have much money, we buy cheap food. Cheap food is often very fattening. Hot dogs instead of lean chicken, pizza instead of fresh fruits and vegetables, lots of soda and chips instead of zero-calorie flavored water are all symptoms of getting our nutrition from the wrong sources. Pasta and white rice are cheap. Some families love it. But pasta and white rice are also high in carbohydrates, and carbs are fattening. Every package in the U.S., well, most of them anyway, carry a printed area with the word nutrition. Someday compare the number of carbohydrates in one serving of ice cream to the number of carbohydrates in a serving of milk. The number of carbohydrates in products is usually an excellent way to figure out if one product will make us gain weight faster than another.

Being overweight is a significant concern in America. Being overweight can lead to all kinds of medical problems. Thus, and because more and more Americans are demanding better food, the makers have created less fattening alternatives. There is 2% milk, for example, and No Sugar Added ice cream.

It's not easy for poor people to get good food. Studies prove that many grocery chains don't want to build in poor neighborhoods, so

many poor people have to take the bus or drive a long way to get fresh fruits and vegetables. Driving costs money, too. It's easier for them to just walk a block or two to a small convenience store, the Dollar Store, or a gas station and pick up something to eat.

What do you eat? Really, what do you eat every day? Do you have a good breakfast, a healthy lunch, and a nutritious dinner? If not, what can you do about it?

The first thing is to figure out what that even means. What does it mean to eat a healthy diet? Remember all those genes, chromosomes, and cells from the last chapter? Our bodies need healthy nutrition. Whether good for us or bad, everything we eat gets distributed to thousands, even millions of cells in our bodies.

The Center for Disease Control emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. A good diet includes various protein foods such as seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), soy products, nuts, and seeds. Scientists and doctors say that our diets should be low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars. All of that is usually written in the Nutrition area of our products. Even fast-food chains like McDonalds and Burger King post nutritional information these days.

Eating fresh food like bananas and apples is so much better for us than processed foods like chips and soda that there really is no comparison. Most processed foods are called empty calories, meaning that eating them might make us feel full, but the nutrition our cells need to stay healthy isn't there. In a way, it's fake food.

Flavored cereals and hot dogs are just fine some of the time. Pizza tastes good and, if made correctly, can even be okay for us, but our

diet needs to incorporate dark leafy greens like spinach or swiss chard and lean meats like chicken or fish instead of a constant diet of beef and pork. There are thousands of recipes on the Internet or probably even in your parent's cookbooks that show us how to eat correctly. Why don't we do it?

It's not just money. That can be a big reason, but no. It's not just money. We eat the way we do because we are in a habit. Our habitual nature takes us down the same path week after week, year after year, and unfortunately, those habits can lead straight to the doctor's office. If we don't have money, we don't even see a doctor. We one day end up in the ER waiting room with problems.

Nutrition and good health require eating well AND exercise. If we rely on our parents to feed us properly but think we may be eating the wrong foods every day, we can do a few things to help fix the situation. First, learn. Ask teachers for information. Maybe bring a book home and sit at the kitchen table reading it. When parents ask what we are doing, just tell the truth. We are studying good nutrition and think maybe we want to try it.

In this guide, you will read strategies for healthy behavior. You can't get angry at your parents for feeding you the best way they know how. It's a very delicate situation. Some parents choose to spend their money on drinking and other things. Some don't really care. They may even be offended and blame you for not eating good food when they serve it. Is that true? Are we part of the problem?

Yes, we are. We all are. As long as we keep buying food that is not good for us, we are part of the problem. Grocers make more money off of lousy food than good. Most comfort foods are high in calories and rich in fat and extra sugar. Here are some comfort foods that we all love to eat. We all love eating deep-fried chicken and waffles,

spaghetti and meatballs, fried steak, biscuits and gravy, a plate of eggs with extra bacon, mac and cheese, pizza, chili and cheese dogs, chips and dip, ribs, and ice cream. Fortunately, there are alternatives in each of these categories that are more nutritious and less fattening.

If we eat fun but fattening stuff every day, we risk problems like diabetes, heart disease, and other conditions that come with being overweight.

This is not a diet book nor cookbook. It's a guide about living in families and what to do when we think things are off track. Being hungry too often or eating the wrong foods every day is one of the first signs that things might be off track. If you are worried about your parents, brothers, and sisters eating the wrong foods, you are probably on to something. Study what you eat. Make a list and do some research on things you might try to eat that are better. Even if your family tries to eat healthy one day a week, it can have an effect. Eating right one day a week to start could turn into a good eating habit where you only eat junk food on occasion.

Now let's briefly talk about healthcare before moving on to the story and the next chapter. Healthcare is a complicated issue. Healthcare involves insurance, regular checkups, vaccinations, dentistry, coping with chronic illness, and many more things. Some families don't speak English very well. They avoid the doctor's office because of it. They may even be undocumented and never want to be found out.

Other families live below the poverty line. That means there isn't enough money for most of the things other families take for granted. They can't really afford regular checkups with a doctor nor a dentist. When they are prescribed medications, they often stop taking them when they run out of money. In some areas of the country where people live in poverty, there is a shortage of doctors and nurses.

If they want to see a doctor, they might have to travel a long way. Travel costs money and eats up time in the day. For that reason alone, many people do not see a doctor nor dentist regularly.

Some medical groups are working on what they call telemedicine. This works because patients schedule an online conference with the doctor or nurse to describe how they are feeling and discuss their concerns. From there, the person needs to find a way to visit the doctor's office, or, sometimes, the doctor has the advice to give right over the phone.

Almost every medical group these days has what is called a medical portal. That means that once you establish a relationship with a group of doctors, they give you a place online where you can read the doctor's notes and look at your medical history. Instructions are posted there. Unfortunately, people don't tend to use these portals. Racial and ethnic minorities and whites with a lower socioeconomic status don't go there often. That's also true of neighborhoods with poor Internet access. Healthcare, like so many other things, is increasingly moving into the digital stream. That means an availability of more instruments that people can use at home to measure their blood sugar, heart performance, and other things. These new options will not be as widely used in some communities.

How to pay for healthcare? The CDC says about 28 million can't afford insurance. Someday when things are pleasant in the house, ask your father or mother if the family has health insurance. If you have not seen a doctor or dentist for over a year, ask if the family has a family doctor. Parents usually want to do what is suitable for their children, and they may ask if you feel well. Your parents must know that you hope to eat right and want healthcare. Caring about things, and letting your family know you do, brings attention to the things that matter most.

A final word. Even if you think your parents cannot afford it or seem bothered if you don't feel well, let them know.

Jerome's Story

Jerome is a big guy for still being in high school. He takes after his father that way, tall, muscular, a natural-born athlete. He often wishes his father were still in his life, but he's not. After serving in the military, things didn't go well for him. He and his mom split up a few years back, and he hasn't heard much from him since.

After football practice, Jerome took a quick shower and hustled home. He was exhausted because every August, he and the team had to do two-a-days to prepare for the coming season. Jerome worked at football harder than nearly everyone on the team. He thinks of football as a way to pay for college, so he takes advantage of every chance he gets to learn and improve.

He headed straight for the kitchen at home, threw his books on the table, and opened the refrigerator. Dang, he thought. Usually, his mother left at least a sandwich and something in there for him, but it didn't matter. He made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, grabbed a glass of milk, a fist full of almonds, and headed into the living room. When he got there, he found a note from his mother and a twenty-dollar bill on the coffee table. He tucked the bill into his pocket and read the message.

Hey, J. Kill it in practice? I work late tonight, so here's a 20 for pizza or whatever. Love You. Be home around 8.

The note made him sad. First off, his mother worked two jobs now just to make ends meet. Jerome worked some during the summer. He had split his paycheck with her, but when football started again,

that was the end of it. Between football and school, there was no way he'd be able to keep working. His mother had said not to worry and picked up a shift stocking shelves at the mall.

A text inviting him to a party arrived from a friend. They traded messages for a while, but he decided not to go. As he put his phone away, he started thinking up a different idea. "Hell yeah," he said to himself and went back to the kitchen. "Where is it?"

It took a few minutes of rummaging through cupboards to find his mom's cookbooks. He knew just the one to grab. It had been his grandmother's, and it was full of snips of paper with recipes handed down through the years. Before Jerome was born, his mother lived in Charleston, South Carolina. It's where she'd grown up and a place they often visited when he was younger. He has cousins down there that hit him up on Facebook or Instagram sometimes. A picture of his grandmother, grandfather, and mother all together brought memories back to him from when she was young, and he knew what he wanted to do.

Cooking is not Jerome's thing. He'd heated stuff on the stove and in the microwave. Sometimes he'd helped out in the kitchen, but mom did all the cooking. The only thing Jerome made regularly was mac and cheese. Today would be different.

He fanned through the pages and bits of paper until he found what he wanted. It wouldn't be easy to get the ingredients, and it might not even be easy to make, but it's like his coach says. Nothing easy is ever worthwhile.

He took a picture of the ingredients with his phone, went upstairs to his room, and grabbed a few extra dollars just in case. He threw a backpack over his shoulder before hauling his bike to the street.

Even though his legs were burning from the workouts, he took off peddling. Twelve miles through dense traffic later, he finally arrived at an actual grocery store. The only thing he worried about for the ride home was the colossal shrimp he'd bought. Peddling all that way in the sun might not be suitable for fresh shellfish, but the guy behind the counter knew what to do.

When Jerome got home, he unpacked all of his ingredients, pulled the chilled shrimp out of a plastic bag with half-melted ice surrounding the shrimp, and put them in the fridge. In the store, he'd wondered if the shrimp were okay and if these were the right ones. They looked grey instead of pink. The guy smiled and then assured him that once he dropped them in boiling water, they would color up just fine.

A few things on the menu made Jerome nervous, so he tapped into the Internet and looked up how to cook shrimp. He trusted his grandmother, but all she'd written was to prepare them. He also wanted to see what other cooks did combining shrimp with grits. His grandmother hadn't needed to say anything about how to devein shrimp. Everybody in Charleston probably just knew how to prepare shrimp. He checked one of the shrimps and saw this tiny vein they were talking about.

And Jerome learned something else from the Internet. Cooks time when they start things in the kitchen, so everything gets done at once. Back to the cupboards. This time he found the pie pans tucked into a pullout drawer under the stove. Who knew? His grandmother hadn't said anything about pie crust, just to use a 9-inch pan. At the store, Jerome asked one of the older women shopping if she could help him. At first, she acted all scared but then she showed him what she would do. Instead of making dough from scratch and rolling out a crust, she showed him premade pie crust that just comes rolled up ready to use.

The instructions he read didn't sound right at first, but he followed them. He dropped five whole sweet potatoes with their skin still on them into a pot of water and brought it to a boil. He set a timer on his phone to 45 minutes, and then like he'd seen in a video on YouTube, he got all the other ingredients and measuring cups ready. Rolling the pie crust onto the pie plate was almost as easy as the instructions said. He even pinched up the edges and lined them with tin foil.

When the sweet potatoes were done, he threw them in cold water for a while and pulled off the skins before smashing them into a bowl with eggs, sugar, and spices. The recipe called for a mixer, but he didn't have one. Instead, he beat the mixture together with a fork and that seemed to work just fine.

He soon slid his pie into an oven that was set at 350 degrees and set his timer again. Checking the time, he realized he had at least another half hour before starting the actual dinner. Jerome opened his math book and tried again to understand what his teacher had attempted to explain earlier in the day.

The problem started with a right triangle inside of a parabola. If the equation of the parabola is $y = 4x^2$... "Whatever," he thought and closed the book. Maybe he should have gone to the party. But three minutes later, he opened the book again and worked on problems until his timer chimed.

Jerome had forgotten to remove the tin foil from around the crust edges, but he didn't panic. He carefully removed it and returned his pie to the oven for another few minutes. That's all the time it took to finally get his equation to check out, and he slammed the book closed in triumph.

At 8 pm, Jerome sat in the living room, glancing out the window at

the street every few seconds. When he saw his mother get off the bus at the corner, he ran to the kitchen and loaded two plates, one for him and one for his mother. Jerome set dishes on the table and arranged the silverware just right. He put his grandmother's cookbook on the table too and pulled out the picture of his mother and her parents. He set that on the table against the cookbook so it would be right in front of his mother's plate.

Mom came into the house and stood in the doorway for the longest time. "Jerome?" she called out. "What did you do, son?"

"In here," Jerome called to her, and she came to him in the kitchen.

As she walked toward the kitchen, he heard her comment on how good the house smelled, and when she actually came into the kitchen and saw how the table was set up so nicely, all she could say was, "Oh my Lord? You didn't. You did all this? Grits and shrimp, you got some southern sausage on there. It smells so good. Looks delicious. Whatever got into you?"

"Don't get all used to it now, but yeah. I was thinking about grandma and all of them. Sit down, and let's have some."

Jerome's mother took her place at the table, rested her elbows there a second, and picked up the picture of her mother. She ran her hand over the cookbook, stood, and threw her arms open wide. "Come here, boy. You make your mama so proud!"

"And it's not even your birthday," Jerome said.

Jerome and his mother laughed and talked about old times all through dinner. They ate sweet potato pie with brown sugar for dessert and spent a few minutes sitting on the front step, just taking in the night air and dreaming about the future.

Lessons and Strategies

Every one of us has the potential to create a great surprise for the people we live with. It doesn't always have to be much, just something to show that we care. In Jerome's case, he thought about his mother this time and put her first. At the same time, he learned some valuable skills in the kitchen, which he will probably use when he's on his own.

Every child needs regular medical and dental checkups. If you are not getting those in your family, don't just shrug it off. Say something. Let your parents know that you are aware of what is supposed to happen. Then, like Jerome, begin thinking about some little thing you can do in the kitchen to help out. Remember, you are an adult in training! Learning to cook is not only about helping your parents. Looking up recipes on the Internet, imagining what foods would be delicious and nutritious is part of life. Some of the best moments in your future probably involve sitting around a table with friends you may have not even met yet.

The strategies most important regarding nutrition and healthcare are knowledge, agreement, and accountability. Of course, it is always good to remember encouragement and reward. Make an agreement with our parents to find a family doctor and arrange for your family to regularly visit the dentist for cleaning and evaluation. If your parents don't have enough money, which is a widespread issue, begin asking around to see how other families in the same situation handle these problems. Your school teachers may have ideas for you as well. The point is, don't let it slide too long. Your parents are probably already concerned. Show them that you are, too.

Roles, Rules, and Responsibilities

Parents have most of the authority and nearly all the responsibility in the household. When they don't use their authority responsibly, the whole family suffers. At one extreme, the parents might exercise too much authority and demand so much control that they become oppressors. At the other extreme, they don't live up to the roles and responsibilities that come with being a parent. Remember that social contract? Parents that are overly preoccupied with themselves or their commitments, debilitated from abusing drugs and alcohol, or maybe just inattentive, sometimes don't use their authority at all. The absence of leadership means anyone can take control, and that's what happens. When parents don't do their job, someone else has to do it. Often the oldest or most aggressive child takes on the leader's role, and if that person is not mature, bad things can happen.

In other situations, a grandparent, aunt, or uncle step in for a while, but there are extreme cases where social services networks find out and come knocking at the door.

Having parents that do not accept their role or just can't live up to it does not mean the children do not love them. Some of the weakest parents in the world are loveable. In fact, a Buddhist might say that it is because we see the imperfections and suffering of those around us, we love them. Empathy and love are as natural to some people as repulsion is to others. We can love someone dearly and still not get what we need from that person.

One of the roles in parenting is setting and enforcing the rules. Roles and traditions are what make up the structure of a household. We all live by rules, whether we realize it or not. Rules don't

only come from our parents. Even they have to live by rules. Our government, the schools we attend, the games we play, the sports we wish we were good at, and many other institutions, including religions, memberships, and even the rules of physics, all deserve our attention and sometimes our compliance. All of those rules form the guidelines we carry inside of us. They provide ethics, conscience and lead to something we call personal integrity.

Understanding our role in the family and knowing both what we are and are not responsible for is very important for our peace of mind. Every position comes with rules. If we don't understand our role, we can't possibly understand all the rules. Also, if there are no boundaries between our roles and the roles of others, we will never be entirely sure who is responsible for things like cleaning the dishes, doing laundry, taking care of a baby, making dinner, and the list goes on. Rules often frustrate us, but playing by the rules also works in our favor.

Most rules are buried so deep in our minds that they become automatic. We may not even realize a few of these internal rules even exist until something happens that makes us feel uncomfortable. People call that bias. Whether we recognize it in advance or not, we might discriminate against others for the color of their skin, the way they sound when they talk, the clothing they wear, the shape of their body, and many other little things. These internal emotional rules and biases sometimes protect us but most often get in the way of doing things our thinking mind knows for sure that we should do or not do. Here's an example.

Every summer Tom and his family traveled north along the shoreline of Wisconsin and crossed the bridge in Ashland to Duluth, Minnesota. Tom always looked forward to that trip. He got to play with his cousins, which was always the best part of the journey, and

he had two sets of grandparents there, all of which did everything they could to make the trip great. He loved getting all that attention, hugs, presents, and unique kinds of food that his mom never made.

When Tom was twelve years old, though, their summer trip was different. His grandfather on his mother's side had been an influential figure in his life. He'd worked the ore docks, swore like a sailor when it was just the two of them kicking around, and shook his hand like he meant it. His grandfather arm-wrestled with him, often letting Tom win, and most of all, he was always straight with him about anything he wanted to know. On this particular trip, though, his grandfather had taken a bad fall at work. Maybe that was the cause, and maybe not, but he had a brain tumor and went through treatment.

"Where is he," Tom said after all the initial hugging and talk took place at this grandfather's house.

"He's resting. It's been a bad week, but I know he would like to see you all very much. Should I see if he's well enough to come and sit with us for a while?" His grandmother asked.

Everyone in the room, including Tom, really wanted to see him, so they all said yes, and waited for grandma to bring grandpa into the living room. When they came out of the hallway together, grandpa was in pajamas and a robe. He'd lost so much weight he didn't even look like himself. He kept his head down, concentrating on every step, and needed help from grandma to walk. His grandparents sat on one end of the living room couch, across the room from where Tom sat. His mother pulled a chair up next to the sofa so she could hold her father's hand, and they all began to talk, to ask questions about how he was feeling and get caught up.

The whole while, Tom didn't say a word. He stared at his grandfather's head with a large square patch of burned skin from the radiation treatments he was undergoing. It was brown. The tumor in his brain had put pressure on his left eye inside his head. That pressure pushed the pupil of his eye away from the center and toward his nose. He'd not shaven in a few days. The look of him made Tom afraid.

After a half-hour of conversation, grandma said he was tired and needed to go back to bed. She said, "Come and give grandpa a hug, Tom. He has missed you so much."

Everyone in the room looked at Tom and expected him to walk to his grandfather, but he didn't move. Something in him didn't allow him to do it. "Please," his mother begged, but Tom still didn't budge. His grandfather lifted his head, and Tom saw tears, but he still didn't move. He wasn't brave enough to overcome that hidden inner rule.

"It's all right," his grandfather said. "He's scared."

Tom had a rule he didn't even know about. The rule said not to do something that made being scared scarier. An impulse buried deep in his brain couldn't accept hugging his dying grandfather. His grandparents and parents also had a set of rules in their minds that gave them intuition. They somehow knew that forcing that hug would be worse for everyone.

All through our lives, we move between rules and responsibility. We obey laws and have a responsibility to check ourselves sometimes and abandon internal impulses that no longer work. Restrictions that no longer work are those that cut us off from other people, slow our development, or even stop us from great friendships. It's a mistake not to review the rules we live by and work to fix them. Human beings make mistakes. Continuing to use ideas that no longer work

makes life more challenging.

Jennifer's Story

Jennifer had two children and held two jobs. Her main job was working at a department store as a sales clerk. She'd had that job even before she had her first son, Phillip.

When the second son came along five years later, she realized she needed a second job or a pay raise. The pay raise didn't come.

Her second job was part-time and only on weekends. She actually enjoyed waiting tables at one of the better restaurants in town more than standing behind a counter all day, but that second job didn't pay enough to do it full time.

Jennifer sometimes regretted that both of her children came from the same father. She'd fallen for him once, and he wouldn't marry, then fell for it again, thinking she'd be safe, but along came son number two, and he still wouldn't marry. Worse than that, Jennifer thought of him as being horribly lazy. He would work a job for a few months here and there, send her a few dollars for the state-ordered child care, quit that job, and hang out with his friends for a while. She'd given up long ago on ever collecting all that she had due her.

Jennifer was determined to provide a good life for her children despite any obstacles. She bought the best daycare her money could afford when they were young. She brought them to the doctor and dentist regularly and made sure they both got their vaccinations on time.

There was always food in the house. And as the boys got older, she began assigning responsibilities to them. By the time Phillip was

13 years old, he had a whole lot of responsibilities. Every day after school, Phillip was responsible for getting his younger brother home safely and looking after him until she arrived, usually around 6:30. It was only about three hours a day, and Jennifer was good friends with an older woman that lived next door. If they'd ever wanted an adult for any reason, her phone number was on the refrigerator door. For almost a year, Phillip had never needed to call her.

What Jennifer didn't always think about was what Phillip might have missed out on having to come home after school every day and watch his brother. While Phillip was at home cleaning up the kitchen or any of the other things on the lists his mother always left for him to do, Phillip's friends were playing. They played baseball in Little League. They learned football in high school. Sometimes Phillip wished he could just hang out.

Philip loved his mother and brother very much, but as he approached 14 years of age, he began realizing how much he was missing. All his friends talked about these days was the football game they just played in or the one coming up next. His father had played football in college, or so he said. When he came around more years earlier, they'd gone to a few games and always watched football on the television.

Phillip became incredibly frustrated one day when his mother called from work to ask for a favor. "The backyard needs mowing. I need you to take care of that today, Phillip. Can you do that for me? Actually, if you do it every week, I'll bump up your allowance by a few bucks. Deal?"

The increase in allowance helped Phillip get over himself, but if he had the choice, now that he was 14, he'd much instead find his own job at McDonald's or something and get some real money.

Philip slumped in his chair for a while, feeling sorry for himself. He could feel the anger bubbling up in his chest, but what was the use? He'd have to mow the lawn whether he was angry or not.

He told his younger brother what he had to do and gave him instructions to just watch television or something until he was finished. He went into the garage, filled the gas tank on the lawn mower, and rolled it into the backyard. He pulled the starter rope a few times, and nothing happened. He kicked it a few times in frustration, then, not knowing anything about small engines, he adjusted the choke, the throttle, messed with the spark plug wire, and tried again. Nothing.

At this point, most kids would just call their mother and tell them what was happening, that the mower wouldn't start. But Philip knew that calling his mother at work was only to be done in emergencies. Not mowing the lawn didn't seem like an emergency, more like a major annoyance.

Philip went back into the house. He was hot and sweaty from attempting to start the lawn mower. He looked at the list of things he was supposed to do and felt even more frustrated. His mother had been right. The grass was getting really long back there, but he was stuck. He went into the front room to check on his brother. While he was there, he happened to look out of the front window. He'd seen the man and his wife that lived there more than a few times. The guy always seemed to have guests in fancy cars stopping by, big men, too. The thing that caught his eye this time was the man's lawn mower.

"Why not?" he asked himself and walked across the street. No one came to the door. He knew he should not take the lawn mower, but he did. Maybe it was the frustration he felt or just a lapse in good

judgment, but he stepped into the man's garage. It didn't feel right to be there, but he put his hands on the man's lawn mower. Then, he rolled the mower out of the man's garage and hustled back across the street and into his own backyard. He knew he was breaking several rules but told himself that he would return the mower when he'd finished.

The mower started right away, and within a half-hour, Philip had finished the job. As Philip rolled the lawn mower back across the street and into the neighbor's garage, the neighbor drove into the driveway. He saw Phillip in his garage and honked the horn, loud and long.

The neighbor apparently knew who Philip was. He got out of his car and started yelling. "Hey! What the hell do you think you are doing?"

Phillip didn't know what to do. He was hot and sweaty. He'd done something wrong, and he didn't even know the name of his neighbor.

The neighbor slammed his car door shut and stepped into the garage. He threw his arms up in the air as if he were surprised and disgusted at the same time. All Philip could think to do was admit that he had used the man's lawn mower. That's what he did. He told the whole story as fast as he could and then stood there waiting for whatever was going to happen.

"Why the hell would you think that was the right thing to do?" He asked. The man placed his hands on his hips and looked very offended.

"I'm awful sorry, sir. Like I said, our mower won't start. My mom's not home, and I had to get the backyard mowed. I shouldn't have

done it for sure. I'm sorry."

"You know you can't just go around the neighborhood taking people's stuff. When does your mother get home? I'm going to need to talk to her."

"She'll be home in a couple hours, usually at 6:30. I'll tell her what I did and that you're mad. I'm sure she'll come over here and try and explain. We can pay for the gas."

"Now hold on. I didn't say I was mad. I just said you can't go around doing this kind of thing."

"I'll tell her that, too. Sorry," Phillip said, and he meant it. Hearing what he'd done would make his mom angry and disappointed. He hated to disappoint his mother.

"You say it won't start? What do you think is wrong with it?" the man asked.

"If I knew how to fix it, I probably would've done it already," Phillip said.

The man laughed. "She won't start, huh. Well. Give me a minute, and let's go check it out, see if we can't figure out what's wrong."

The man walked to his lawn mower and checked to see if it was OK. Philip had brushed loose grass off of it and rubbed it with a cloth before bringing it back, so it looked good. The neighbor went inside, but only for a minute. When he came out of the house, the man grabbed his toolbox. The two of them headed back across the street and into the backyard.

“So, this is the stubborn lawn mower,” the man said and began adjusting controls. He talked about what he was doing at every step. First, he changed the throttle and adjusted the choke. He pulled the starter rope. It didn’t start. Then he had Phillip touch the spark plug wire on the side of the engine while he pulled the starter rope. They could both see a spark between the cable and the engine block. When he’d done that, he double-checked the gas tank even though Phillip had said it was full. After checking the gas tank, he lifted the side of the mower off the ground a couple of inches and reached underneath to make sure the blade wasn’t stuck. Finally, he inspected the spark plug.

“This may be our problem right here. See how the plug looks corroded?”

The man pulled a wire brush out of his toolbox and brushed the exposed end of the plug. This time, when he reattached the wire and pulled the rope, the engine came to life.

“Thanks Mr., what do we owe you?”

The man put his tools away and just stood there thinking about it for a minute. Eventually, he said, “You and your brother live here all alone with your mom, is that right? My wife and I have always respected how hard she works to raise you and your brother. So why aren’t you off playing football or something with your friends?”

“It’s my job to stay home with my brother. Mom works two jobs.”

“Two jobs. That’s kind of what my wife and I figured. Ever feel like you’re missing out?”

“All the time. The guys at school are playing every day. We have a

big game coming up this Friday. I'd play, that's for sure. I just never got a chance."

"I'll tell you what. Put your lawn mower away and bring your brother out front. Meet me in the street, and we'll throw a ball around for a while. Do that, and we'll forget all about this little lawn mower incident. That be OK with you?"

"Sure! I'm probably not good at it, though. Haven't had much practice."

"Well then it's time we got started?" With that, the man turned headed back toward his own house. Philip called after him when he was halfway there. "I'm sorry I borrowed your mower without asking."

The man didn't yell back. He didn't turn around. He just waved an arm in the air as if to say, don't worry about it.

15 minutes later, Philip and his brother were in the street with their neighbor, learning how to catch and pass the football. Even though Philip wasn't great at it, the man showed him how to hold the football and how to throw a spiral. Phillip's brother was better at catching the ball than throwing, but they both knew that they could figure it out with practice.

"You're really good at throwing the ball, muster. Did you play in high school?"

"High school, college, and the pros. I made a life out of playing ball, but listen, I have to go inside in a minute. Got some phone calls to make, but I want you to tell your mom something. Do that for me?"

Philip got nervous again. Here it comes, he thought. He's going to ask his mother to call and give her a piece of his mind. She's going to be so disappointed. He thought all that but said sure, anyway. He'd tell his mom whatever he wanted her to hear.

“Tell her anytime you boys need a hand with around the house, just give us a call. If we're not home, leave a note on the door. Either my wife or I will be happy to come over and help figure out just about anything.”

The man pulled a business card out of his wallet before leaving and handed the card to Philip. “You can keep that football, by the way. My mobile number is on the card. I have it with me wherever I go. Tell your mom coach says hello. Will you do that for me?”

Philip thanked the man again for the lawn mower, the football, for everything before he and his brother headed back into the house to make dinner.

He laid the business card on the kitchen counter, put the football there too, and stared at the card for a long time. The card belonged to best NFL football team in the Western Conference. His best neighbor ever. The man that taught him how to throw a football.

Lessons and Strategies

When we do bad things, we should expect consequences. Being willing to accept the results of our actions is the only way to reach maturity. Roles, responsibilities, bias, and intuition are part of life, and so are mistakes and forgiveness.

We pick up so many rules in the first few years of living that many of them are no longer conscious to us in everyday life. Instead,

those rules form biases and intuition. It takes self-awareness and stumbling into new and unexpected experiences for us to even know they are there. When we realize we have patterns that get in the way, we shouldn't justify our behavior. Instead, we should always try to uproot the defect and fix the problem.

The most important strategy when it comes to roles, rules, and responsibilities are agreement and accountability. You may not remember the definition of promulgated rules. That is where everyone clearly knows the rules, and there is plenty of communication about them. Know your responsibilities. Know what your parents expect of you and themselves. Communication is the key.

Blame and Resentment

Here's an example of blaming. If the dog chews up the couch, blame the dog. It is the dog's fault that the sofa is messed up. That seems pretty straightforward. Or, maybe it's the fault of the person who owns the dog? It could be that someone didn't walk the dog. The dog goes absolutely crazy when he's left in the house alone all day. What if it's the breed of dog that is the problem. People say Russel Terriers love to chew everything they can get their mouths on. If we work at it enough, we can probably find a hundred things to blame. Maybe someone spilled delicious food on the couch, and that's what attracted the dog.

Where does it get us to focus on blame? Why not focus instead on what comes next, and here it comes. Someone gets angry. They go after the dog. Someone else gets mad at the person that went after the dog. Soon, everyone is mad at everyone in the house because, well, that's just how they do things.

Why not just quietly say to ourselves that dogs chew things because they are dogs. Do we go after the dog every day just because he is a dog? Does someone in the family hate the dog and constantly punish it while someone else loves the dog and tries to protect it? Blaming is often the first step in a chain reaction.

Okay. The dog needs to learn that attacking the sofa is not allowed, but in some families, the blame game stirs up all kinds of issues. Angry people create scared people. A few stories in this guide should show how simple arguments can get out of control, but the point has probably been made.

Blaming each other for every little thing is in itself messed up. Being blamed for everything takes our pride away and leaves us afraid to try new things. Humans make mistakes. Humans are messed up. Parents and their children are human beings. Nobody gets everything right. But if someone hardly EVER gets things right or isn't encouraged when they do something outstanding, that's a problem.

There is supposed to be a winner in nearly every game, but there's no winner in the blame game. With practice, we can get really good at blaming others. With practice, we can also get really good at letting go of every little thing that goes wrong. We can practice being angry or practice letting go. If we practice being mad about every little something, we will eventually drive even our closest friends away. Even worse, we will come to prefer being angry and feeling justified in our anger over just chilling and being cool with most things.

If we stay angry at someone for a long time, that's called resentment. Holding resentments for a long time actually makes us ill. If your brother breaks your favorite things when you are young, you may still be angry at him years later and not even really know why. Anger and resentments can be as habit-forming as drugs, alcohol, or ice cream! That is what resentment does. It sticks around and lets you feel angry and justified whenever you want. All you have to do is think about your brother.

The other thing about blame and resentment is that we become flawless. When everyone and everything else is at fault for our troubles, we start thinking that we are the victim of all those nasty people. We secretly begin to believe that we are always right and they are always wrong. Believe it or not, most criminals never learn to accept responsibility for their own actions. We talk about tough guys later. To them, everything that goes wrong in their lives is the fault of someone else.

So why would someone practice so hard on blaming others instead of accepting responsibility? The main answer is actually straightforward. If we grow up in a house where good things are never honored and being at fault for even small things has horrible consequences, we have little choice but to play the blame game. We have to get good at deflecting blame, or we constantly live with awful results. Focusing on using blame as an excuse slows emotional growth.

One time, a famous psychologist wrote that maturity only comes to those who learn to accept responsibility for their actions. It's sad to say this, but just getting older does not mean we are mature. See how he said that? We must learn to accept responsibility for our actions. It doesn't always come naturally. Even parents are sometimes immature and do not accept responsibility for their actions. Sure, they are fully grown in biological terms, but getting older in years does not necessarily mean that we become equally mature. Good role models are either mature or on their way to becoming mature. No one is born a leader. Maturing emotionally and intellectually takes practice and hard work.

The good thing, though, having even one mature person in the family means there is hope. People learn from each other. A mature person becomes like a guide for others to use while becoming mature. If everyone in the family tries to be reasonable, things will eventually work out for good. This guide shows you some of the basics in trying to be a mature person, even when you really just want to yell and run away.

You may be thinking about someone in your house right now, someone that just doesn't get it. What if that one person is always blaming someone else and then gets really angry at whoever they blame? What if that one person carries around a lot of resentments

and moans about it all the time? Others in the family may begin doing the same thing.

In the chapter on DNA, we realized how we can't change that we have feet, ears, and hair that look a certain way. It can't be changed that we are tall or short. We can't change all that, but we can learn how to deal with difficult people. It's not easy, but there are a few tricks worth trying.

Our parents learned how to think about the world from their parents, friends, school, and the things they experienced. What they discovered is their roadmap, and they continue down that road whether they realize it or not. If we learned to blame others for everything and then think it is okay to get really angry about it, we're wrong. We may not realize we are wrong, but we are. Maturity comes from accepting responsibility for our actions and trying to change for the better. If someone never learned to do that, they are not mature. They are not a role model we should follow. Instead, it is up to us to figure out a better way.

Should we blame ourselves if we don't change when we know we should? Sometimes the answer is yes, but to blame is an unnecessary step. So is resentment. Here is one of the tricks. Rather than think about blame, just think about the next right thing to do. How can you make a bad situation better? It's not necessary to say something nasty every time our family does crazy stuff. Often it is better to just smile, listen, and forgive. That's what is meant by letting go.

Here's another trick immature people don't get. Blaming is easy, but forgiving is even easier. If we take all the stuff that bothers us about someone seriously, we won't want to be around them anymore. We can get angry or depressed just thinking about them. Every kid should be able to trust and look up to their parents. You should be

proud of them sometimes, even if they are not perfect. One of the fastest ways to patch things up between family members is to quit blaming and focus on the next right thing to do.

Cindy's Story

Cindy woke up with a start. Her neck hurt from sleeping at such an odd angle on her friend Shantel's couch. But there was something else wrong. She could feel it in her gut. She looked around the room and saw that all of her friends were still asleep. Some of them were wrapped in blankets, others in sleeping bags they had brought to the sleepover.

Panic grabbed her mind as she ran to the backdoor window. Oh no! It was raining outside on her brother Derek's expensive down-filled sleeping bag was still out there from the night before. It was completely soaked. The rain had washed the mud out of a flower pot. Dirt and water flowed onto the outside of the bag and even into it. She should have taken better care, she told herself. Why didn't she bring it inside like the other girls? The reality is that it had been so late, and they were all having so much fun, she simply forgot. Inside, she'd sat on the couch and talked about everything under the sun until she fell off to sleep.

Her brother Derek is sometimes violent, and he'd be upset that she used his bag without permission. The thought of dealing with his anger sent her into an anxiety attack. Her breath seemed to fade away, and she could feel her heart race.

Cindy ran into the rain and dragged the bag inside. It was heavy. Rainwater ran from it onto the floor in puddles. She rushed into the bathroom and dropped it into the tub, where she tried to squeeze the water out.

“What are you doing?” The familiar voice from behind startled her. She turned and looked up to see Shantel nearly laughing.

“I left it in the rain. It’s ruined!” Chocking back emotions and wiping water from her face. She was soaked from dashing into the rain and working on the bag. The room smelled like wet dogs, which made no sense because there were no dogs around, but maybe it was the soggy goose down in the bag. Either way, it was awful. She saw how much water she’d dragged into the house, too. Puddles were trailing her path. The water formed huge puddles on the floor. It was all too much.

“Hey. It’s going to be all right,” Shantel said, trying to calm her friend.

“You don’t understand! It’s Derek’s sleeping bag. He’s going to kill me,” Cindy said as she returned to frantically wringing water into the tub. There was so much water and so much dirt that she felt hopeless. Cindy broke down crying and slumped forward, resting her forearms on the side of the tub, her face in the palm of her hands.

“You’re tripping, girl. It will all be okay. What’s his big deal, anyway? It’s just water. Move over and let me see.” Shantel knelt beside Cindy and fumbled with the bag, turning it this way and that until she could read the instructions for care. There were clear instructions for washing a down bag, including recommendations for the kinds of soap used on down sleeping bags.

“I’m dead. What does it say?”

“It says we need to quit worrying so much and go to the store is all. We’ve got this. A little soap, run it through our washer, and then we just throw it in the dryer on a low setting. It’s all right here. Just

wait and see. It will look even better than new. Your brother will understand.”

“No! He won’t!” Cindy snapped. “You don’t know him. You don’t know what he’s like. He’s worse than my dad.”

“OMG, girl. Come with me.” Shantel headed into the hallway. Cindy picked up the wet bag to follow, but Shantel laughed at her again as the water fell to the bathroom floor. “My God. Just leave it.”

They walked through the hallway, past friends in the living room who were starting to wake up, and entered the kitchen. “Morning,” Shantel said to her mother, who was setting dishes, utensils, and breakfast on the counter.

“Too bad about the rain, baby girl,” her mother said.

“It all worked out. We need your help. Cindy left her bag out, and it got all kinds of messed up. We need this special soap called NixWax or whatever? Something like that. It’s for cleaning down comforters and sleeping bags.”

“No problem. I’ll hit the store while you all eat. Those lazy girls better get they’re you know what moving, or I’ll eat all this my damn self. I got you some scrambled eggs, a little fruit, there’s juice and milk in the fridge, cereal, anything you find, just go on ahead. Coffee drinkers in the group?”

“You’d do that for me?” Cindy said impulsively and practically burst into tears.

“What you think? We can’t have you going home with a wet dirty sleeping bag. How would that look? This here is a respectable

family. Ain't that right, Shantel."

Shantel rolled her eyes as Cindy said, "Thank you so much. My brother would kill me."

"That's like the third time you've said that. Really? Is he going to kill you? I don't think so," Shantel said.

Cindy wiped her eyes dry and tried to smile. "You're probably right. I'm overreacting." But she knew better. Derek used every opportunity available to make her feel useless and afraid. He'd pushed and even hit her many times, and it was always over things like this.

A few hours later, the sleeping bag was clean, dry, and good as new. Shantel's mother gave Cindy, and other girls rides to their homes. When they dropped Cindy off, everyone said goodbye. Cindy watched Shantel's mom drive away.

Turning toward the house, she froze for a minute and reminded herself that at least the bag was dry and clean. Feeling confident in her plan, she went into the house.

Her plan was to quickly dash up the stairs and slip the bag back into Derek's closet before he, or anyone else, even knew it was gone. He was hardly ever home in the afternoons, so this should have worked, but as she neared the top of the stairs, Derek came out of his bedroom. He was wearing the headphones he always wore around the house.

When he saw Cindy with his sleeping bag, he ripped the headphones away and started in on her, growing louder with every word. "That's mine? How many times have I told your fat butt to leave my stuff alone! Give me that!"

Cindy froze in her tracks two steps from the top of the stairs. Derek lunged forward, snatching at the bag, but all this did was rip it out of Cindy's hands. The bag flew over the railing. It fell from the second floor to the first and smashed into a lamp by the doorway. The lamp fell to the floor.

"Look what you did now! Mom's going to kill you. Gimme the bag."

"I didn't do that. You did."

"I said get me my bag, moron," Derek rushed forward, causing Cindy to race down the stairs ahead of him, grab the bag and toss it at Derek. He caught it and stopped on the stair, scowling at Cindy. "You never do anything right. You're always stealing my stuff and breaking lamps. It's embarrassing."

"You broke the lamp, not me."

"Hey, mom! Cindy broke the lamp by the front door!" Derek yelled loudly. He turned, slipped the headphones back onto his head, and left for his room. When he got there, he slammed the door behind him.

Cindy picked up the lamp. The bulb had shattered. The wires in the shade were bent, and there was a big crack in the ceramic base. At that moment, her mother came around the corner. When she saw what had happened to her lamp, she screamed. "What the hell did you do now?"

"Wasn't me. Derek grabbed ..."

"Hush up! It's always somebody else with you kids. Derek this. Derek that. Do you see anybody else standing here? Clean up this

mess before I really get angry. And talking about angry, where were you last night?”

“At Shantel’s. I told you all about the sleepover, and you said okay.”

“I said no such thing, young lady. I said, you can go there is all. There wasn’t anything about a sleepover.”

Her mother did this all the time. She’d deny something they had agreed on. “Mom! You stood right there with me in the kitchen. I told you for sure. I even ...”

“So now you are calling me a liar? That’s how you want to play this? You get this mess cleaned up now and stay in your room ‘til your father comes home. We are going to have a come-to-Jesus moment about everything that’s been going on,” she said, emphasizing the word everything.

“But I told you. We even wrote it on the refrigerator.” Cindy said as she rushed past her mother to the kitchen. Her mother followed, screaming at her not to walk away when she was talking.

“See? Right here. Spending the night at Shantel’s. I even put her phone number on it as you asked.”

The mother snatched the note away and crumpled it in her fist. “Don’t you dare sass me!” As she said it, she pushed Cindy hard and screamed in her face. “Clean it up. Now! You kids think money grows on trees! Your father is going to kill me. That lamp is about the only thing you kids hadn’t ruined, and now look.”

That’s where this story ends for now, but when Cindy’s father came home, he started in on his wife for not controlling the kids. The bag

was never mentioned again. Instead, the argument spread to how Derek needed a reckoning, and how the place was a mess, and how he works so damn hard why can't his lazy wife and useless children pitch in now and again.

The yelling continued all through the house until 7 pm when football came on the television. At that exact moment, the yelling subsided, and everyone slipped back into their individual routines. Cindy's mother sipped wine in the kitchen, lots of wine. Her evil brother listened to loud metal music on headphones. Cindy huddled in her bedroom, texting Shantel about how much she appreciated her and hoped they could have another sleepover someday soon.

Lessons and Strategies

We were born into things we cannot change, and a few things we can. Most of us live with one or more parents while we are young. Our parents have problems just like every other human being, but most parents continue to learn, continue to mature, so we can learn from them. Sometimes parents are great role models, and sometimes not.

In the story you just read about Cindy and the sleeping bag, what did you notice? How did parents react? What emotions did Cindy feel? Who got blamed for things beyond their control, and how did everyone accept responsibility for the various situations? We can blame our parents and each other for not having the skills or resources to handle every situation, but blaming doesn't make life better. This guide shows ways to make life better for you and everyone in the family.

The most essential strategy in a home where blaming and resentments are out of control is not catharsis. We don't want people breaking

down all the time. Instead, focus on credibility, agreement, and encouragement. Most of the time, blame is unnecessary. As the old saying goes, when the shoe fits, admit to your part in whatever has gone wrong and wear it. Do this even if someone else does not. Accepting responsibility and consequences for our actions is the fastest way to maturity. Also, encourage others not to blame as much. Blaming is a way of avoiding responsibility and slows growth.

Time and Money

If you live in a lovely home with a three-car garage and take vacations every year to places like France and Hawaii, money is not one of your troubles. But here's a secret. Even wealthy people can have money problems. In fact, most Americans do. One of the biggest reasons people get divorced is money trouble. When people make more, they tend to spend more. Instead of paying rent, they may have a large mortgage. They may be paying every month for their cars, a boat, an investment, any number of things. Some wealthy people have all their money tied up in non-liquid assets. When those investments fail, well, that's a problem.

This chapter is not about that kind of money trouble. It's about the families that struggle because they don't ever have enough. Even here in the U.S., millions of families live paycheck to paycheck or try to get by on minimum wage. Some families can't afford a car. They live in small apartments with their grandparents and other family members. It's really crowded. If the kids need a new pair of shoes, they might have to wait for their size to show up at Goodwill. They may wear clothes that their older sister or brother grew out of. Kids in these families, maybe in yours too, never even think to ask their parents for money because they know it's just not there.

If this sounds like your family, then this chapter is for you. Not having money is very stressful. Stress can make people grumpy and depressed. All a poor person can do is worry about what comes next. Will it be a medical bill? Will the car break down or the water heater break? When you realize that there is a need in the home, you have two choices. Choice one is to ignore the situation and just get angry

or depressed. Choice two is to figure out what you can do to reduce the stress everyone is feeling.

So how does a child reduce stress? The ideas in this section create more work for you, so you may not be interested but read it anyway. A little later, we will talk about ways for you to get your own money.

Step one, negotiate. Your parents tell you to do stuff around the house all the time, and it gets annoying, but if you pick up all the dirty laundry before going to bed or mow the lawn for your dad, maybe you can get Saturdays off to play ball or do other things with your friends. Being willing to take care of things around the house, on your own schedule, is a great way to prove that you are worthy of being treated like an adult. Of course, you have to follow through, or it won't work.

If your mom works a job and is training at night for a better opportunity, maybe start doing things she doesn't have time to do. When she gets that new job, the family will have more money. If you know English well and your parents do not, work with them. Set aside time every day to help them, even if it only for a few minutes.

Okay, that's all we need to say about helping out. Doing that helps reduce stress for everyone.

Now let's talk about making money on your own. How old are you? In most states, you only have to be 14 to get a job. The number of hours you can work is limited if you are under 16, but finding work is possible. It's not easy to find work when you are so young, but many do. McDonalds hires young people, and they have a program that helps them afford college. In fact, most fast-food restaurants will employ and train you if they have an opening. A lot of grocery stores hire 14 and 15-year-old people. If you live near an amusement

park, ask them. If you are really bothered by not having money, consider getting a job.

The next thing is how do you get to and from work? That isn't easy, either. If you can get hired nearby, walking, biking, or taking a scooter to work might be an option. You might get lucky and have your parents or even an older friend give you a ride sometimes. One of the other employees might do it. If you live in a safe neighborhood, take the bus. If you really want money you can possibly find a job, depending upon where you live.

There are other ways, too. There is a thing called a cottage industry. It comes from a long time ago when people lived in cottages and worked from their homes. Printing companies sometimes hire people to do what they call piece work. Here's an example. Let's say a printing company has an order that requires stuffing printed sheets of paper into envelopes. Some machines do that kind of work, but not all projects work well in the machines. What they do is hire someone to stuff those envelopes. Usually, they pay a little bit to stuff each one. Maybe it's only a nickel or dime, but it adds up. Some people make a living doing piece work.

People do all kinds of things to make money when they are desperate. They mow lawns, shovel sidewalks, trim hedges, and do odd jobs. If you need cash and are willing to do just about anything, there is a way to do it, but don't break the law to get money. That leads to trouble.

Getting that first paycheck feels fantastic! Not only are you learning a skill that you can put on your resume, but you are also now in a position to contribute to the family. But don't think you have to turn over your pay. If your parents ask for that, there is a problem. Negotiate. Work out a plan to give them maybe 10 percent. If they

have to drive you to and from work, pay them more. Think like a business person. Think about your future. Make earning money part of your plan.

There is something called the 10% rule. If you start using this rule right away when you are young and keep it going throughout your life, you will do very well, probably even better than your parents. This is how it works. Every time you get paid, put 10% away in safekeeping. You can start by putting it into a savings account at a bank. Later in life, you might invest in a money market account or retirement fund. The reason you put it away is so that that little bit grows over time. Having savings does so much for you in the long run. It gives you confidence. It prepares you for things you will face later in life, and above all, it gives you options.

Few people in the U.S. save money. They think they need every penny just to get by, but that is usually not true. When you get older and work for some company or yourself, you'll find that that little 10% can be automatically withdrawn from your paycheck and put into savings for you. You don't even have to think about it. It just happens for you every time you get paid. Over time that amount grows and grows, and depending upon where the money is kept, you will earn interest on your savings. You'll realize one goal after another. The first time you hit \$100 in savings is a start, but if you keep at it, you will eventually reach \$500 or \$1,000. When you are older and making more money every week, the number will grow much faster. If you follow the plan all of your life, even if your paychecks are not anywhere near what lawyers and doctors make, you will be able to retire with 10s of thousands of dollars, maybe even a million dollars. Do your parents have a million dollars? Probably not. If you follow the 10% rule, you may be the first person in your family, going back hundreds of years, to retire with all the money you need to live on after you are done working.

Everything you just read is possible for most kids, even in difficult situations, but let's be honest. In some neighborhoods, there are no job opportunities at all. Competition for work can be tricky. If that is your situation, the next best thing is to learn. Do well in school if you can. Ask your teachers how to get into a trade school. Many trade schools are only two years, and they don't cost as much as college. These days, graduates of trade schools enter the job market sooner and often earn more money than people who went to a university.

When you come from the most disadvantaged towns or neighborhoods, it can take longer, and holding a job is more challenging because you don't have many of the advantages of other kids, but don't give up! Think about what life might be like in five or ten years. Imagine having an excellent job, a great place to live, and options. In difficult neighborhoods, all the doors seem closed. Opportunities are for other people, not you, but that doesn't have to be the end of the story—plan for a better life and work on it.

Ava's Story

Ava had dreams of dancing the ballet on the biggest stages in the world, and she had the talent to make her dreams come true if only the right connections were available and there was enough money for training. This young girl was the only person interested in ballet in her entire neighborhood. People thought Ava was naive. No one from a place like that ever succeeds at something like that. Her father put up railings in their basement so she could stretch. The Internet provided information. Links to examples and explanations of movements were kept in a growing playlist. It wasn't likely at all that she would make it. Her family lived in a broken and dangerous section of town, but Ava just knew she would dance from a very young age.

Hard work is rewarded if you also have a natural ability. Ava managed to get into a few recitals, and the ballet master at the Dance Academy saw one of those recitals. The teacher recognized her talent right away and pulled many strings to get her into the school without paying.

Every evening, and often on the weekends, Ava took the bus to the Academy for more lessons. Her natural ability stunned the teachers, and that made them push her even harder. Within two years, she became one of their most talented soloists in the state. Those remarkable performances at such an early age earned her free entrance to many prestigious summer sessions in New York and other places on the east coast. Her parents were amazed at her success and so very proud of her. Of course, it was not easy for them, either. There were travel expenses. She needed special shoes, costumes, and a few times special medical attention for strains and minor injuries. Ava suffered splits in the callouses on her feet quite frequently. Watching her suffer at home bothered her mother a great deal.

Too many people link how much money they earn at their work with self-esteem. That was not Ava's problem. For her, dance was enough. She never worried about how much she made or did not make as a ballerina. For her, being on the big stages all through the region was enough.

For a short time, she lived the life of a soloist for a regional ballet company. Her dream had come true. But even talented ballerinas cannot share the spotlight forever.

At age 30, Ava was replaced as a soloist. The experience of stepping down crushed her spirit. She'd put a few dollars away, so she had money to live on for a while, and she used that to disappear from

dance, her family, and friends, practically from life itself.

The next step for many ballerinas is to teach. She should have accepted the offers she'd been given, but all she'd ever wanted to do was dance. At that moment in her life, nothing else was good enough.

Like many athletes that leave the playing field, Ava fell into depression. Years of living on so few calories turned into stuffing her face at night and regretting what she'd done in the morning. She gained weight and lost muscle mass. When Ava looked in the mirror, she became horrified at what she'd become. To anyone else, she seemed just fine, but to her, she was overweight and ugly. What made things worse for her was the lack of motivation. Her money ran out, and she took a job as a waitress. She quit dreaming of a better life and just accepted that she would be poor forever like her parents had been and still were.

Ava struggled with depression. She was often irritable and used that as an excuse not to do any of the things ordinary people do. Sometimes sleeping was a problem. There would be weeks without hardly any sleep at all and days where sleeping was all that happened. Ava was easily agitated and felt like she had even lost balance. Maybe, she thought it was just because she was tired all the time, but another aspect of her depression was lack of concentration. Half the time, she didn't even know what the next right thing to do was.

Almost three years had passed this way when one day, riding on a bus home from the restaurant, she saw this elegant young girl with ballet slippers in her hand get on the bus with her. Seeing her brought back memories. Ava could tell just by how this girl walked and how strong her core looked as she sat in perfect posture on the bus that this girl was something special.

Out of the blue, she asked the girl what method of dance she was studying. “Is it Cecchetti? Vaganova? Balanchine?”

Angelica, as Ava would eventually discover her name to be, seemed surprised. Why wouldn’t she? Ava sat across from her in a dirty waitress’s uniform. She was wrapped in a shawl that had holes in it. “Excuse me?” the young girl asked arrogantly.

“Just curious,” Ava said.

“If you must know, Cecchetti. Do you know it?”

“I’m very familiar. Do you enjoy your instructors? It’s so important to have good teachers. Without a great teacher to guide you, progress is slow. You could even run out of time before you get what you want out of dance.”

Again, Angelica seemed surprised, possibly even offended that this strange woman would dare to get so personal. “I’m doing very well, thank you. I take it you were once a dancer. It must have been a long time ago.”

Ava laughed. “I guess I deserved that one, but yes. I was a dancer. Where do you train?”

“The Dance Academy. Do you know it?”

“I do. Tell me, would you mind very much if I followed you to class and just watched?”

“I don’t think they would allow that.”

“I’ll leave if they don’t. Deal?”

Angelica turned her head away momentarily as if thinking it over. “It’s up to you. My name is Angelica,” she said and gracefully extended her arm. Ava took her hand and gracefully nodded as if she and Angelica had just finished a piece on stage together.

They got off the bus together three blocks later, walked the half-block back to the Academy, and climbed the long-familiar worn stairs to the second-floor studio. They entered together and had not been there more than a few seconds when the ballet master turned toward the door, smiled broadly, threw open her arms, and came hurriedly across the floor. Angelica must have thought the dramatic gesture was for her. She opened her arms for an embrace, but the teacher glided by. “Ava! Such a surprise. I’m so glad to see you!”

These old friends, the teacher, and her former soloist had come through so much together. Their embrace lasted for a long time. “What brings you to the studio?” Ava was asked.

“It’s quite a surprise for me too, but I’ve come to see Angelica train.”

“Marvelous. Angelica, darling. I didn’t know you knew Ava. You should have said something. I’ve been trying to get her in her for ages.”

Angelica seemed speechless, so Ava interceded. “We haven’t known each other for very long. I just think she is so, I don’t know the word. Let’s just say she has great potential and leave it at that. May I observe?”

“Of course, and you are right. Angelica is one of our best right now. Don’t rush off, though. We need to talk. So happy to see you! My goodness.”

Ava watched the class warm-up. They stretched and began their routines. She studied Angelica with increasing interest for a full hour, and at the end of practice, Angelica and the ballet master came to her side. “What do you think of her?”

Angelica looked back at her teacher and this strange woman with curiosity. The young talented dancer clearly didn’t know what to expect or why to expect much of anything. Ava then offered her critique.

“Angelica’s fouette is so close, but her working leg is low, and she is not projecting all the confidence and power I know she possesses. I can say the same thing about the en pointe. Angelica, try to retain posture without looking anxious or stressed. I know it’s difficult, and you do the movement well, but the audience never wants to see exertion. Grace, balance, fluidity, and that beautiful smile will win the day. I was most impressed with your Grand Adage. You’ve been working hard on your strength, and it shows, especially the front lift. Now, tell me. What was your issue with the pirouettes?”

Angelica exhaled and slumped.

“At this stage, Angelica, you should have mastery over that technique every time you are called upon to use it. Never mind. I see what happened. Your pirouettes followed so many Grand Jetes that you must have been physically spent. I actually almost collapsed on stage one time going from a Grand Jete into a fouette.”

“I remember!” the ballet master said, laughing. She then turned to Angelica. “We could use a woman like Ava here in the studio. Don’t you think? That will be all for today.”

As Angelica pranced away, Ava said, “She’s wonderful.”

“And so are you,” the ballet master said. “If you hadn’t shown up, I would have hunted you down, young lady.” Taking Ava by the arm, she turned them toward the office. “Have a minute? I desperately need your help.”

Lessons and Strategies

Money is a big problem. You can worry about it and do nothing, or you can work to realize your dreams. When you are 14 or older, you can get an actual job and begin securing your future. Some people make money mowing lawns, shoveling sidewalks, and doing odd jobs for their neighbors even before then. When you get that opportunity, make the best of it. Do a good job, so the opportunity lasts, and begin saving 10% of every paycheck you ever get. People who manage their money well live a happy and less stressful life. Be one of those people.

Here is something that most people entering the job market don’t think about. If you have a job, you get money, but you don’t have much free time. If you don’t have a job, you have plenty of time but no money. Life is a juggling act. As you get older, try to find ways to enjoy work and play in equal amounts.

The most essential strategies in homes where there just isn’t enough money to meet all of your needs are knowledge, accountability, and above all, encouragement. When there isn’t enough money to go around, it is critical to be informed about opportunities. Parents looking to better their situation can benefit from an extra pair of hands plowing through the Internet to find better work opportunities. Make it one of your hobbies to sign up at places like Indeed. If your parents are willing, help them by doing that kind of research. Sometimes we are so caught up in just living that we are unaware of opportunities right up the street. And encourage your parents.

Tell them how much you appreciate how they go to work all the time to provide for you. Finally, if money needed for actual needs is wasted on other things, let's say drugs and alcohol, hold yourself accountable to mention how it affects you. Don't be a pain about it, but make your parents aware that money spent foolishly has kept you from regular doctor visits and dental checkups, for example. More information is coming on what to do if they can't handle that observation.

When Being Good Isn't Enough

Doris said, “Oh my God. Your kids are so perfect! What’s the secret? My kids are such a disappointment, especially Tom. I feel like a failure with him.”

Way back in the 1960s, if a father spent four or five hours with his children every week, they figured they were doing quite well. In those days, most families still had only one breadwinner in the family, usually the father.

But over time, market forces and other factors changed all that. Many will say it was the Women’s Liberation Movement, and that is actually true. Women began thinking that maybe they didn’t need a husband to be happy. Without husbands, they took their own jobs and fought for equal pay. Even families with a father in the workplace sometimes had the mother working, too. When that happened, companies raised prices. After all, two parents working meant more money in the home for things like housing, transportation, entertainment, and medical expenses.

Then in the 1970s and 1980s, prices went up again on many of the more expensive items. Luxury items were priced for DINKs, which was an acronym for Dual Income No Kids. Meanwhile, wages rose for top wage earners, and pay for everyone else just stopped growing. Those jobs at the top paying who knows how much are highly competitive. By the way, women still don’t always get paid equal wages for equal work.

Parents skilled and lucky enough to hold management positions in major corporations, sit on boards of directors for multinational

companies, or even hold middle management positions in wealthy firms put in long hours. They constantly adjust their schedules and priorities to remain competitive. Entrepreneurs often work even more challenging and longer hours. In other words, people at the top cope with very high standards of performance.

All of that is great for them, and setting high standards for their children can also help them achieve, but there is a fine line between enforcing high standards and saying that not reaching those standards is a failure.

Here are a few things parents and children do to each trying to prove that they are enough. High-performing families are often critical. They hate seeing each other fail, and failure usually means doing something differently from how they were told to do it by a parent. Big-time executives often think they know best. As a result, they tend to micromanage, which is a short way of saying they hover over their children barking instructions. To them, how someone spends their time on a task is very important, sometimes more important than how they went about completing it in the first place. “If you do it this way, it’s more efficient, or faster, or better.”

Another thing that often happens is demanding excellence in everything. Parents who let their children figure things out on their own are much preferred, as you may have read earlier. Why? Because an essential aspect of life is learning how to figure things out on our own. Having someone give you all the answers because they want you to be flawless may sound good, and it may help get every little thing done faster in the short run, but when that child is on their own, they won’t have someone there to explain every little thing. It will be their job to figure things out on their own.

It’s great to encourage your kids, sisters, and brothers. Everyone

needs a little praise now and again, but the opposite of encouragement is brutal criticism. The difference in whether someone praises you or is constantly criticizing you is patience. Impatient people climb corporate ladders like fast-moving monkeys. They are really good at it. They demand everything be done fast because it makes them look good to upper management. Many of these ladder climbers have no respect for the people under them. They commit their staff to very long hours.

Kids are not on the corporate ladder. They don't report to an aggressive boss, or at least they should not have to.

As you will read in the story for this section, pushing your child to do things because you have a dream for them, rather than listening to their plans, is also a problem.

Remember the discussion with Doris that started this chapter? She said she feels like a failure because her son Tom is not as perfect as her friend's children are. Why does she think this way? Does she have concern for her son's achievement levels, or is she using her son's lack of achievement to measure her own self-worth? Parents that are lost in perfectionism affect their children in many ways. If Doris goes around the house and neighborhood talking about her son Tom as if he's inadequate, that could lead to depression and other mental problems. Some children develop eating disorders when their parents constantly encourage them to watch their weight. Other children fall into procrastination. That means they put things off knowing in advance that their parents will only criticize them at the end of a project anyway. Procrastination slows development.

Very few people make it to the top in their chosen sports, their career choices, even in love. If the bar is set too high, there is little chance of reaching it. It's better for parents to listen for the aspirations of

their children and then offer support for as long as they work to achieve them. For most of us, just being in the game is enough.

One final thought before the next story begins. A lot of parents these days spy on their children by tapping into their social media world. Some of that is just fine because parents should know how their kids think and who they hang out with. But there are limits. Parents who leave comments and act like they are just one more of their friends are annoying. If a parent is interfering in their child's social life, eventually, that child will find a technology that allows them to communicate in private. That is also a type of secret.

The other thing that parents don't realize is that kids can lurk on their parents' pages, too. If Doris chats with her friends about Tom on social media, in the same way she confides with her friends in person, bad things might happen. Parents are constantly checking into their children's lives through social media. Sometimes their kids are also checking on them. Just saying, Doris.

Chance Walker's Story

Chance Walker was the quarterback for his high school team, the Gators. For two years in a row before he became the quarterback, he played safety, but his ability to remember and execute plays in practice got him noticed by the head coach. It also didn't hurt that he had a great throwing arm.

Through his sophomore year, Chance only played when their team was far ahead or behind. At the end of that school year, however, their star quarterback graduated high school and went on to play with a full scholarship in college.

Chance became the starting quarterback in his junior year, and his

father was more excited about it than he was. It's all his father talked about, how his son Chance was going to lead the team to another regional title and undoubtedly get a scholarship one day.

The attention and encouragement Chance got from his father were great, but he also loved other things, including math, singing, and just hanging with his friends. This led to discussions where his father pushed him to work harder and told him all those other things could come later in life. Right now, he just needed to focus on football. And his father constantly sent videos of NFL quarterbacks running this play or that and talked continually about what he saw in those great players. In short, his father became obsessed with Chance's opportunity.

After every game, his father pulled out his camera and made his son watch replays of the game. He constantly pointed out what Chance could or should have done better. By the end of the season, Chance began to believe that his father was disappointed. They even talked about it, but his father denied any of that. He'd always just say how proud he was and how he was sure Chance would make it to the pros. But that didn't happen.

In game six of his senior year, Chance took a bad snap from his center and tried to get the ball off before being tackled. He was hit by one of the opposing linemen very hard and while his arm was extended behind him. That is all it took. The tackle broke one of his ribs and sent him to the sidelines.

The coach and doctor on the field checked him out. Despite him saying he just wanted to be taped up, they sent him off the field to get an X-ray. Chance's father was furious. He screamed at the coaches for being wimps. He called them horrible names and accused them of treating the players like little girls. None of that went well with

the coaches, who had little girls at the time, nor did the fans seated in the bleachers nearby appreciate such a rude father.

It was Chance's mother that met him at the hospital, not his father. It was she that talked with the doctors and worked out a recovery plan. That plan meant that Chance would sit out for at least two games, maybe more. They argued that his injury needed time to heal correctly. If he didn't rest, they said that a broken rib could splinter and damage his lung.

As Chance and his mother drove home, his mother described how her father had, in her words, stood up to the coaches and assured him that with the proper chest protection, he could probably be back in the game within a week, two at the latest. "But you heard what the doctor said," he protested.

"Your father will know what to do. He's brilliant. You'll see."

After that, they drove in silence. Chance became more anxious.

At home, his father was sitting at the living room table with his open laptop. When Chance entered the room, he jumped up. "There he is. Took a little hit, huh? What did the doctors say? Good to go?"

Chance started to answer, but his mother cut him off. "He's tough. They want him back in a couple of weeks for another X-Ray, but if he's got a good wrap and extra padding, I think he'll be ready to go game after next."

"It won't take that long," his father said and dove back into his chair and swiveled the laptop so Chance could see what he was looking at. "I already ordered this for you. It's the same gear the pros use. I'm thinking a cortisone shot, a wrap like this, daily icing, and you'll

beat the clock for sure. Ten to one, you start in the game next week. It's a big one. The coach wouldn't dare sit you out against South Central."

Chance looked at his mother in disbelief, but all she could do was smile and say, "See? I told you he is brilliant. Father always knows best."

"But that's not what the doc said. He said I had to sit out at least two games, maybe more. They say if I don't, the rib could splinter and ..."

"Nope. No. That's not going to happen. The scouts will be in the stands this week. If you sit this one out, the scouts won't see that frigging arm of yours in action. We'll figure something out. We always do," his father said.

Chance demonstrated that he could barely raise his arm at all without intense pain. He said it hurt just to breathe.

"Hold on a minute there, buddy. This is football, not a dance class. A little pain isn't going to stop a guy like you. Hell no. You're going to man up, show up, and suit up. It's too important. Baby, get the ice. Recovery starts right now."

Chance knew better than to argue, but in the back of his mind, it was all too much. Why did he have to argue anyway? The coach wasn't going to listen to him just because he wanted to play. The coach would call the doctor and pay attention. "I just. I just don't know, dad. The doctor said ..."

"Said what? Said you're a loser? You going to let a stupid ER nurse stop you now after we've come so far? This is football, son. It's our

ticket to college and the pros.”

And there it was. For years Chance had been pushed to excel at football. He had always appreciated his dad’s enthusiasm and encouragement, but something had changed. “I’m not a loser, and it’s not OUR college. It’s me going to college, not you,” he replied.

“Just hold on. If you let a little thing like this get in the way of a great career, what would you call that? A win? No sir. There are no losers in this house. I’m telling you that right now. You are playing, son. If you can’t find the courage, go to your room right now and don’t even think about coming down until you have your head on straight. No kid of mine is going to wimp out like that. Now get to your room. Mom will bring you the ice.”

“I think I just want to lay down. The pain meds and anti-inflammatories are taking over.”

“Really? I spend \$300 on special equipment, and you just want to lay down and give up? Losers give up. You a loser? Is that what you are? Not in this family.”

Chance didn’t answer. He’d already said he wasn’t a loser, so he turned and headed for the stairway. As he climbed the stairs to his bedroom, he heard his father lay into his mom. “What the hell did you say to him? This is your fault. I’m trying to raise a real man, a tough man, and you’re indulging him day and night. No wonder he’s such a wimp about all this. It’s just a cracked rib, for God’s sake.”

And the arguing went on long after Chance had shut the door and found his way into bed. “Maybe I am a loser,” he thought.

Lessons and Strategies

We all know what it means to try harder. Often we wish we had. Giving up on something we enjoy and are good at because it gets hard almost always leads to regret. Giving up on something because we are told to give up leads to resentment.

In the story about Chance, we read how important football was to his father. The story never told us how Chance really felt about it. Here's the rest of the story. Chance didn't play that week or the next. The team lost its game against South Central, which meant that they came in second rather than first. It made Chance's father so angry that he sulked around the house for weeks, barely speaking to Chance at all.

But talent scouts understand injuries. Before they left the stadium, they had the coach bring Chance into the locker room to talk. There were two football scouts there that day, each from a different university. Both of them said they'd reviewed videos of previous games and wanted to assure Chance that he was still one of their top prospects.

Chance didn't tell his father about the scouts for nearly a month. He didn't tell his mother, either. He needed a break from being pushed and having to talk about football every day. In the end, he got that scholarship anyway and left for the university during that summer. Chance never made it to the pros. Instead, he became a high school math teacher and assistant football coach.

You are good enough just the way you are. It will not always feel that way for a simple reason. Every time we try a new thing, there is a learning curve. If you work in technology, you know that IT is constantly changing, which means you frequently need to retrain. If you climb mountains, reaching the summit is not always the end goal. Sometimes it's just how much more beautiful the view is as

you climb.

Nearly all of the strategies are applicable when the people around you don't think your contribution is enough. First, make your family aware that their actions and opinions matter a great deal to you. Give them the knowledge that what you need are love and encouragement. Try to come to an agreement that they will treat you more fairly and hold them accountable. Then, reward their good behavior with a thank you.

Abandoned, Abused, Neglected

This is going to be a difficult chapter for some readers. If your parents have abandoned, abused, or neglected you, some of the ideas and stories here may be uncomfortable. In fact, the following four chapters dive deeper into some of the bad things that take place in some families. You can stop reading if the material is just too painful for you. Instead, jump to the last chapter on looking back and maybe come back to the painful chapters later.

Often parents don't acknowledge abuse, even to themselves. Their children do, too. Every kid wants very much to love and trust their parents. There are no exceptions to that fact in the beginning. Even when relations get broken, there is still some small part in us that wishes we could set things right.

There was a Baptist minister one time, many years ago, who graduated from a seminary in Minneapolis. During his time there, he and his wife had a son. The seminarian and his wife were so poor that they lived in a renovated chicken coop, but they knew they had to do better when that son came along. They rented a third-floor walkup and stayed there until the seminarian got his first mission. When that happened, they moved to a tiny town in Iowa.

This minister was a bright and energetic pastor with inspirational ideas. His whole mission in life was to serve the Lord. He soon found out that serving parishioners in a church congregation is not precisely the same as serving God. Working with people always involves a layer of widely held opinions.

Over the years, he made compromises. His congregations in some

places were far more conservative than he was. In those settings, he enforced all kinds of rules that he didn't sincerely believe in himself. Some of those rules created problems at home. In time there were horrible conflicts with his children, especially their oldest son. The son didn't understand why he couldn't use playing cards, dance, or use electronic instruments (he played guitar). He had no idea why he could watch television but not go to a movie theatre. Drinking of any kind, smoking, and even eating certain foods were banned.

No matter what the son did, he was in trouble, and trouble meant a lecture. The thing that caused such a strain in the family was what psychologists might call assigned authority. The parents didn't realize what they were doing when every argument, every rule, and every punishment came from God, not the parents. How can a child say no to God?

Instead of confiding in their parents, the children learned to sneak around. First, the oldest son, and eventually his younger sisters and brother, all lived secret lives. The son hid cigarettes in his room, snuck into movies with his friends, he even played music in a rock band.

The father realized he was losing the respect of his children and doubled down on the rules. That only made things worse. He tried everything he could think of to regain respect and trust, but it was too late.

Most important, the father was always out tending his flock. That's the way ministers see themselves. They see themselves as guides for God's children. This minister was a good man, even a great father, but he spent more time away than at home.

Years later, that same minister moved to California. Many of the

rules he enforced in the Midwest fell away, and he tried to reach out to his son. On one of the very few visits that his son paid his family, the minister pulled out pipe tobacco. He had a beer in the refrigerator. Maybe he thought that showing how he'd loosened up would patch things, but there was nothing that needed mending for the son. He'd long ago forgiven anything his parents had ever done and moved on. Like Bob Dylan once sang, they were, "Just one too many mornings and a thousand miles behind."

Parents that neglect, abandon, or abuse their children go through something similar. Their behavior causes a rift in the relationship that is very hard to mend. Abuse can happen in a flash, turning a summer walk into a day of horror. The abuse can be sudden and violent or even just verbal and psychological. Sometimes all it takes is for a parent to say they are disappointed.

Abuse can be verbal, physical, even sexual in nature, or abuse can stretch out for years in subtle ways. Doctors in emergency rooms are trained to look for physical abuse. Teachers watch for signs of abuse, too.

When discovered, some organizations help children understand and deal with their abusers. One of them is called Adult Children of Alcoholics. Medical News Today defines abuse like this: "Child abuse refers to any emotional, sexual, or physical mistreatment or neglect by an adult in a role of responsibility toward someone who is under 18 years of age." Remember the social contract? There are laws against forms of abuse. There are no laws against some mild forms of neglect, but there should be.

If you were, or are being abused, reach out for help. Don't wait. The same is true if you believe you are an abuser. Often abusers blame the abused even when they know deep down that they are

responsible. Abusers often realize they are wrong. The wiser ones find someone to talk about what they have done. This might be a priest, a psychologist, or a group that shares their problem. There are 12-step groups for nearly every kind of issue.

Neglect is a form of abuse that takes longer to recognize. Children need good food, medical, and dental attention. Above all, they crave love and nurturing. They need to have their vaccinations on time and undergo regular physical checkups. They need their parents to care about them and show they care. Children cannot be left alone for long periods because they are vulnerable to all kinds of things. Until a child is ready to live and thrive independently, their parent or guardian is responsible for their welfare.

One of the least discussed forms of abuse is favoritism. Over the years, playing favorites with your children can produce devastating consequences. One brother is a gifted athlete, and the other can't throw a ball more than twenty feet. If the parents spend hours with the talented son and ignore or even make fun of the other, in time, even the gifted son will despise his sibling. Living in a home where no one respects you can lead to mental illness, lack of initiative, isolation, cutting, anorexia, bulimia, and even worse. Bullying and suicide are on the rise in America. The CDC conducted a survey in August of 2020. They found that 75% of those that took the survey, ages 18-24, "reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral health symptom." Twenty-five had considered suicide within 30 days of completing the survey. If you think about suicide often, especially if you think about hurting others on the way to your own death, seek help right away. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is open to callers 24 hours every day. They can talk to you in English or Spanish.

If you are trying to figure out how to end your life, you really need

to call this number and talk about your pain. 800-273-8255.

Bullying is a form of abuse, and it is now prevalent in too many school systems. Parents and siblings can be bullies, too. In the next chapter, we talk about what it's like living in a home where bullying is commonplace. But before you read the story below and think about your situation today, take a minute to assess whether you are being bullied, abused, or neglected. Do you see the doctor and dentist regularly? Do you have enough to eat? Are you bullied at school, or are you bullying others? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, do something about it. In the chapter on looking back, there are lessons to be learned that may help you decide the next right thing.

Lil buck's Story

“How is having Kids like a wild horse or a good saddle?” None of his friends knew. “You got to break him in hard before they are any good.” Buck's friends thought he was pretty damn funny with that one. They tap the necks of their beer bottles together after that one and go back to playing pool.

“Yeah, I got Lil Buck doing just about any damn thing I want. Took a while, but he's coming around,” Buck said.

“So, are you guys still heading up? Where the hell you said you was going, Wyoming. Hunt mule deer? I bet the little guy would love it. Hell, I'd invite myself along if you weren't so damn bad-tempered,” one of his friends said as he leaned into a clean shot at the nine-ball.

“Changed my mind on that one. Next trip I take with Lil Buck probably be to the woodshed. You know what he done today? He and his ma both run off picking wild blueberries when he's supposed

to be walking the fence line. It's his ma's fault, but you know what I'm saying. A real man puts work first." Buck senior always talked about his son like that, as if he were a handful. He spoke and acted as if Lil Buck was a tool to be used around the farm and put away. Nothing more.

Fathers like Buck carry a line that stretches back to the 1800s. These are hard men, tough men. Buck was the hardest in his line, and he was proud of it. He had every intention to make Lil Buck into the man he thought he should be. Lil Buck's father treated him more like an employee or pack mule than a son. He treated his employees a lot better. He'd sit on the gate of his pickup truck with the boys. They liked the shade of the barn. Sometimes they would down a case of beer between them. Lil Buck barely got the time of day from his father.

When Buck senior didn't get things done exactly the way he wanted, he felt justified in messing with his kid. One day he was so mad he up and sold the boy's horse. Lil Buck loved that horse like a brother or sister. He took pride in the horses and would feed them every day. Watered it, too. Talked to his horse like a friend every time he brushed its coat. Losing that horse nearly broke him.

This other time Buck senior went and smashed a school project Lil Buck was working on. Did it right in front of him and his mother. Lil Buck had spent the whole weekend working up a pretty darn good paper-mâché soda volcano for school. He' been up to the elbows in mess and paint. Had it all laid out nicely on the living room table.

He was showing his mother how it would go off at school when Buck senior came in from the barn. Something hadn't been done. Maybe something wasn't right, but he hauled off and bashed that volcano to pieces. Left it lying on the floor. "Work comes first," is all he said. And he strolled into the kitchen looking for his dinner. He

didn't talk to the boy for three weeks after that. Not a word. Drove his wife and kid crazy like that all the time.

And big Buck was not above physical abuse, either. More than a few times, he'd slapped his kid across the face. Took a belt to him when he felt like it and this one time pushed him down half a flight of stairs. The boy broke his wrist, trying to catch his fall.

His mother knew it wasn't right, but she had herself to look after, too. Lil Buck worried for his mother's safety almost every day. The thing is senior treated everybody around him like a tool or a horse. He treated his horses better than people. Horses made money. People cost money.

All that stuff he told his friends about fishing with his son and hunting in Wyoming? It was all made up to make himself sound good. None of it was true.

A few weeks before Lil Buck had his 10th birthday, big Buck loaded a couple of his finest quarter horses into the trailer. He told Lil Buck he was coming with him to the Ranch Horse World Championships in Guthrie. Lil Buck had never been to Oklahoma, so he was very excited.

All the way down there, he talked about what horses they should buy. His dad told him how he would see things he never seen before and maybe would never see again. Lil Buck looked forward to seeing great horses and learning from pro trainers. Promised to get him one of those big nickel-plated buckles.

Lil Buck loved horses more than most kids love their iPhones and games. They had two kinds of horses at the ranch, those used for shows and a few for racing. He was allowed to see one of his father's

horses race at the track one time, but when the horse came in fifth in a field of eight, that was the end of it.

When they got to Guthrie, they checked into a Red Roof Inn a couple miles from the big show. The Ranch Horse World Championships is a big deal. Horsemen come from all over the country to compete, look at the latest gear, and hear about new training techniques. Big Buck was really in his element at shows. He threw money around like it was just paper. Four or five of his friends were in town, Buck had said, and used that as an excuse to abandon his son. Needed to spend time with them is what he told Lil Buck.

When he took off in the morning on the first day, Lil Buck was left in the hotel room with instructions not to leave the room. Big Buck told his son he'd bring a few sandwiches back later, but he forgot. They were there for three days, and Buck never did let his boy see the show. Every day it was another excuse, and every night he came in later and later. Truth be told, Lil Buck didn't see a damn thing. He never got that buckle and didn't even see the cowboy boots he had dreamed about and hoped to get.

When it was all over, big Buck loaded two new quarter horses into the trailer, and they headed home. Didn't say a word the whole drive. When they got back, he made Lil Buck move the horses into the stables, feed, and water them. For Lil buck, feeding the new horses alone in the barn was the best part of the whole trip.

“How did you guys do down there in Oklahoma?” Buck's mom asked when he came into the house.

Lil Buck glanced at his father. “We had a hell of a time down there, mama.”

“What’d I say?” big Buck said to his wife. “The kid had one hell of a time.”

At the end of the following workday, big Buck was standing with a few of his guys sipping beer like usual. Lil Buck was in the stable cleaning up when he heard his father yell for him. He came running. One of the men nodded in his direction, a big smile on his face. “Your daddy says you all had a good time down in Oklahoma. I’m guessing you helped him pick out them new horses. Am I right?”

Buck looked at his father and knew what he had to say. “Yes, sir. We had a great time driving down there and even coming back. Loved every minute.”

“He sure as hell did. Got on my nerves a few times, but everything worked out good enough in the end.” Big Buck then turned back to his friends, flipped his hand in a dismissive way toward Lil Buck, and sent him back to the barn.

When school started up again, Lil Buck got on the bus, as usual, put a few things in his locker, and slid into a chair in one of the classrooms. His favorite teacher was running the class. She made a few announcements then came up to his desk. She touched his shoulder and asked how his summer went. “Went really good, ma’am.”

“No trouble?”

“No, ma’am. Everything’s good at home.”

The teacher touched the top of his head, said something like I hope so, and went back to the front of the class.

When the class was over, and everyone was leaving, she asked Lil Buck to stick around for a minute. She said she had something she wanted to talk about.

“I did something wrong?” Lil Buck asked.

“Of course not. I just want you to meet somebody. He’ll be here in a second. Just take a seat. We’ll have a talk.”

Buck took a seat in the front row as she asked. He had no idea what would happen next, but he didn’t feel good about it. He thought this teacher was great, but last year she asked him all kinds of personal questions. She wondered about bruises on this and that part of his arms and neck. And when he reported that his project had been a good one but got destroyed by the dog, she hadn’t believed him. Lil Buck doesn’t have a dog. He forgot he’d even told her that. In truth, Buck felt that she didn’t think a lot about what he said about home.

They sat in silence for what seemed to Buck like 20 minutes, but it was probably only one or two minutes before a young gentleman wearing a tie and a city suit walked into the room. “Hey bud,” he said like they had been friends for a while.

“This is a friend of mine. I asked him to come out and meet you. He’s a good guy. You can trust him.” With that, his teacher stood, shook hands with the gentleman, thanked him for driving all the way down from the city, and said she’d be back in a few.

“How’s it going, Buck? My name is Theo. Some people call me Dr. Ted, but I’m not really a medicine kind of doctor. You doing ok today?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I talked to your teacher for a while, and she asked me to stop by and check in on you. I hope that’s ok. Just a regular part of my job. Nothing to worry about.”

“I’m pretty sure I haven’t done anything wrong.” Lil Buck said.

The man laughed and took a seat next to Lil Buck. He loosened his tie before talking again.

“You seem like a solid young man, not one to waste time, so I’ll get right to the point. Your teacher is worried about you. She thinks maybe something’s going on at home. It’s my job to check these things out, so I’m going to ask a few questions if you don’t mind.”

“No, sir, I don’t mind. You can ask all the questions you want.”

The city man took a small pad of paper out of his suit coat pocket and grabbed a pen from another. He made a couple notes. “So, you live on a farm with your father and mother, right?”

“It’s a horse ranch. Yes, sir.”

“A horse ranch sounds cool. Would you say that is a dangerous line of work?”

“No, sir. I don’t think of it like that, at least not for me. I get along well with horses. They like me.”

“Ok, but that makes me wonder. If it’s not dangerous, maybe you could tell me how it is that you got hurt so many times during the last school year. Take your time.”

Lil Buck was surprised. He tugged at his sleeve without even

thinking about it. Before he answered, he looked away and took a deep breath. “Well, sir, I’m ah, well accidents just happen, I guess. I’m a kid, so ... yeah. Accidents.”

“What kind of accidents? Do you trip and fall a lot? Maybe you ran into a door and got that bump on the head she told me about. I can see that happening.” The man chuckled a little as he said that.

“Yes, sir. I tripped and fell a few times. Lots of times and that dang barn door hit me on the head that one time.”

“Huh.” The man made a note in his little pad of paper. “Well, how did you fall? I mean, she said your arm gets bruised all around like you were wearing a black and blue bracelet. She said it looked more like somebody wrapped a rope around you or something, or like your arm got twisted. It doesn’t seem possible that you’d get something like that from a simple fall. I could be wrong, but how does that work?”

Buck stared at his arms, recalling how his father grabbed him off of a horse one day. He’d snatched and twisted his forearm hard and jerked him off of a horse. He fell hard on the ground and nearly wrenched his shoulder out of place. It had hurt him horribly for a long time. The whole time he was on the ground, his father kept yanking on his arm, yelling that Lil Buck didn’t know how to ride worth a damn. But that’s not what he said to the man. What he said was, “Sir, I don’t completely know how it happened. When I fell, maybe I was holding onto a rope? Maybe the rope got all wrapped around pretty good. Yeah. That’s what happened. Yeah, that time I probably fell off a horse, and the reins was wrapped around my arm.”

“What about the door?”

“That’s an easy one. See, I was running, and well, see the barn door was open just that little bit? And the wind caught it, and I tripped? Hell, I’m just a dumb cowboy who doesn’t watch where he’s going half the time. Dang door caught me on the head right here,” Buck said, pointing first to the right side of his head and then the left. “Right here.”

“I see. It must have hurt. Let me ask you something. Do you love your mom?”

That was a strange question to ask, Lil Buck thought. “Yes, I sure do.”

“I assume you love your pa?”

Lil Buck hesitated for a second, not sure where all this was going. “He’s a good man.”

“And your father treats your mom well, right? He’s not mean to her or anything like that.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve never seen him hit her or anything, right?”

“I can’t say.”

“You can’t say because you don’t know, or because, well, because you can’t say?”

Now Lil Buck felt really uneasy. He worried that his face would give away something he didn’t want to talk about. Lil Buck felt like crying. He felt like this so many times before and never knew what

to do about it. This man was asking personal questions even after saying that wouldn't happen. Confused, he decided not to answer at all.

“Buck, here's what I am wondering. I am wondering if you and your mama are safe out there at the farm. Sorry, the ranch. After talking to the teacher, and now after talking with you, some things don't sit right. I know you did your best to answer truthfully, but, well, let me just ask you straight up. I looked at some reports from Dr. Beck back up in the city. These are from the time your mom went there a few years ago and again this spring. Those doctor reports don't work with the story you're giving. Seems like your daddy beat her up pretty good a couple times, and when she was talking to the doctor, she might have mentioned that sometimes he hits you as well. Got anything to say about that?”

“Sir, I can't talk about none of that.”

“I understand where you're coming from. I really do. If I were you, I'd be afraid too, but let me tell you something. I hope you're listening. Sometimes these things get worse over time. You don't want your mom to get hurt, do you?”

“No, sir.”

“Neither do I. What I think the best thing to do right now is we just talk open and honest about what you've been experiencing out there on the ranch. I promise we won't do a damn thing about any of this unless you say. Do you understand? And when I say do something about it, we're not talking about anything bad. We just want to bring a little safety and security into the situation.”

“What does that even mean?”

“I think you know. Nobody wants to hurt your daddy. Nobody wants to embarrass him or take you away. All I need to know is whether he’s been hitting you and your mom. It’s my job to ask these questions and make sure you are safe. That’s all. Do you feel safe? Do you think your mom is safe? Simple questions. I sure would appreciate it if we started there. Do you feel safe?”

“I don’t want anything bad to happen to my mom. I can take it on my own, but it bothers me something horrible when he and her get into fights.”

The two sat there looking at each other for the longest time. Lil Buck’s eyes fogged up, and he had that voice inside again, yelling to just let it all out. That’s all he had to do, maybe. Maybe if he told it all, he could put an end to it. This guy in front of him seemed all right. His teacher said he could trust the guy. He came from the big city where people know about this kind of thing.

Lil Buck put his left hand up over his eyes, and he held it there when he started. “He can’t help himself. He always says he’s sorry. As I said, I can take it. You don’t have to do anything on my account. But it sure couldn’t hurt none to have a little talk with my dad and make sure he never hurts mom again.”

Before Buck could get out another word, all that fear came bubbling up in his throat, and he choked his words.

“That’s ok, Buck. You’re going to be all right. So those bruises on your arms and head, all the injuries you had last year, it wasn’t just falling down, was it.”

Lil Buck kept his hand over his eyes. It made him feel comfortable enough to go on, and he knew that he wouldn’t stop when he did. He

cleared his throat and began.

“Dad gets angry sometimes.”

Lessons and Strategies

The world can be a wonderful place. Some parts of the world are so beautiful that just being there makes us feel like we are in the backyard of heaven. That is the big world. The other world, the one we live in at home, can be quite the opposite. No one thinks about the grand open prairies or majestic mountain streams when they are being chased in the house by an angry drunken father. It is impossible to feel good when you know someone in your household, maybe a brother or sister, is being abused.

Neglect is part of it, but we don't always realize when our needs are being neglected. Some kids are happy never to go to the doctor or dentist. But the truth is clear. We all need to pay attention to our mental and physical needs. We need someone to love us and someone to love. What we don't need is to sit at home every day wishing someone was there to make dinner or even to talk to.

The story you read about Lil Buck showed multiple forms of abuse. He was the victim of neglect when he was left in that hotel room alone. The abuse continued when his father wouldn't speak all the way home. He was physically abused by his father many times, including when he was yanked off that horse. Lil Buck felt alone and helpless. He wished he was big enough and smart enough to protect his mother. All that was working against him, but two things worked in his favor. He hadn't become that hard man his father tried to make him into. He still loved his mother and his horses, which means he hadn't yet lost touch with the seed in us that helps us to become emotionally mature. If we become indifferent or even cruel to animals, we have lost something precious.

The other thing? Lil Buck was brave. Many kids are so afraid of their abuser that they never say a word, even when asked. When asked if they feel safe at home at the doctor's office, they always say yes. If a teacher asks how they got a bruise, they make up stories. But when Lil Buck was directly asked if his father had hurt him or his mother, he chose to speak up. Remember what he said? I can take it, but I don't want my father to hurt my mom. If he'd never been asked, Lil Buck might never have had the chance to speak up. He might still be taking it, as he said.

This guide encourages every reader who knows deep down that they are taking far too much to speak up.

What strategies make sense when you are being abused or otherwise neglected? This is a tough one. You may be experiencing catharsis almost every day. You may go to our room and cry about what is going on more than anyone should have to do. Your situational awareness may be very acute in families like this.

One strategy you can use is one you may have to apply to yourself. Become aware of alternatives. Learn what options you have. For example, you may want to ask a teacher to speak with a counselor at school. That counselor may have some great advice to give. Make an agreement with yourself that if things reach some level, and only you know what that level is, you will act. Hold yourself accountable. Work on a plan.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is more commonplace than most of us realize. According to Dark to Light, one in ten children in the U.S. will experience some form of sexual abuse before they are 18 years old. There are 42 million survivors of sexual abuse among us. You may be one of those children or adults that have had a horrible experience. If so, you should visit this website - D2L.org. Dark to Light specializes in child abuse prevention and training for adults that are in positions to help

We know what sexual abuse looks like, right? Some big hairy dude sexually attacks a woman. A creepy guy tries to grope kids at the city pool, or a group of drunken guys do bad things to a girl at a party. If a drug is used to disable another person for the purpose of taking sex, that is immoral and against the law. These are clear examples of sexual abuse. But the experts don't stop with these glaring examples. Sexual abusers use strength or position to fulfill their sexual desires. Some define sexual abuse more narrowly, as in when an adult abuses a minor. The examples just given all involve physical contact. But there are other forms of sexual abuse where the abuser doesn't ever touch the victim.

What if you are walking home from school and a guy jumps out from behind a tree, throws open his coat, and wiggles his private parts at you? Nasty! That is called exhibitionism, and you would probably never get that out of your head. Exhibitionism is the flaunting of private parts to someone that doesn't want or deserve that experience. Exhibitionism is a form of sexual abuse. The law calls it indecent public exposure. It doesn't cause physical harm, but to some it can be emotionally devastating.

The opposite of exhibitionism is a voyeur. That word is French. The simple translation of voyeur is someone who looks. Voyeurism, is secretly looking at another person or persons without their knowledge. Sometimes called a Peeping Tom, a voyeur might try to watch another person undress, take a shower, make love, any of that. They might do this with binoculars or a telescope. That person could look over a fence into someone's windows, or these days even hide miniature cameras in a person's room.

There used to be laws against ogling. Maybe there still are in some places, and no, that is not a typo of Googling. When someone ogles they stare at another person in a bad way. A lecherous man might ogle a woman making her uncomfortable. Exhibitionism, voyeurism, and ogling can all be sexually inappropriate and feel threatening, just like attempting to solicit sex from someone who clearly is not interested. Only in rare cases where there is a pattern of that kind of behavior over time might these violations of the social contract get formally added to the statistics for sexual abuse. Even so, if it is happening in the home, if dad walks around in his undies and wants you to sit with him on the couch, that would be inappropriate. Anything that makes a child uncomfortable, and has something to do with sexuality, borders on abuse.

There are tired old jokes about voyeurs and exhibitionists being a perfect match, but that would probably imply a consensual relationship. Sexual abuse is never consensual. We would be shocked and angry to discover hidden cameras in a bathroom we frequent. If you someday found nude pictures of teens in your parents closet, that should set off alarm bells. On one extreme, sexual abuse can be physically violent. At the totally opposite end of that continuum, it might even be unintentional. The definition of sexual abuse in this guide is when someone exercises power or deceit over another person to satisfy their own sexual impulses.

How do we recognize when someone is using power or deceit over us? If someone physically attacks you, that is power. If a teacher, parent, priest, boss, or guardian, for example, use their position to force you into sex, that is clearly abuse. If someone wants sex and threatens to harm or take something away if they don't get it, that is also sexual abuse. People should never use their authority over you to get sexual favors.

Sexual harassment and abuse are violations of the social contract. There are laws about sexual conduct, too. Some young people don't even know their lover is legally abusing their position.

Cory turned fifteen years old. She felt and looked much older. Her entire attitude seemed to shift from being a kid at 14 to becoming an adult at 15. The makeup she wore, her jewelry, a different type of bra, and even a nose ring were all expressions to the world that she was an independent and free-thinking woman. She had arrived!

One of the guys she met thought that too. Jeb had a good job. He'd started working in a restaurant as a dishwasher but had applied his talent and determination there for years. Now he was an actual line cook on his way to becoming a sous chef. Jeff had money, something some older men call pocket charm. He had a cool car and lived in his own apartment. He'd been dating for a long time when he met Cory. In contrast, Cory had only been on a few dates, and those dates had been uninteresting.

Jeb was older. He knew that Cory was under the age of consent but didn't care. He used his money, car, and experience with dating to convince Cory that he was in love with her. She loved how they went to fancy restaurants where everyone knew his name. Jeb snuck drinks for her at these restaurants, bought her nice things sometimes, and took Cory to places she'd never been before.

To keep this predictable story short, Cory felt that she was in love with Jeb. She believed him when he talked about having a life together. Within a few weeks of dating, they made love. Cory had never done that before.

When Cory's parents found out about the relationship, and especially how far Cory had gone with Jeb, they were shocked. This man was taking advantage. The relationship had to end, and like right now!

Cory didn't see it that way. She just knew she was in love.

We all experience desire. We all encounter boundaries. Most of us keep our desires within the boundaries of our social contract. In your lifetime, you will experience millions of sexually charged moments. Sex is a normal part of life. Males especially have sexual thoughts nearly every hour, sometimes more. And it is natural for us to test boundaries. Basically, everyone thinks about sex and has a different way of getting it. When done properly, it can be exciting, dull, or even inconsequential. When sought inappropriately, nearly always uncomfortable consequences follow.

We earlier mentioned the age of consent. The age of consent differs by state. It is as low as 16 in some places. In other states, a person must be 17 or 18 years old. Some cultures have no age of consent rules at all. That is not the case in the U.S. Anyone having sex with a minor is breaking the law. The courts are sometimes lenient in cases where two young people, one a year older than the age of consent, and one just a bit younger, have sexual relationships. For Cory and Jeb, that was not the case. Jeb was 23 years old at the time. Cory was 15.

The law draws from psychological and medical studies. Our brains are not fully developed for a long while after birth. Cory may have

thought she was a mature woman, and some might agree, but we live in a land of laws. Jeb used his charm, money, and other resources to get sex from Cory. He saw that Cory was adulting, a word we will explore later, and too advantage of that trait. Even though Cory didn't see it that way, it was true, and Jeb knew it was true. He seduced her with a beautiful vision of how the future might be with Jeb, and he'd convinced her that having sex was a necessary step in keeping him happy and available.

When we are young it isn't always easy to tell someone is taking advantage. It's important to always consider motivation and the law before entering into a sexual relationship.

Story

Mark was a curious dude all through grade school. At least that's what kids told him. Being different is fine if you are muscular and handsome. Standing out in a crowd because you are cool is different than being uncool. Mark was underweight, pale, and awkward. He didn't have girlfriends. He wasn't even a brilliant nerdy genius.

Even if he had been good at math, history, English, or any other subjects at school, it wouldn't have mattered. Mark was ashamed of who he was as a person. He felt utterly inadequate and outclassed to the point where he feared conversations with attractive people. Even if a popular person was friendly and courteous toward him, he pulled away. That sense of comparing had crippled Mark. Having new and exciting friends would have been great, but he let imperfections get in the way. The idea of one day having a sexual relationship seemed ridiculous and unattainable.

We know Mark was wrong. A good strategy for him would be to smile, use kind words, and be willing to communicate even while

feeling awkward. It takes practice to mold our personalities away from the self that doesn't work toward a new self, but he couldn't see the path. He focused on the bad things that had happened and all the bad still to come. As a result, his fear, shame, and isolation continued into high school.

One day, while a sophomore, something happened. Near the end of a school day, one of the most attractive girls on the cheerleading squad came right up to him and started talking. Like so many other appealing people in his school, she had always been distant and discourteous in the past. Her willingness to talk surprised him. They discussed classes they were taking and the hobbies they enjoyed. She accompanied him from their final classroom, down the stairs, and through the long hallway to the exit.

Before stepping through the door and down the wide concrete steps to his bus, she asked what he was doing right then. Before he could even say, she asked if he would please go with her to a small party.

The girl's name was Clarisse. She was a senior. She said she wanted to get to know Mark. Clarisse had a car and would drive him to and from the party.

Mark said no initially, claiming he needed to get home, but she was insistent. When convinced the party would be fun, he sent a text to his parents saying he needed to stick around the school for a while and joined her in her car.

Clarisse was very friendly during the drive. At her home, he met by two more cheerleaders, friends she'd invited. The girls were all seniors and all very attractive. What surprised Mark most of all was that no one else was coming to this party. For reasons that he could not possibly understand at the moment, he was the only boy invited,

and he was in the presence of three beautiful women.

“Welcome to the pool party, Mark,” Clarisse said as they entered her house.

Frightened by how unusual this all was, Mark thought about leaving. He might have done so but how he would get home?

“We’re going to change. Join you at the pool?” Clarisse’s friends said before disappearing down a hallway.

“I don’t feel all that comfortable swimming right now,” Mark said. He went on to talk about ear infections and claimed he’d never learned to swim. Neither of those claims was true, but Clarisse seemed to see right through him.

“Don’t be silly. It’s just you and I and a couple of friends of mine. Come on, it’s going to be fun,” she said as she touched him on the shoulder, gently nudging him toward the double-wide glass doors that overlooked her parents’ luxurious pool.

Mark followed. There were five lounge chairs, stacks of fresh towels, a diving board, and various pool toys, including noodles and a raft ready for them to use. They hadn’t been poolside for more than a minute or two when Clarisse’s friends came out of the house wearing tiny brightly colored bikinis. Mark found it nearly impossible to tear his eyes away. It was also very intimidating to him. “Looking good, girls!” Clarisse said. Then turning to Mark, she excused herself, saying she’d be right back.

The two bikini-clad women approached Mark. They each asked him if he would be so kind as to spread sunscreen on their backs. He obliged. Mark had never felt anything like this before in his life.

The way these women chatted and flattered him made him almost feel excepted.

When he'd finished applying sunscreen to the second girl, she said, "Now, it's your turn."

"I'm good," Mark said.

"Nonsense. You'll burn to a crisp out here. With that the women began to unbutton his shirt. He pulled back instinctively, but they insisted, and soon they were rubbing suntan lotion on his body. "You're not going to swim in your pants, are you?"

Clarisse emerged from the house wearing the smallest bikini of all. He'd never seen a woman in a thong before, at least not in person. "Mark thinks he's going to swim in pants." One of the girls called out. All three girls laughed at that. "Come on, bud, you're wearing boxers or whitey tighty underwear. There's something under there. That's as good as a swimming suit if you ask me. Don't worry so much. We're all exposing a lot more than you will."

Mark reasoned that he'd come this far. He didn't want to disappoint this new and beautiful friend, so he released his belt, button, and zipper. He removed his pants and stood there in his boxers.

"I don't know why you were worried. You look good," Clarisse said. One of the other girls said he looked better than good. He looked hot.

They went swimming. Mark had never felt as free in his life. They splashed each other with water. They took turns holding their breath underwater to see who could last the longest. Maybe they let Mark win that contest. Even so, he felt proud.

Two of the girls climbed out of the pool and began to towel off. “Want to get out?” Clarisse asked. “If you do,” Mark answered. They climbed from the pool.

Clarisse wrapped a towel around Mark. She helped dry his hair, shoulders and back then asked him to do the same for her. When he’d finished, he turned to see that the other two girls had removed their bikinis and were lying on their backs in lounge chairs, eyes closed, sunning themselves. Clarisse did as they had done, leaving him standing there startled, excited, and confused.

Mark was not about to remove his boxers. He did lie on a lounge chair, though, and closed his eyes against the brilliance of the sun. It felt warm. One of the girls used her phone to play music. He listened to the women talk about plans for the weekend and how much they looked forward to college.

With his eyes closed and the sun beating down on him, Mark nearly fell asleep. He didn’t open his eyes again until a shadow crossed his face. Looking up, he saw Clarisse leaning over him. She brushed his hair with the palm of her hand and said, get up. We’re dancing.

Mark turned his head, shielded his eyes, and saw Clarisse’s friends dancing to music a few yards away. “Dance with me. Come on. It’s good exercise,” Clarisse begged and then grabbed his arm. She encouraged him until Mark followed her to the dancing girls. Soon, all four of them were moving to the music.

Mark felt terribly self-conscious. He’d never even tried to dance before. He’d never been in a situation where dancing was required, especially not with three gorgeous unclad women.

The music changed to a slower song. Clarisse pulled Mark close, and

they danced. As they did, one of the other women kissed his neck. The kiss startled him, but Clarisse held him tightly, and he didn't pull away. The sensations were arousing. It was a feeling he'd only ever wondered about experiencing. As the dance continued, Clarisse surprised him even more. She kissed him full on the mouth. As she did, he felt the hand of one of the other women slide down his back and into his boxers. Mark thought for sure having sex would happen when he felt his boxers sliding down his legs.

"I didn't know you were such a good kisser," Clarisse said, the palms of her hands firmly on both sides of his face.

"Neither did I," Mark stammered.

Kissing him quickly once more, Clarisse pulled him close and whispered into his ear that he should close his eyes. She said he was going to love what came next.

Mark closed his eyes. He stood poolside with his boxers at his ankles, eyes closed, waiting. He felt a finger slowly trace from his neck, down his chest and across his stomach, but then, nothing. "Still there?" Mark asked.

When Mark heard giggling, he opened his eyes. He instantly leapt into anxiety, fear, and shame. All three of the women stood a few feet in front of him, his privates exposed, eyes wide, face locked in horror that they were making videos and laughing. They made jokes about his anatomy.

Mark's clothes were missing. The three women recorded him reaching for a towel and wrapping it around his waist.

Mark looked again. They had definitely taken his clothing. He

wanted to scream, to get angry, but all that came out were tears and shudders of embarrassment. Not knowing what to do, he ran into the house.

Clarisse followed him. She videoed his retreat and didn't turn the camera off until he begged. After that, she said she was sorry, but it wasn't true. She called him big boy. She said, "Need a ride, big boy? I'll give you a ride." Clarisse then tossed his clothing to him. Mark put on his pants and shirt.

The car ride to the high school was humiliating and also terrifying. What would Clarisse and her friends do with the recordings? She wouldn't answer, but what he feared would happen, did.

The next day at school, Mark stood out even more. Kids came up to him laughing as they flashed video of him standing, eyes closed, boxers around his ankles, asking if someone was still there.

Lessons and Strategies

We cannot handle some problems on our own. If a parent, brother, aunt, or uncle is demanding sex from you, that is not something you can take on alone. You cannot fix that without the help of others.

There is an old saying. "Every problem discussed is a problem cut in half." What can you do if confronted with an abusive situation? First, talk to someone. Discuss the situation with someone in the position to help. After talking about your experience, you will have an ally. If it's the right ally, they will advise and help you know what to do. Sharing concerns about sexual abuse or any other problem is the first step in finding safety and recovering peace of mind.

At the end of this chapter, there are Internet addresses. If you are

sexually abused, have been abused, or are afraid that you may become a sexual abuser, follow the links.

Think back to Mark's story. That experience will stay with him for the rest of his life. He may never learn to trust his well-being to another human being. The sinister and inappropriate actions of those three women may have been funny to them and their friends, but it was a form of damaging sexual abuse. Abuse takes place every day in America. Maybe not to the extent that Mark suffered, but in locker rooms and on athletic fields, sexual intimidation is common.

Remember the lessons that we learned in the section on DNA? We are who we are, and we deserve to be here. We can build our bodies with exercise. We can change our hairstyles. People try new fashions all the time just to change or hide their appearance. But there are some things about our being that do not change. All we can do is work on acceptance.

Strategy: Communicate. Many sexually abused children, and even abused adults, never talk about their experiences. According to Dark to Light, 38% of child victims report abuse, 4 to 8% of reports are false. 52% of child abuse cases get identified by school personnel. Talk to your teachers if you are in trouble.

Those that do not report are ashamed, or they fear consequences from their abuser. Don't suffer in silence. Don't confront your abuser alone if that person is violent or otherwise threatening. Get help!

This web page offers information on preventing abuse, identifying abuse, and reporting abuse: <https://www.d2l.org/get-help/>

The Darkness to Light Helpline also identifies resources by state. Go here:

<https://www.d2l.org/get-help/resources/>

If you know of a situation with a friend or neighbor, and that situation is bad enough to warrant intervention, consider calling the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Cyber Tip Line at 800.843.5678.

We haven't talked about human trafficking, but if you or someone you know is caught up in that horrible situation, go to this place online: <https://www.ice.gov/webform/hsi-tip-form>.

Adulthood

Adulthood is behaving like an adult. Many adults make jokes about adulthood. To them, it means acting like an adult even when they don't feel like one. Many college-aged men and women leave home without all the life skills they will eventually need to succeed in life, so they act as if they had them for a while. In a way, adulthood is practice.

Developing skills is a life-long project. If you think about it, the longest-running project in our lives is us. We are a project that moves through many stages on a path toward maturity. If we work on this project diligently, we will succeed. It doesn't matter where we start or what challenges we will face. Success in business or love is not the only measure of success. Success means we always try to be better and more responsible people.

Part of trying to be an adult means attempting new personalities. There are limits, though. When we are children, we should practice being children. As we become teens, it's best to act like teens. Every stage in life has its own set of challenges and rewards. If we skip a stage, say we try too hard to come off as an adult when we are still young, we can miss important discoveries.

Darlene's parents were super focused on proper behavior. They were members of a country club, had professional jobs and responsibilities, and the pressure they put on themselves to fit in became unconsciously transferred to Darlene. Everything the family did had to be just so. Sit and walk properly, dress to get noticed, speak intelligently, flaunt accomplishments, spend time with the people that can advance their careers, and avoid embarrassing actions were

the traits they had developed. In their world, those are shared traits. But even though Darlene went to a private school where there were plenty of others practicing the same characteristics, she had relations with kids that didn't do any of that.

The thing that saved Darlene from becoming an arrogant adult was empathy. Empathy is one of the essential characteristics of a mature person. Having a good heart, as some call it, is when we can feel for another person. We intuitively understand when they are suffering, confused, afraid, or feeling isolated. Do you know this phrase? I feel for you? Empathy implies that we can feel the emotion someone else is feeling, either because we've had that emotion ourselves or try to grasp the other person's point of view. Sociopaths can't feel for others. They have a psychological disorder that often makes them highly antisocial and uncaring. Hopefully, you don't have to live with one.

Acting like someone we are not can be practice. That's a good thing. When we know we are adulting because a task calls for it, that is practice. Acting like someone we are not can also be a negative. Some people take adulting too far. They think that acting like an adult means they are an adult. Parents can be like that in extreme circumstances. It's also true that some parents expect their children to act like adults when they are indeed just kids. They may secretly know they are just old children but don't want to admit that even to themselves.

Story

Tyrel had just turned 14, which meant that in his state, he could actively seek employment. His parents didn't have a lot of money, nor did they do things to better their station in life. Tyrel wanted more. He wanted a job to get a few things, but more importantly, he

wanted a position where he could advance. His big dream wasn't working for someone else, but he needed money to start his own business as a songwriter and performer.

The first time someone applies for a job, especially a position in a corporation, is intimidating. We want to look our best. We worry in advance about what questions and how we will respond. For Tyrel, it was both frightening and exciting.

The process started with filling out an online application for a fast-food restaurant. Tyrel had eaten there dozens of times and saw how they had employed others his age. When he got a call to stop in and talk to the manager, he sprang into action. The first thing Tyrel did was go to a department store to look at clothes. He couldn't afford what he found there, so he went to Goodwill. He purchased a tie, a white shirt, and the best suit available close to his size. He'd seen fashionable men in magazines wearing suits and athletic shoes, so he figured that would be all right.

The clothes mostly fit as Tyrel looked at himself in the mirror at home. His parents encouraged him, saying how nice and professional he looked, which gave him confidence for the interview.

Tyrel said he was there to meet with the manager at the restaurant's counter, a guy named Tom. He had to wait for about ten minutes. When the manager finally came to the counter, he called for Tyrel to join him in a small office behind the kitchen. Tyrel took a seat on the opposite side of Tom's desk. Tom left the door open even though it was a bit noisy and distracting.

Tom pulled out a printed version of Tyrel's application and scanned it before asking any questions. As he read, Tyrel looked around the office and saw pictures of the man and his family, books on how to

be a great manager, and stacks of paper in his inbox. A computer was open to a spreadsheet. “Ever have a job before?” Tom asked.

“Not a real job. This job will be my first time. I’m ready to learn, though. I get pretty good grades in school.”

“Keep it up. School is vital. What we do here, though, we train you to do things that you probably never learned in school. If you do a good job, we have a program to help you get into college. Would you like that?”

“Cool,” Tyrel said and immediately thought that sounded stupid. “What I mean is, yes. I definitely want to go to college.”

“I like that in a young man. Shows initiative. So, tell me, why do you want a job? And why here?”

“I’m going to have recording equipment someday. Your application says I’m old enough and others can do it. I know I can probably learn what to do pretty quick.”

“Fair enough. You like recording, huh. I played a little guitar when I was about your age. Even had a band. How about I show you around for a few minutes, and then we can talk.”

The manager showed Tyrel what he’d be doing to get started, including carrying out trash, mopping floors, and restocking supplies as his cooks ran short. He assured Tyrel that he wouldn’t have to worry about the cash register for a while, and they talked about schedules.

Back in the office, the manager asked a few more questions, and the interview ended. They stood. The manager came around his desk

and shook Tyrel's hand, thanking him for showing an interest in his restaurant. "When will I know?" Tyrel asked.

"When do you want to know?" Tom asked.

Tyrel was surprised by the question. He didn't know how these things worked. "Ahh. If you have to think about it, I understand. You can just hit me up with a text or something."

Tom laughed. He returned to his side of the desk, looked at Tyrel's application again as if he were deciding, then picked up his phone. He tapped a few keystrokes and set it on the desk.

Instantly Tyler's phone vibrated in his pocket, and he heard a notification. He still hadn't connected the manager's actions to his text alert and thought it rude to read a message while in an interview.

"Aren't you going to check that?" Tom asked.

"If you don't mind. It could be my dad." Tyrel pulled the phone from his pocket. The notification was from Tom. It said, "You're hired."

A huge smile spread across Tyrel's face. "I got the job?"

"Why not. You seem like a good kid. It's going to be hard work. You have to show up on time every time, and you have to get along, but sure. Let's see how it goes."

"Thank you so much, sir," Tyrel said and extended his hand.

They shook hands, and Tom asked if he could begin the following day, one hour after Tyrel would get out of school.

“I’ll be here,” Tyrel said proudly.

“Okay then. See you tomorrow,” the manager said and took his seat behind the spreadsheet.

“Thank you, sir,” Tyrel said and turned to leave. Before he’d taken two steps, the manager called his name.

“Tyrel. So that you know, you don’t have to wear a suit and tie tomorrow.”

Lessons and Strategies

The story about Tyrel is straightforward. The suit didn’t get him the job. It possibly wasn’t even necessary. A clean set of clothes would have done just fine, but to him, the suit and tie sounded right. He was adulting in a good way.

To the manager, the suit probably looked ridiculous. It was at least one size too big. The tie had been out of style for a decade, and wearing worn athletic shoes didn’t work at all. The manager knew right away that Tyrel was fronting, but he showed initiative. Tyrel had demonstrated a willingness to act outside of his usual comfort level to get the job. Anyone willing to do that is probably teachable, and that is what the manager most wanted out of his next employee.

Strategy: Test new ways of being. Somewhere ahead of us is a new and unique experience, one we currently don’t know how we will handle. For a young person, that might include college, the first real job, a relationship, marriage, parenting, travel, heartbreak, or a fantastic adventure. Adulting is a way for young people to try on new things before they are overwhelming. Adulting is practice, and it is useful. We ask ourselves, what would the emerging adult in

me do with this problem or opportunity? We should never forget what stage of life we live in right now, but practicing for the next is brilliant.

Walking on Eggshells and Living with Secrets

This section is for everyone. There is a saying among people in recovery. “We are only as sick as our secrets.” Why do we keep so many secrets from each other? Actually, using secrets to cope with life begins at home and becomes a life-long pattern. Millions of people eventually realize that they no longer need to keep secrets, that whatever the angry force or trouble they were once trying to protect themselves from is over. They are still walking in the shadow of realities that no longer exist for them.

Walking in shadows is an exciting place to start this chapter. One of the famous psychologists of the last century talked about the shadowlands. It is a metaphor, not an actual place we can visit, like the Badlands of Dakota or Death Valley California. No. He imagined that every time we try to make something happen but don’t follow through, and every time we face some horrible thing that is not resolved, the unresolved memory becomes a part of us that does not quickly go away. Those memories linger as a kind of feeling, a feeling that something isn’t right or is yet unfulfilled. The opposite is also true. The psychologist that talked about the shadowlands was Carl Jung. He wrote, “The most intense conflicts, if overcome, leave behind a sense of security and calm that is not easily disturbed.”

Jung believed that overcoming difficulties makes us stronger. What we do not overcome lingers and makes us vulnerable.

When we are young, even very young, we don't want to do anything to upset our parents. Parents are the source for everything! They are the judge and jury of our lives, and especially if they are a bit immature themselves, they can use that authority in ways that make us want to hide who we are. It doesn't take long to figure out what makes them angry. The first thing most of us try to do is not make them angry, which means we hide things from them.

Remember the dog that chewed the sofa? If that is my dog, I quickly learn to keep the dog in check. I know in advance that if he does something my father doesn't like, anything at all, even bark when someone comes to the door, I'll get in trouble.

Have you ever heard the saying, walking on eggshells? If someone does literally walk on eggshells that have been scattered on the floor, they crunch. You can listen to them being crushed when you step on them. If you are very careful with each step, you can avoid most of the noise.

Living in a household that walks on eggshells means that we have to watch out for what we say. We might not be able to discuss politics. If we like something our parents don't or if we look at someone in a certain way, trouble follows. That's what it means to walk on eggshells. We constantly monitor ourselves to avoid conflicts, and often this high level of monitoring involves everyone in the family. Everyone is super careful all the time because all it takes is one person breaking the unspoken rules, and chaos can erupt.

In these families, people keep secrets. They use that technique a lot.

“Where did you go last night? Have a good time?” a mother asks her teenaged son.

“Bowling. I rolled a couple of games at almost 230, which was way cool. And then we went to Chuck’s house and had pizza with his little brother because it was his birthday. Chuck put six candles on the pizza. It was ridiculous.”

In truth, the son in that little story didn’t go bowling and didn’t go to Chuck’s house. He actually hung around with a different friend, Bill. Why lie like that? Why did he keep his friendship with Bill a secret? In the son’s mind, his parents don’t like Bill. They don’t want their son to have anything to do with Bill, but they think Chuck is just fine.

Keeping secrets and lying becomes a way of life. It begins as a way to avoid trouble. If unchecked, it prevents maturity. How? Because we are not honestly accepting the consequences of our actions. That makes us inauthentic. Being inauthentic is another way of saying we are not honest. How can we take responsibility for who we are and our actions if we are not genuine, even with ourselves?

Does keeping secrets sound familiar? How often do you hide something from your family or friends? Why do you do it? The happiest and most mature people you know don’t do that. They have the confidence to be who they are all the time. Their friends and family trust that what they say is the truth, and there is no need to be careful around them, with just about any piece of information.

Carl’s Story

Carl was an adopted child. He had loving parents who would do just about anything for him. Right from the start, his parents realized

that they were in for a challenge. Carl had a severe case of what psychologists and educators call attention deficit disorder or ADHD. People with severe ADHD can't focus their attention very well, and that makes learning very difficult.

Being hyperactive is when someone can't seem to sit still for even a minute. The affected persons are always running around getting into things, playing with stuff and walking away, leaving things here and there around the house, and getting angry that they don't know where something is.

Carl demanded attention for every little thing, and the combination of all these problems created chaos in the house. Even in the specialized school they paid for him to attend, he made problems.

In his teens, things got even worse. Carl started using hard drugs. He stole money and property from his parents. He robbed neighbors and eventually ended up in a juvenile detention center. Finally, he was diagnosed as having a mental condition called bipolar 1 disorder. Bipolar individuals can one day be bouncing off the walls with enthusiasm for some of the wildest things. The next day they may be huddled in a corner, massively depressed. The condition has levels of intensity. Carl was prone to full hypomanic episodes and minor depressive episodes.

Carl had both ADHD and was bipolar. The combination made his parents confused and fearful. Sometimes, Carl would smash things in the house because of frustration. He got in fights on the street with perfect strangers and was arrested multiple times for doing so. On top of all this, Carl often refused to take the medications prescribed to him. Instead, he would buy or steal hard drugs on the street. Imagine what it would be like, living with Carl. You would be walking on eggshells, too. His parents never knew what was coming at them next.

Carl thought all of his parent's attention should go to him. He hated that they went to church and didn't like their friends. He didn't approve of most television shows and always got angry when they mentioned politics.

It may sound harsh, but when he was one day given a lengthy jail sentence for attacking an old woman in a grocery store, his parents' life got better. They still worried for him but worried less for themselves. Things got back to something of a normal state. The thing that continued in them for years to come was fear. Living with someone like Carl is not entirely different than surviving a war zone. After the action dies down, the memories and fears continue. It's called Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD for short. Many of our most exemplary veterans suffer from PTSD.

People with PTSD suffer from traumatic memories, unexplained and often unwarranted anger, and little control over their impulses. The risk of suicide is higher in groups that have PTSD. Another common thing is that many of these people are so on edge that they rarely discuss their feelings. That would help them a lot, just to let it all out with a psychologist or in a group, but they resist.

Do those parents still love Carl? They do. They still help him when they can, but they have learned to protect their lives through boundaries over many years. Their adopted son is now a grown man. He goes in and out of jail. He takes his medications for a while then stops. Bad things happen when he stops.

Keeping secrets about the trauma we experience while growing up is a bad idea. It's a bad idea not to tell someone what is going on in us, and essential that we find a way to discuss our problems.

Lessons and Strategies

How are you doing so far? We've discussed everything from DNA to PTSD and a whole lot in between. In this chapter, we discussed keeping secrets instead of becoming honest and open about who we are. Some of the happiest people on the planet are so because they quit keeping secrets. They accept who they are and accept the consequences of their actions. They also hold others in their lives accountable on the journey toward maturity. That's what life is. We are striving to become more knowledgeable and mature, or we are not. If the people around us are not on that same journey, they hold us back. Unless we are parents, we are not responsible for the maturity of others. We can love them, respect them for who they are, and try to help, but the goal is to become mature and responsible ourselves.

Secrets lead to isolation. The strategy you need most in these situations is awareness and reward. That's right. Reward yourself every time you abandon a secret. We've said many times that the fast path to maturity is accepting the consequences of our actions. Secrets are a way of avoiding conflict. Relying on secrets to cope with uncomfortable situations means that we are inauthentic. It's far better to live an honest and open life than to protect ourselves with too many secrets. A few are okay, but honesty is infectious. Being honest makes you a great role model for others to follow.

Violence

People who study these things say that violence is declining all across that country. That's a great thing! Unfortunately, the decline has not reached many of the poorest neighborhoods. In many of these neighborhoods, they don't have the same quality of services as other more affluent communities have. How the police behave, whether they have good schools or bad, and what types of business and recreational opportunities are available significantly impact neighborhoods.

Where violence is more frequent in the neighborhood, school grades go down. Being around the constant threat of violence is terrible for the health and development of the people that live in these areas. The whole community can be affected by even a few dangerous groups, and believe it or not, sometimes the monster is us, or at least we know and protect one of the monsters. The police call these areas hot spots, and they use different tactics in hot spots.

The good thing is that even in poor neighborhoods, where violence was once very high, a few solid social organizations working for the common good can change things around. It also helps if there are plenty of job opportunities for young people. Community participation in programs like community gardening, youth sports, block parties, and the like help stabilize neighborhoods. Families in stable areas do better. School grades often rise as crime statistics drop. Stable communities get better services. Businesses are more willing to put their stores there. Life is always better with less crime and violence.

On the other hand, it doesn't take many bad people to make a

neighborhood unstable and have everyone living in fear. It only takes a few. In a family setting, it only takes one.

Violence in the home and neighborhood is so important that this chapter has two stories. These stories use coarse language. If foul language bothers you a great deal, the author apologizes, but there are good reasons to write in a way that fits the topics.

Jimmy's Story

Jimmy heard the front door open and close. He thought it was probably his mother returning home, and he was about to call out to her. He wanted to say something funny and make her laugh. He loves how his mother laughs at his jokes, but then heard that heavy set of keys hit the stand in the entryway. Those were his father's keys.

His father found him in the kitchen. "Where is your mother?" he barked.

"Sorry. I haven't seen mom since breakfast."

"It's a simple damn question. Where the hell is she? Her job to be here. Where is she?"

Jimmy stood rigid, arms at his sides, chin tucked in. Anger came to his father's face the way it always does when he's drunk. He should have been at work instead of drinking at a bar, but here he was, sloshed and angry. "Give me a beer and go to the garage," His father said with that wicked smile Jimmy had seen too often recently.

"But I didn't do anything, pops. I've been here all day."

“What the hell did I just say? I said, get me a damn beer and go to the garage. You don’t get on it I’ll drag you out there, and you won’t like that a damn bit.”

Father took two steps forward and raised his arm, but Jimmy didn’t let him near. He dashed to the refrigerator and stood there, back to the door, fingers on the handle until his father left for the breezeway and interior garage door.

When his father was gone, Jimmy opened the refrigerator and grabbed a can of beer from a half-empty 24-pack cardboard container. He closed the door and then stared anxiously to where a set of kitchen knives rested on the counter next to the stovetop. He touched the handle of the chef’s knife. It was the longest and sharpest of his mother’s steel blades. It felt dangerous in his hand, and pulling it out made him feel invincible. Light streamed through the window and caught the edge of the blade, reflecting sunlight in his eyes. Before he left, he thought better of taking it with him and returned it to the wooden block.

Jimmy went to the garage door in the breezeway. He stood momentarily with one hand on the doorknob. Six months earlier, one of his friends ran away from home. At least, in the beginning, they sent texts to each other. Eventually, his friend’s parents cut off the phone. He thought hard about that possibility. He wondered if just leaving might be his best option, but every time he got serious about leaving, the same long list of reasons came into his brain. Where would he go? Jimmy didn’t know how he’d make money, where he’d be able to get food, or what it would be like sleeping outdoors. He’d seen homeless people with shopping carts piled high with whatever and tried to imagine himself having to live that way.

His friend left in the dead of winter. The Midwest is cold in winter.

There are days in Minnesota where a person could freeze to death in twenty minutes if they were not indoors or at least wrapped up in something warm. He worried about his friend in the first weeks that he was gone.

But then he got another text. His friend caught a ride in a truck and ended up in Arizona. Arizona was warm. The sun came out almost every day, and his friend made it sound like a real option. He said Jimmy should join him, and Jimmy thought about it. He even packed things in a bag one night, but a month later, his friend texted him again, begging for money.

The guy was desperate. He'd made it to New Mexico but hadn't eaten for a few days. He didn't feel well. Said it was hard just to get drinking water.

Jimmy didn't have any money to send. He felt terrible about that for the longest time. That one from New Mexico was the last text he ever got from his friend, and that thing about needing money, not feeling well, how it was even hard to get water? Home is Jimmy's only real option. Leaving would hurt his mother really bad, make her cry and cry. Besides, when she's around, his father is more reasonable. He hardly gets hit when his mother is in the house. And if he does hit him, and she finds out, she gets in his face.

Jimmy slowly turned the doorknob, opened the door to the garage, and stepped inside. His fear tripled. It was like the four times before.

His father leaned against his workbench with a belt in his hand. "Took you long enough," his father said.

Jimmy walked to his father, handed him the beer, and stepped back quickly. He'd run before in moments like this. He'd run outside, run

upstairs, and hid in his room. He hid in his parent's closet when he was younger and smaller, but running just made it worse.

His father accused him of holding back. "You're always covering for that bitch. It's so stupid. How many beatings do you need before I get some damn respect?"

"I respect you, dad. I respect you a lot. I just don't know where she is. She didn't say if she was going to the store or get her hair done or anything. Did you call her? Want me to call her?"

"Shut the hell up. See, that's the problem right there. All I get are stupid excuses. If you were going to call her, why didn't you pick up the phone in the first place?"

"I'll call her right now. No problem. I'll run get the phone." Jimmy turned and raced back into the hallway and kitchen. His phone was on the living room table where he left it earlier. He grabbed it and headed back to the garage, but this time he took the knife with him.

He held the knife behind his back as he hit his mother's number on his phone.

Standing in the garage now, knife hidden, his hand shaking almost uncontrollably, he taps the speaker function and holds the phone out in front of him so his father can hear.

The phone rings once, but his mother doesn't answer. It rings again. His father stands erect now and takes a step toward his son. The phone rings again. Father wraps the belt tightly around his burly fist and slaps the loose end of the strap into the palm of his other hand.

Jimmy takes a step backward. He thinks about running again and

this time never looking back. It's probably the right thing to do, but then he takes a stand. His hidden hand tightens about the handle of the knife. The phone rings again, and his mother finally answers this time.

"Jimmy. What's up?" His mother asks.

"It's dad. He's pissed off because you're not here. He wants to talk to you."

Jimmy extends the phone toward his father. That same terrifying smile washes across his father's lips as he slowly grabs the phone from Jimmy's hand. "You're supposed to be here in the house. Where the hell are you?" his father says into the phone.

Jimmy's phone is on speaker and he hears his mother ask where he's calling from. She asks why he isn't at work. And then, before he can answer, she tells his father that if he does anything to hurt Jimmy, if you even think about doing him harm, that'll be the end of it.

Father says, "Who do you think I am? He's just a kid. I asked him to get me a beverage is all. Where the hell are you? I'm hungry."

"The big man is hungry, is he?" Jimmy's mom says satirically.

In the silence that follows Jimmy's father half-heartedly raises his middle finger at his son and mouths a nasty word at him. Then his mother continues. "What do you guys want for dinner?"

Father nods toward Jimmy, flipping his chin in the air for a moment as if to ask what he wants. "What do you want to eat, boy?"

Jimmy searches for something to say. He finally asks if they can

have pizza.

“Kid wants pizza. How fast can you get it here?”

“Probably 20 minutes. I’ll get one of those already made ones. If you can’t wait, just grab a banana or something. I’ll be right home. And remember what I said to you, big man. You do anything to him, and we’re done.”

Jimmy feels the steel in his hand behind his back. He tightens the grip and reaches his other hand out for the phone. Father hands it to him and says, “Got off easy this time. Ever disrespect me like that again boy, I don’t give a shit what she says. You’ll get a whipping you won’t come back from.”

Jimmy takes his phone and slowly backs out of the garage. He returns to the kitchen and replaces the knife. Mumbling under his breath, he says, “Won’t be no next time.”

Trigger’s Story

Five teenaged boys stand on their side of an intersection. Three of them are black, two white. They’ve known each other since before grade school. If they hadn’t all dropped out of school, they’d be seniors by now and thinking about college. A few of Trigger’s friends are doing that. They are finishing their last year in school and preparing to get out of the neighborhood.

A black Cadillac Escalade slowly passes by. Two older men sit in the front seats. They nod. The boys stare and make comments about owning a ride like that someday and about how they would pimp the wheels. As the Cadillac passes, one of the boys wants to know why those tiny dick MFs are in their hood. None of the boys like that they are there.

“Hey, Trig, when’s your pops get out the big house? I heard he got a long bid. He doing all right?” One of Trigger’s friends asks.

“F if I know. You think I spend a dime to visit his sorry ass? BOSS got to do his own time.”

His friends laugh, and one of them says, “Heard that.”

“But who’s hitting your moms? I’d do her for ya. Make her happy with this pipe I hauling. Know what I’m saying?”

“FU, man. She gets all she need. Champ and my moms do conjugal. Feel me?”

Trigger’s friends laugh again. No one is seriously going anywhere near Trigger’s mom. They are just playing, and Trigger knows it. Trigger’s father may be doing time, but he is well known in the neighborhood and has muscle on the outside.

“Gimme some,” Trigger says, and his friend hands him the short end of a blunt he’s been hogging for a minute. Trigger takes a hit of the joint and passes it to another of his friends.

“He fighting in the joint?”

“Naw, well, maybe. The champ stays sharp. He makes a few trades training some of the inmates up there. You know how it is. Him being a former champ and all, they come around.”

“Champ’s putting on pounds, though.”

“Whatever. Still kick all you all sorry asses,” Trigger says, and he means it.

The Escalade comes around the corner on a second pass. “Fuck that, man?”

“You think they buying?” Trigger asks and takes a few steps toward the vehicle, but as he does, the riders open their windows, and the driver speeds up. Instantly, all five boys scatter in different directions. Trigger’s friends run up the street trying to get away while Trigger dashes across the street in front of the speeding Escalade. Two men begin firing weapons out of the passenger windows of the vehicle. Trigger’s friends are easy targets. Trigger pulls a revolver from a side holster and opens fire on the Cadillac, sending all six rounds he has into the side and back of the SUV. Within a few seconds, the attackers have rounded the corner at the end of the block and are gone.

Trig holsters his handgun and runs to his friends. Leaning over two of the boys that fell nearly in the same spot, he pulls his friend’s phone from his pocket and dials 911.

Momentarily, he gets an answer. “911, what’s your emergency?”

“I been shot. My friends is shot, too. Help.”

The emergency dispatcher asks a series of questions as Trigger wipes the phone clean with his T-Shirt and places it in the motionless hand of his friend. One of his other friends is limping away as fast as he can go. A fourth friend lays on the sidewalk, resting on one elbow. He is cussing at the pain. Trigger calls out to him. “Ambo’s coming. Ain’t a thing. Hold on.”

The boy right in front of Trigger isn’t breathing. He’s been hit twice in the back and once in the neck. Blood has pooled under him. Trigger digs through his friend’s pockets, removing a knife and drugs, then runs to his other friend, who has already pulled contraband from his

pockets. This friend has been hit once in his side and at least once in a leg. “Get your ass up,” Trigger says, but the boy says no. He wants to wait for the ambulance.

Trigger takes the boy’s weapons, and drugs then runs.

The only thing in Trigger’s mind as he runs through alleyways and across streets is how this isn’t going to stand. Someday, somehow, he’s going to find the men that did this and get revenge.

There is an abandoned lot full of trash next to the apartment complex where Trigger and his mother live. It’s a common hiding place for him and his friends. Before he goes into the building, he stashes weapons and drugs in a black garbage bag that’s tucked beneath an overturned abandoned piano. He’s used this place before when he was in a hurry.

Trigger’s mother is on the couch when he gets home. It’s nearly midnight. She doesn’t look up from her television but calls to him. “Hey, Trig. Come sit awhile, baby. I got some of the good stuff if you want a shot. I miss you.”

“Not tonight, mama. I got things to take care of. Catch you tomorrow. Don’t stay up too late.”

“In the morning, the first thing Trigger does is send texts to his boys. The messages just ask, “What up?”

Two friends answer, two do not. One of them replies that they got shot up in a drive-by, and he is in the hospital.

“Where at?”

“St. Bernard,” his friend texts back.

“No, dumbass. Where you got shot at? In your head?” Trigger knows full well where it happened and where his friend was hit. He was there. But over the years, he and his friends have all worked out that any contact with authorities can go wrong. It was his father that first taught him.

“On Parnel. Didn’t see a damn thing. Got it in my damn back and leg.”

“Damn, man. You good? Need anything?”

“All good. Probably be out in a couple of days. Already had surgery and all that. See you when I land.”

Trigger puts his phone away, goes to the kitchen, and drinks a glass of milk. He eats a couple of broken ginger snaps his mother left on the counter and dials Uber. Thirty minutes later, he’s escorted into a visitation area at Cook County Jail. Ten minutes after that, he’s talking with his father.

“Surprised to see you, Trig.”

“Hey, pops. Doing all right?”

“I’m doing. What you here for?”

Trigger’s eyes moisten. He wants to talk about everything but knows the guards listen.

“Come on now. Can’t be all that bad. Is your mom okay?”

“Yeah. She good. I just don’t know what to do anymore, Pops. My guys got hit last night. Shot up good. One of them didn’t make it, maybe two. The life is killing me. Know what I’m saying?”

“Who?”

“Not now. I just need to know what to do.”

“Look at me. You looking?”

“I see you, pops.”

“I need you to listen, too. Doesn’t matter how tough you is or how careful. I mean, look here. Been locked up two years with five, maybe six to go. Hear me? Whatever the streets got you into, lay it down. Don’t care what it takes. You lay it down. Got any cash?”

“A little.”

“Then you get on out of here, and you take mama with you. Get you a trailer in some little town somewhere and chill. Work a car wash if you have to. Get you that GED or whatever. I ever get out, I’ll come join you, and we can wash them damn rides together. You gots to do it, son. If you don’t? Only place you go is here or a pine box.”

“I don’t even know how to ...”

“You can do it! I’m telling you. Look at me. You looking? You bright, you strong, you can do it, and I’ll help you. You remember Stump? Go see Stump. Tell him I sent you. Tell him you need a little something to make a fresh start, you and your mama.”

“I got to handle this first.”

“No! You ain’t listening. Listen to what I say! You ain’t got to handle nothing. Nothing! Hear me? Don’t do it. You get yo ass over to Stump’s, then go home and pack.”

“Why Stump going to help?”

“Don’t you worry about that. I’ll take care of it. You just go see him soon as you leave. Go straight there. You hear me? I’ve had a lot of time to think up in here. Time is all I got, and I know this is right. You can do it. I should have done moved all of us a long time ago, but I wasn’t strong like you is. Promise.”

Trigger leans back in his chair. He didn’t expect this at all. What he expected was to hear his father tell him to track down the men that did this thing and take them out, but that’s not what happened. “You sure you’re okay, Pops?”

“I’m good. Never better. You promise me, son. Go see Stump. Don’t even think about it. Just pick up and go. Promise me.”

There is a long silence between them. Trigger feels closer to his father right now than he did as a kid shooting hoops in the park. “I promise. When we land someplace, I’ll give you a call and come visit.”

“Damn straight you will. Love you, son. Now get yo ass out of here and out of the neighborhood.”

Lessons and Strategies

The story you just read comes from a city with 7 times the crime as any other American city. Low-income communities and crime are linked. In the neighborhood where Trigger lives, the average income is just \$12,000, and even though incomes don't rise, the cost of housing has increased by over 3 percent every year.

No one should deal with violence and crime on their own. It takes the whole community working together, and it takes time. The only advice anyone in these communities needs to hear is to work together for change.

There are no perfect strategies to deal with violence. Violent people cross a line that is difficult to come back from. A violent person doesn't usually listen to reason, so having a conversation doesn't go very far. That violent person saying they are sorry a thousand times does not make up for the thousand times they let their anger and emotions get out of control. They lose all credibility.

If you are being abused with violence, become accountable to yourself. Protect your future by coming up with a plan. There is probably nothing more critical to your wellbeing at the time, so make that the highest priority. Get help.

When Parents Break

Some parents give up on their kids. Some kids give up on their parents. The hardest decision any parent or child will ever make is to split up before the social contract is completed. If we parent a child, we are bound to raise that child until they can take care of themselves. That is the unspoken agreement, and the government agrees. Parents are responsible for their kids until 18 years old, but some parents can't handle the work.

Families fall apart for many reasons. Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce here in the U.S. Drugs and alcohol often play a role in broken families. Mental illness can be a factor, and money troubles are high on the list.

When one of the children in the family is born with severe autism, or if they are always angry and violent for some reason, they can become a threat to the other children, the parents, neighbors, others at school, and the situation becomes complicated for everyone involved. Many parents break under these conditions. When one parent leaves that situation, the other is in real trouble. Often, they must rely on the state for assistance.

A dangerous parent often requires police intervention. That can be true of a child that has gotten out of control as well. There are families where the parents never completely give up and yet find it necessary to send one of their children into the system to protect the others.

This guide does not dive deeply into the psychology of violence. We touched on it in the last chapter, but there are thousands of stories

to be told. We just know it happens, and when it does, everyone suffers.

The thing about love is that it can live right along the side of fear, depression, and the need for security.

Marsha's Story

Marsha has a different story. At age 13, her mother and stepfather were in a severe car accident. Her mother sustained brain damage, and two years later, her father still limps. The problem for Marsha is that she has to stay home and take care of her mother all the time. That is a notable point of contention in the home. She knows she shouldn't, but she began leaving the house to meet with her friends.

At first, her friends came by to hang with her in the backyard. They felt sorry for her. But other things became more attractive to them, and soon she would leave for more extended periods.

They went to the beach for an hour or hung out under one of the railroad bridges in town where they could vape and drink wine.

She wouldn't always get home in time. On days like that, her mother would have had an accident that needed to be cleaned up. Her father knew this was going on and became more agitated every time it happened. Finally, she went too far. She'd met a boy she really liked. That was the start of the end.

One day her man came to the house late in the afternoon. We call him a man here only because he was 18. Marsha was only 16. Men are not supposed to have sex with women under the age of consent, which for them was 18.

They went to the bedroom, leaving her mother in her wheelchair in front of the television. They made sweet love. Without intending to do so, they fell asleep.

When Marsha's father came home, he flew into a rage. He punched her boyfriend in the face, pushed him around, and screamed at both of them. Marsha was pulled out of the house by her boyfriend for her own safety. Rather than going back inside to smooth things over with her father, they left.

In the morning, she called her father, and they had a brutal argument on the phone. He said she was useless white trash and had worn out her welcome. He told her he didn't care where she went, go live with her dude, as he called him, but if she couldn't do the job of taking care of her own mother, she wasn't needed nor welcome.

Marsha had dreamed of getting away for a while, so at that moment, even though she believed her father secretly wanted her to come home and work things out, she decided to stay on her own. The decision made her happy, but not for long. None of her friends, including her boyfriend, could take her in.

A big decision had to be made by Marsha. Either she would go home and beg forgiveness or try to make it on her own. Either she would have to go home or come up with a new plan.

There was a fence across the street from Marsha's father's house. Three days after she'd left, she hid there a while, then snuck into the home three days later, when her step father left for work. Marsha had snuck in and out of her house so many times while her father was sleeping that it was easy for her to find the little money she'd hidden away, pack a few things, and get out without being seen. She wished she'd had time to hug her mother one last time. Her mother

often responded to a hug with a smile, but that wasn't possible. In her absence, he'd hired a professional assistant, something she had begged her father to do for almost a year.

She bought a bus ticket and headed out west to get help from an aunt and uncle. She didn't know them all that well and didn't plan that they would take her in, but that's what she did.

The bus ride to Arizona seemed to take forever, and when she arrived, she found that her relatives had moved. She didn't know where exactly and decided it didn't matter. What mattered was getting work, and that's what she did. She lied to the operator of a fast-food restaurant, saying that her family had just moved to Arizona and she needed the work to help care for her mother. In this story, the mother was broken physically, and the father eventually lost all patience with his daughter.

Lessons and Strategies

Divorce is one of the most painful things children endure in their early years. Being pushed out of a house is also one of the most dangerous situations. Let's hope neither of these outcomes ever happen to you.

If your story is like Marsha's, or more like Jimmy's friend who ended up in New Mexico, find out where you can get help. Every state has resources designated for homeless children. There are shelters and systems available for everyone in trouble. These are not always the most convenient nor inviting places to be, but it is far better to get some kind of help than none at all.

Children can be vulnerable in the home, but they are in real danger when they end up on the street.

Strategies to consider when your parents break or get divorced are awareness, encouragement, agreement, and accountability. Don't let your parents carry too many secrets. Let them know you are aware that they are struggling and agree that they will share how they feel and what they may be planning to do. Remember the social contract. Your parents are responsible for your well-being. If they can't handle that responsibility, then openly discuss the situation and see if there is anything you can do or say that might help them through the moment. Often, the problems your parents are facing at the moment are temporary. Let them know you still have needs, but also encourage them. Let them know they are probably not alone in their problems and though you have no authority, you will do what you can to help.

Looking Back

Unfortunately, not everyone makes it to the end of their parental social contract and moves on to the next stage in life, learning to do it all without those parental rules and resources. Too many kids are dependent upon their parents, siblings, or the state, deep into their twenties and beyond.

But let's say you are healthy and well equipped to begin a life of your own. Your journey may start with college or a trade school. In some families, the children work with or for their parents and may stay at home longer than others. Some kids move into apartments a few miles from their parents and share living expenses for a while with friends. For others, joining the military may be their first experience

away from home.

Those first few weeks and months are marked by an awareness of how different things are. Getting out of school and living in an apartment or dormitory is very exciting and a bit frightening at the same time. That's just the beginning. Falling in and out of love, maybe getting married, or having our first child, are all milestones worth celebrating. Each one should cause us to stop and to reflect on where we have come from and where we are going next.

Wherever we end up, we must look back at our childhood and how our parents raised us. What were we taught about living? What rules do we carry forward in life that may no longer fit? These are questions every one of us must answer on our own. Remember, we can't change our genetic makeup, but we are certainly able to work on what we do and become.

You'll meet great new role models in your life. These may come to you as mentors, teachers, gurus, friends, or just traveling companions willing to experience life as it comes. There will be those you work with, new neighbors, and maybe even children of your own. Wherever life takes you, remember the lessons you picked up while learning to accept the consequences of your action and, yes, from your parents.

People come in all shapes and sizes. They are sometimes mean, but more often loving and kind like you. Everyone has a story. Everyone has a message worth hearing if we only take the time to smile, listen, and forgive.

When you get older, and by that, we mean really old, you will undoubtedly think back to all the places where you lived and many of the people you encountered. Even in old age, it is not too late to

learn forgiveness. Letting go becomes easier when very old as well. After all, the end of life is all about letting go.

Don't carry resentments. Try not to live a life with regrets.

Here is the final story in this guide. It's about an old man who looks back at his life in a particularly unique way.

Paul's Story

Not everyone lives a long life, but Paul did. What he remembered most when he was old was something that happened when he was young.

Paul rose slowly from his bed and mindlessly fell once again into the routine of coffee, shaving, toast with pepper jelly, and then pressing the button in the garage to raise the door on another day. All he thought about these days was the time he had with his grandfather as a child. The synapse in his brain, those tiny gaps between this and that, had fused into a compelling memory. The memory was of a time he had with his grandfather as a child. At odd moments, he recalled names of the places he'd gone. He tried to relive the sounds and smells that he'd carried with him all of his life. Places like Isle Royale and Thunder Bay, destinations in Canada somewhere haunted him.

He was so young back then that now, in old age, he wasn't even sure where these places were.

All that remained were the mental pictures of walking on the shore of Lake Superior with his grandfather, and how the waves sounded, and how cool and wonderful it felt in the shade of cedar trees. He never forgot how smooth the rocks were just below the surface in

the shallows or the flicker of light that shown there quickly as a Northern Pike swam by.

Back then, all he wanted was to live like his grandfather. He never understood why his father hadn't tried to be more like him, too. Why hadn't he, in all his years, even taken one long walk in the woods as he was encouraged to do so long ago? Maybe if he'd done that early on, he could have avoided a life without meaning.

Grandfather had been a lumberman, soldier, railroad engineer, and wanderer. He was small in stature but unwavering in principles. Grandfather was the most fantastic storyteller ever. He told stories of working on the railroad and arm wrestling with giant men. He'd fought in the great war. Grandfather said God lives in the forest and rarely comes out. Grandfather had said if you want to meet him or your guardian angels, you have to go there and spend time, let them look you over to decide if you are worthy. Grandfather had heard God breathing, he'd said. He'd met his guardian angel, and the angel loved his company.

A friend to all creatures, Grandfather spent weeks at a time wandering in the north with only a daypack. He had nowhere in particular to be and nothing more important to do than walk and sit and stay awhile. He knew moose, bear, the big cats, and wolves, all of whom he'd met on many occasions and sometimes fought.

But Paul's father was an accountant. He'd badgered Paul all through his education to become one, too. That's what Paul did. He became an accountant. There is nothing at all wrong with being a numbers guy unless you hate your job. Paul hated his career for over four decades.

In his late years, he spent lunch with a sandwich wandering through

Google Earth on his computer. He followed the Trans-Canada Highway or dreamed of visiting Kama Hills. He found sounds on the Internet, so he could listen to waves on the rocks and loons in the distance. He used the app at night when he was tired and wanted to sleep. He had a spray at home that reminded him of pine trees, and sometimes he actually had pine boughs in his house for months and months beyond Christmas, just to relive his dreams.

But the swirl of smoke and smell of a good campfire, the glow of the sun at dawn, or the chill of northern lake water in spring are not present in the pixelated shorelines and flattened topography of Google maps. An app is no substitute for the real thing.

Paul felt confused and embarrassed by how he'd lived his life. Why was this memory so important to him? Why, after nearly sixty years, was he so driven to find that spot on the shore of Lake Superior? It couldn't be done, or could it? For all he knew, someone purchased the land where he and his grandfather had camped back then. Everything is for sale or already sold these days. He'd sold his entire life to men that wouldn't give him the time of day outside of work.

He imagined that some affluent buyer would have built on the land and made that big rock and the curve of the shoreline where they walked, even the little creek they found, into private property. They might have put a fence up, and he would never be able to find it. His grandfather had said the land would never be developed, but even he may have been wrong.

One day just after retirement, Paul rummaged through his dead father's things. He'd come upon a musty faded postcard he and his grandfather had written and mailed back to his father while on their trip long ago. He remembered having breakfast on that day. Where was it? Thunder Bay! The postcard had a picture of Thunder Bay.

His grandfather laughed at the pencil point as he wrote that note because it was loose and wiggled. The writing, in his grandfather's hand, talked about their drive up.

Seeing that card flooded Paul with memories and brought tears to his eyes. They had driven to Canada in his grandfather's Studebaker Hawk, with its forward-looking lines and fins on the back. A smoldering pipe of tobacco rattled in the ashtray, and they talked about fish, traps, and all the uses for pine pitch and moss. He heard about catching sucker fish in the spring with bare hands, flipping them onto the banks by the dozens, and smoking them later. It can be done in the spring because their bodies are still firm and delicious after a winter of struggling, grandfather had said. There was a lesson in that.

Reading that postcard brought memories of crackling campfires, knot tying, his grandfather's jackknife, the smell of bacon, the clatter of cookware in a gunny sack, and the old canvas tent that he'd used countless times. He remembered how it was patched in a dozen places. There were loons then. Maybe they are still there. His grandfather sometimes drank right out of creeks back then, but he wouldn't let Paul do it. Said you had to have been blessed by the forest.

"Things are different now," Paul told himself. He'd wanted to be a different person all his life as if it were baked into him but abandoned. He'd let God down and was ashamed.

Now, even though he had the time to do it, if he went on that quest today, he'd be confined to a postage stamp of a campground. It wouldn't be the same experience. He'd justified just sitting in that cubicle for years, but time was running out. Death lurked in his lungs, heart, and arteries. It was time to go.

Paul's grandfather spent time as an infantryman. He was 17 when he entered the military, and he told stories of shells exploding up and down the line and of dead friends hung up in barbed wire. He spoke of driving horses, arm wrestling contests, winters in the far north so cold your pee would freeze into wire before it hit the ground. The stories can't be found again. They are buried under layers of noise. Even if they are discovered, retelling falls on deaf ears, but when grandpa returned from the war, his parents lived in the Poor House in Duluth, Minnesota. It was a shame, he'd said, to contain people for being poor like that, but then he laughed about it, too. He'd met a girl that worked there.

It took years to realize how old his grandfather had been at the time they went camping. Grandfather was timeless to him as if age didn't matter at all. He had been in his mid sixties. Paul was in his mid-sixties now, but his grandfather had been ten times more fit. He lived when many men still knew the land, could navigate on instinct and fix anything in their domain. There was a calm in his presence, which made age irrelevant. Paul had never achieved nor witnessed that way of being again. If he'd just done it right and followed Grandpa's lead, he wouldn't have spent life in a cubicle. Paul thought that with the right profession, a man could stay young. At least stay in touch with the earth. As grandfather had urged him to do many times, he'd have walked ground where few others dared to go.

So much for wandering, wilderness, and nature. Who had time anymore to sit by the edge of a river or lake for even a day? But grandpa had done that many times. It's who he was, he'd said. It was in his genes, and Paul had those same genes.

Paul had a wife for most of his life. She hated the idea of camping or even walking in the park. She loved television shows and shopping. In her estimation, Paul was weak, and that was probably true. He

had let her and his daughters run him in circles.

He had an honest job, though, status in the church, and he'd kept his lawn almost perfect. Big deal, he thought now. He'd been a dedicated husband and father, which everyone except for him seemed to value. To him, each piece of this cobbled identity was a hollow reed, buffeted by the waves he recalled from Lake Superior. Ground down by time into a lonely stubble.

Eight months before taking retirement, sitting alone in a coffee shop one day, he broke down crying. A strange woman had touched his shoulder and asked if he was all right. For the first time in decades, he said no, picked up his things, and left.

That experience led to the plan. Enthusiasm! There was something in front of him again, something worth experiencing. He would find that place shared with his grandfather, the truth would overtake him, bless him, and he would somehow get redemption. He was going on an adventure.

Corporate noise receded. Huge rocks at the water's edge beckoned. Sleeping beneath maple leaves, pine boughs, and northern stars was all that mattered.

Paul realized the drive from Redford Township near Detroit would take him across Michigan from bottom to top, across the great bridge, and northward through the Soo into Canada. He would break the trip into parts, stay at motels and take his time. That was the plan, and that is what he did.

When Paul arrived at the campground he hoped was right, he just loafed about for a day recovering from the drive. He'd set his tent on a protruding root and had to move it twice. If his wife were alive,

she would be complaining, wanting to go, and for a moment, her memory almost won. She would have hated him for bringing her here, and she would have had a lot to complain about.

He'd dressed oddly. He wore a pale plaid polo shirt and green shorts. He felt like an abandoned schoolboy on a mission to find shelter. These boyish dreams were crazy. He was clearly out of his mind.

Millions of Americans take camping vacations. What Paul was not prepared for was how they all ended up here, in his campground. Marlboro men with gadgets, Lycra-clad young executives riding thousand-dollar bicycles, and anglers gingerly parking \$150,000 fishing boats had all converged on this sacred piece of land. Everywhere there were loud children on the move, giggling and laughing, sometimes with iPads or smartphones in hand. RVs rested in long rows, and he instantly had neighbors. Among them, would-be naturalists groaned and shook their heads as dune buggies, three and four-wheeled machines, boom boxes, and whining city-dwellers fought over sites closer to the water, closer to the restrooms, closer to each other. Grandfather had often said that those who know what they are doing can carry all the essentials in a rucksack. For Paul, even his car trunk had not been large enough.

Watching the water helped. Sitting on rocks trying a breathing meditation found on the Internet helped, too. He read part of a book and took walks. Soon enough, worry subsided.

Early in the morning on the third day, Paul crawled on his hands and knees from the warmth of his sleeping bag. He pulled on his clothes. He unzipped the tent and stepped into the dim light of their pre-dawn campground.

The only other person stirring nearby was another elderly man. Paul

thought the man didn't know what to do with himself, either. They nodded to each other and went about their menial chores – two stiff old men surrounded by tents, trailers, and gadgets, looking for a place to piss in the morning fog.

Paul made coffee, reviewed his maps, and committed to walking any trail that touched the lake. As he walked, he recalled loading the trunk of his Ford Taurus. The trip started in the pre-dawn darkness. A full cooler, maps, sleeping bag, and pillows sat on the seat next to him. A photograph of his grandfather and he sat on the dashboard.

Twenty minutes of walking is all it took that morning, far less time than he remembered or imagined. The sun had already burned through the fog, and he felt warm and alive. What caught his attention was a somewhat familiar fork in the trail marked by a large rock. Behind that rock, surrounded by a thicket of brush, he found the stream he was looking for. It was narrow, maybe a foot deep, and filled with cold water flowing over packed sand and pebbles. He removed his shoes and carefully followed the water upstream for ten or fifteen minutes to a small waterfall. It was smaller than he remembered. The creamy brown water cascaded between rounded boulders and fell just a few feet before continuing to the lake.

At that place, where the waterfall sang, the world stopped. His heart raced. He sat on a fallen log amid a thick bed of moss and pine needles. Silver maples and pine boughs hid most of the direct sunlight. Water had come through this place for centuries, his grandfather had told him. It was a sacred, meaningful place, recalled through years of boring meetings, during arguments with his wife, during every personal crisis. This wedge of earth had not changed all that much. It wasn't owned. It was, as his grandfather had predicted, property of the state, owned by everyone.

The trees seemed different, foliage certainly, but stones don't change quickly. It all came back to him in a flood of memories.

Others had been there. He saw wrappers and bear cans. Someone's initials were carved into a tree, but this was the place, their place.

Paul followed a stone outcropping away from the creek for what he calculated was twenty paces marked by an eleven-year-old boy years ago. He came to a split rock in the shape of a jagged arrowhead. He followed an imaginary line cast by that arrow for another ten paces. He knelt and brushed pine needles from the dark earth below. Beneath the bed of needles, he found the three baseball-sized smooth rocks he and grandfather had placed there. Breath caught in his throat, and he nearly wept.

Unearthing didn't take long. A small spade soon discovered a rusted metal box. Inside the box, nearly deteriorated rags still cushioned a mason jar, and in the jar that had been tightened by his grandfather's strong hands, he found the message he and his grandfather had written to themselves. Their secret bond was still there. He recalled the act but not the contents.

Paul carried the jar to the arrowhead rock, sat, and solemnly turned the lid open. The red rubber seal that had protected the contents all these years practically fell apart in his hands.

In the jar were pictures of the two of them, a baseball card, and a handful of old coins. Most of them were buffalo nickels. A silver dollar issued the year of their trip was the most interesting of the coins.

There was also a note in two parts.

“What I like,” Paul had written at his grandfather’s suggestion. “I like baseball more than anything. I like fishing and camping with my grandpa. This is his picture. I am eleven, and someday I will come back to this secret time capsule and read it and remember being here. I hope I have a good life and get to be a forest ranger.”

And his grandfather had written, “This is my grandson, Paul. I was so lucky to know him that words fail me.”

Paul returned the yellowed and mildewed contents to the jar and laid flat on his back in the pine needles for a long while. Before he left that place for good, he placed the contents of a new time capsule into the hole and covered it ritually with the movements of his grandfather’s hands. He honored the spot, as the two of them had done years before, by sipping a bottle of root beer.

Near twilight, Paul sat on a bench outside his tent, watching flames rise and fall from his campfire. He imagined who could possibly one day find his message, cast not into the ocean, but into the soil, beneath the ground, beneath rocks and trees, perhaps beyond the reach of history.

The new note in the bottle read as follows. “My grandfather and I were here. We had this place in common. I missed him in life, and I will join him in death. Not knowing what else to do with emptiness, I fill this void with words and place them here for you to find.”

