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insights and encouragement from the “home front”

# MEMOIRS OF A MOM

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July 2008

## Spreading Generosity

Parenting, it seems, is a complex balance of providing enough without providing too much. A simple dinner of chicken, green beans and mashed potatoes is providing enough unless the chicken is fried, the green beans are slathered in butter sauce and the mashed potatoes are covered in gravy. Keeping balance at the dinner table is the easy part. It is the balance in life’s important lessons which caused me to pause repeatedly during the years my children were learning those lessons.

In keeping with the work of Abraham Maslow, a noted psychologist who presented to America the “Hierarchy of Human Needs,” I wanted to raise self-actualized children. People who are self-actualized, per Maslow, have a sense of what is true, are aware of truth, justice and harmony and focus outside of themselves. Simple, right?

During those important middle-childhood years, I wanted to encourage my children to be externally focused and more specifically, I wanted them to share. It seemed simple. If a friend comes over, you need to share your toys. Share the snack. Share the computer. Sometimes it worked and occasionally there was a faux pas. I remember explaining that sharing spelling words during the test was not sharing, but rather cheating. I remember explaining that the coins left on Dad’s dresser were not there to be shared. But as my children grew and learned more of life’s lessons, could they learn to share? Would they be generous?

Generosity is vital to American life. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Alexis deToqueville visited this new country called America and wrote his famous *Democracy in America*, he noted that Americans of the time were different than our European neighbors. This French historian and political thinker observed barn raisings and community “town hall” meetings where people provided not only resources but also solutions. I wanted my children to be generous, with their time, their talents and their resources. But these two children were not born in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rather in a time when the zip code 90201 was recognizable and their fellow students were more Gucci than grounded.

The years have passed and I am now able to witness the generosity of my children. Yeah, the presents and thoughtful cards at holidays and Mother’s Day are nice – but I am most excited to see true generosity. Recently my son helped an older woman at the airport parking garage. It can be difficult to find the right car within the rows and rows of vehicles all held together with the hot concrete of a Las Vegas parking structure. And she wasn’t sure if it was a Nissan or an Acura. And my daughter helped a friend move. This friend wasn’t organized, wasn’t motivated and wasn’t very strong. But friends are friends despite their ability to label and move boxes.

So I asked them if it was hard to be generous. Both looked at me as though I was posing a question for a quantum physics exam. Hard, not even. So I asked where they learned to be giving. Simple. From you, Mom.

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