

Give thanks to 'mean' parents

I had the world's meanest parents.

Oh, they did a good job of covering for themselves, with all of their smiles and hugs and "I love yous" and stuff. But they couldn't fool me. No, sir. They were mean, all right. Clear through to the heart.

You wouldn't believe some of the stuff they made us do. Like work, for example. You would have thought we were indentured servants or something, the way



Joseph Walker

Value Speak

they made us work around the house. And not just normal things like making our own beds and keeping our rooms tidy. We had to help clean the rest of the house, too. And we had to do the dishes almost every night. I was the only boy in the sixth grade with dishpan hands.

Then there was all of the outside work. Since I was the last of four sons living at home, it became mine at a very early age, as if my older sisters couldn't get their precious hands dirty. The vegetable garden was mine to weed. The garage was mine to sweep. In the winter, the sidewalks were mine to shovel. And the lawn was mine to mow, trim and rake — steep slopes, powerless mower and all.

Of course, in some ways my sisters had it tougher than I did. When miniskirts became fashionable, for example, they were still wearing dresses that went all the way to the knee. They were never allowed to call boys (although I know for sure that Kathy made a few calls to Rick George while the Gestapo was watching Bonanza). And when they started dating, their boyfriends had to come to the door to pick them up and meet Mom and Dad — the girls couldn't just run out when the boy honked his horn, like normal teenagers.

And that isn't the half of it. These people were into total control. My brothers and sisters and I had no lifestyle of our own. We had to ask for their permission for everything — if we could have some soda, if we could go to a friend's house, if we could stay up late and watch Johnny Carson, if we could have a sleepover. None of us could date until we were 16, we had nightly curfews as long as we lived at home and we weren't allowed to buy a car with our own money until we had saved up enough to pay for our college education.

In other words, none of us bought a car of our own until after we left home.

We tried to convince our parents that all of the other kids in the neighborhood had a lot more freedom than we did, but do you think they cared? I sometimes wondered if they had even heard of the U.S. Constitution or the Bill of Rights.

On top of it all, they seemed to function under the impression that a parent is, first and foremost, a teacher. They thought it was their job to teach us the things they considered important, like how to get along with others, how to cooperate, how to obey rules, how to uphold our values, how to respect the rights of others, how to find validation and satisfaction through service. And they thought that the best way we could learn those lessons was to live them — every day of our lives. No matter what.

And what do they have to show for it? Not much — just eight devoted children who grew to adulthood reasonably happily and well-adjusted. Don't get me wrong — we have each had our share of problems. But for whatever it's worth, we all make our living honestly. We all pay our taxes. We are all active in church and civic affairs.

And we are all trying to do our part for the future by being just as "mean" to our children as our parents were to us.

Joseph Walker is a nationally syndicated columnist who lives in American Fork.

Dear Kids:

Just a note to remind you of how grateful you should be for your mean parents + give you some added mention to tighten up on those mean kids of your own!

what? Our grandkids mean?
Nonsense.
mom + Dad Hall