

Too Much, Too Soon

By Patti Teel

Raising my own children taught me that I owe my parents a debt of gratitude, not only for the things they did for me—but for the things they were wise enough NOT to do. Sometimes, we can do too much for our children and rather than helping them, we can keep them from becoming responsible, resilient and self-reliant. By not granting my every wish, my parents helped me to have the incentive to delay gratification for a long-term goal and to become self-reliant and capable. Like most parents of their era, they drove less, gave my brothers and myself less in the way of money and material things and entertained us less. But we didn't feel any less loved.

It was a time when children learned to stand on their own two feet and heard things like, “you made your own bed, now you have to lie in it,” or “you reap what you sow.” Too often today, we take responsibility for our children's irresponsibility—robbing them of the natural consequences that could teach them to become accountable. For example, my friend's daughter, (a senior in high school) didn't pass a class because she didn't do the required homework. My friend blamed herself and said, “It was my fault; I should have made sure that she finished her work.” Believe me, that's not what my mother or father or other parents of their era would have said!

In many ways, today's children are not as self-sufficient or responsible as their parents were at the same age. At the same time, they are growing up in a society that inappropriately exposes them to adult topics. Understandably, this leads them to believe that they're much more 'grown up' than they really are. It's difficult for parents to protect their children from being exposed to too much too soon, especially by the media. However, it's important to try to do so because the problems that stem from this type of exposure are likely to snowball. In addition to becoming anxious and having sleep problems, children may become precocious and knowledgeable regarding adult topics. They become late bloomers with an early agenda and begin participating in grown up activities long before they have the emotional maturity to handle them. Of course, this leads to a whole host of additional problems.

In addition to being exposed to inappropriate topics, the media also teaches children to expect a lot in terms of toys and other material possessions. I will readily admit that at times I have succumbed and given my children too much. However, I'm not sure they would agree with my assessment of the situation...yet.

One day, perhaps when my children are raising their own sons and daughters, they will appreciate that I tried not to do too much for them. Since it may be a while before I hear these words of appreciation from them, I'd like to take this opportunity to express my own appreciation for some of the things that my parents didn't do for me.

They didn't do my work for me. I was expected to help with the dinner and the dishes, to do my own schoolwork and to complete my own chores. This was not done for a monetary reward. Like most families, we shared in the work and in the bounty. We knew 'we were all in it together' and we learned to be responsible not only for ourselves, but for those we loved.

They didn't drive me to countless lessons or after school activities. For the most part, I was expected to entertain myself. Therefore, I had a lot of carefree time—free to be creative, resourceful, and to enjoy my own company.

They didn't give me too much money or buy me too many expensive toys or clothes. I learned that they really weren't necessary and that if there was something I really wanted, I needed to work for it.

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

They didn't pay for my entire college education and consequently, I valued it. In addition, my numerous part time jobs taught me a great deal about people and prepared me to support myself.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.