

JOHN ROSEMOND'S Traditional Parenting

Weekly Column

6/03/08

Boy's parents shocked his teachers by supporting them

About ten years ago, I created two files that have been growing ever since. One is labeled "RALPH," which stands for Rosemond's Awfully Ludicrous Parenting Honors. Into it I put true stories that are, as the title indicates, ludicrous, like the story of the 7-year-old boy who took his parents' car and drove to the store to get a box of his favorite cereal. The cereal company rewarded him with a year's supply and a new bicycle. Hello?

The other file, which grows more slowly than the former, is labeled "Parenting at its Best!" It receives stories of parents who have swum righteously against the prevailing parenting tides, often becoming the object of much criticism in the process. The parents in the latter category are role models, as are Billy Bob and Lillian (not their real names), the parents of a sixth-grade boy who decided that he was too cool for school, and the rules were for fools, but who's now singing "Don't be Cruel."

On his latest report card, George (not his real name either) brought home three C's and notes from his teachers indicating he wasn't paying attention in class or working at his full potential. Seems he was spending a good amount of class time drawing cartoons and reading books he found more entertaining than those assigned by his teachers. His parents immediately suspended social events, television, and computer privileges until further notice. They sent a letter to the teachers thanking them for giving them a heads up on George's attitude.

"We have explained to him that the glorious days of elementary school are over and it is now time to buckle down and put forth his best effort," they wrote. "Besides hurting his grades, it is also rude of him to not give you his undivided attention." They closed by assuring the teachers of their full support and asking them to keep them posted concerning any future problems. These days, George can often be found doing hard labor in his parents' rather large yard.

Lillian later told me the teachers seemed genuinely shocked that she and Billy Bob had backed them up so unconditionally and been willing to call their son's rude behavior for exactly what it was. Their shock reflects the

sad state into which American parenting, in general, has deteriorated over the past generation or so. Once upon a time, when children caused problems for their teachers, their parents lowered the boom at home. That was a guarantee. Parents expected children to pay attention and show respect for teachers and work to their full potential. When children fell short of those standards, “there are no excuses” was the operative proviso.

When today’s teachers are so bold to point out problems to parents, they hear all manner of excuses from “he is bored in your class” to “he thinks you don’t like him” and all manner of equal ludicrousness in between. Then there’s the panoply of supposedly gene-based disorders that prevent children from paying attention and doing their best, the genes of which were mysteriously dormant when I was a child. Teachers also tell me that they report malfeasance on the part of a child at some trepidation because not only do so many parents not support them, but a good number will respond by accusing them of creating the problem in the first place. In short, a child misbehaves and a teacher ends up on the hot seat.

So, Lillian and Billy Bob, you are champions in a time when champions are hard to come by. Thank you from those of us who know that proper parenting makes for a more civil world. (When I checked just before submitting this column, George was finishing the year with four A's and three B's. Yard work was very therapeutic when I was a kid, too.)