

# Mom and The U.S. Constitution

I was musing the other night on crime and punishment and freedom. I often think deeply on issues in which I have no expertise and feel quite satisfied when I solve any of humanity's crucial problems.

I had read of a prisoner's case brought against the government for cruel punishment. I think a prisoner's rights are related to my personal freedoms, because the government's sway over both of us is limited by similar law. Damage to his rights could eventually lead to a weakening of mine. So, the proper administration of justice is important to all of us.

Probably the most effective person I knew when it came to punishment was Mom. Her personal attention to my boyhood faults and her precise judgments were executed from a base of love, but they clearly trampled on my civil rights. She could not have cared less.

Mom would have no problem running a prison. She knew how to call 'em and she knew what you were thinking and she knew what hurt and what didn't and she didn't give a rat's ass if your best friend Tommy got away with murder. But if you said "rat's ass," you got another night of jail at home with no TV.

As I grew toward puberty and asked Mom who gave her the authority to Lord it over me, her answer snapped back without hesitation. "GOD anointed me. Now go clean up your room!" At age twelve I was almost as tall as the little woman. When I offered to arm wrestle her to determine if it was really my turn to do the dishes, she accepted. And won.

The United States Constitution would not allow my mother's brand of punishment to violate an inmate's human rights. Mom might do a great job running the

State Prison, but she would eventually spend all her time in court defending herself against civil rights suits.

The Constitution also serves to prevent the practice of Mom-ism outside prison walls by those who want to control us as though we are children. Laws said to protect us continue to whittle away our freedoms. Rights are demoted to privileges and whatever is dangerous becomes licensed. We see this over-protective attitude in the public sphere's fixation on safety and security. Often the new laws and regulations seem very practical.

But that's the great thing about America. Sometimes we're willing to replace practical wisdom with impractical abstractions, because without an impractical idea like freedom our personal abilities could not unlock our promise. We wouldn't live up to our potential nor mature as a nation.

My mother knew when to stop acting like a Mom. It was probably difficult for her. Allowing me to follow my own paths as I grew up may have seemed impractical to her at times. But she knew I would in some ways be rid of her in the future, as she had grown beyond her parents. I would build a worthwhile life based on my freedom rather than another person's wisdom, even hers.

The power Mom wielded over me as a child was long ago replaced by a mutual respect, built brick by brick while I advanced to maturity. Mom became important to me as a person and not as a set of rules. I was free to do as I pleased, to enjoy the fruits or accept the consequences of my actions. She might have continued to insist I obey her, but she was smart enough to know that seldom succeeded. Instead she let the reins slacken a little at a time while she rode herd on my adolescence and I galloped toward my independence. I arrived there certainly not without her help, but without her holding my hand. But I suppose that's just a son's opinion.

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