

Mothers!

To all the unappreciated mothers out there. From your ungrateful kids.

When I was a little guy toddling around the living room, I had no higher perspective than the family dog. In fact, my eyes were at the same level as Rover's as the two of us sized each other up and gazed around the room. I would hug Mom by the knees, but so did Rover. Although he had much more hair, I began to wonder if we were brothers. Soon differences became apparent in the way Mom treated us. She picked on me from the start, but always let him have his way with everything. Caught by an alarmed neighbor, you can bet I got away with using the lawn only once. As we grew older, the dog got all the ballyhoo and I got the kind of attention I didn't want. I learned early that mothers can be a pain in the butt. Just ask my father.

When I was ten years old Mom wouldn't let me ride my bike over to the next town. It was only five miles away ... right down the Interstate. I knew my hand signals for right, left and stop. I couldn't imagine why she was so concerned. I even put extra reflectors on my bike in case I didn't make it back by midnight.

Mom got real huffy about it, just like when she complained about me keeping my fishing worms in the refrigerator. Yes, of course, they sat there for days. We'd had a week of rain. I couldn't change the weather. No, I couldn't smell them.

I didn't know why mothers were always so interested in how things smell, but I guess they had very good noses. Enough to notice when I wore my favorite cowboy shirt six days in a row. Mom even complained about the smells I created with my chemistry set. She wouldn't let me build a laboratory in the downstairs bathroom. OK, it's true ... all I ever made were stink bombs, but I was working on a new experiment where the dog would play a major role. Not a long running role, but a dramatic one.

When I turned twelve, Mom wanted to teach me how to dance, but I wasn't interested at the time. Who would I have danced with anyway? Certainly not a girl, for heaven's sake. I had no friends who wound up being girls. And besides, in school they all smelled like chewing gum and cleaning supplies. Mary Jo McMurty smelled exactly the same as our cupboard under the bathroom sink.

And one day ... all of a sudden ... I changed my mind when I realized girls smelled delicious. So I taught myself to dance with the help of the young divorcee next door who insisted I call her Aunt Dorothy. She was quite a snazzy lady in her gold bathrobe which she wore rather loosely throughout the day and evening when her visitors would arrive. Jimmy Kurtzweil delivered her newspaper one afternoon when she bent over to pick up the cat on the front porch and she all but fell out of her robe.

"The cat jumped in there before I could," he said, using his baseball cap to fan his face.

Dad met Dorothy when he went over to be neighborly. That upset Mom for some reason. He didn't go over there again and Mom said she didn't want me to learn any new steps from a tart. But Aunt Dorothy wasn't a tart. Dad said she was a cupcake.

So guess what happened in a few years? I'll tell you what happened. One of the girls in my class caught my eye. I began to call her on the phone all the time and stopped doing my homework. Mom got mad every time I went to a dance and came home late.

"I don't even know this girl you're interested in," she said, exasperated.

"But Mom, everybody on the football team knows her," I said. "You could say she comes highly recommended."

Meanwhile my mother was living through her forties and suffering a change in outlook and attitude. Constantly fanning herself with a copy of the Saturday Evening Post, she would complain about one aspect or another of what went on in The Big Tent, as Dad called our household. My father tried to maintain his humor but Mom's moods took their toll on his good nature. He suddenly embraced the great outdoors and went away on weekend hunting

trips, even though he didn't own a gun and had once been a member of PETA..

After Mom noticed he never brought home any dead birds, he began to go away weekends to a monastery. He carried his prayer book when he came home on Sunday nights, but a close look showed it to be an old Thesaurus. He called from St. Helga's Monastic Inn and Rotisserie one Sunday evening to say he'd be staying an extra night for the good of his soul. Mom said she was sure she'd heard a juke box in the background. In a protective mood, I remarked the monks were so old they had to have recorded music instead of a choir.

But overall, my mother seemed more interested in correcting me than trying to reform Dad. When I was younger, she was more understanding of my behavior, but now for a few years she constantly argued with the way I led my life. I thought she was very unfair. After all, by then I was thirteen, the master of my own destiny. She wouldn't hear of my independence and kept trying to act like my mother. The poor misguided woman was doomed to defeat.

I tried resisting her with my newfound powers of logic. Such conversations often took place when Mom asked me to do a chore around the house.

"There comes a point in a young man's life," I said to her, "when he has to choose between following his muse or taking orders from his mother."

"Uh huh," she said.

"Benjamin Franklin settled the issue when he left Boston by himself and moved to Philadelphia at age 14," I said.

"He probably didn't have a mother like me,"

"I'm sure that's true, Mom. But if one's muse offers more of a Return on Investment, well ... you know what they say about following the market."

"Just stop arguing with me and take out the garbage," she said. "And while you're out there, leave your muse on the curb."

She got upset when I forgot to get her a Mother's Day card. I don't think she believed me when I told her its founder disavowed the celebratory day after years of work to get it established, even as most states began to

celebrate the second Sunday in May. Anna Jarvis tried to have Mother's Day rescinded because of the way Hallmark and other companies exploited the occasion. She was even arrested while demonstrating against it.

When all was said and done, I did in fact survive what I presumed were my mother's best intentions. For example, I never became a eunuch. I do have a dog, but unlike Rover my dog is expected to help with the chores, when I can think of one she won't mess up.

Dad weathered through too. Eventually he stopped going away on weekends and the only cupcakes to capture his interest were those on sale at the Price Chopper. He said they were the only ones he could afford.

And now I have another mother on my case, my wife. She's quite a lady and she's also a grandmother. That's a dangerous combination, I can tell you. She was wonderful when we were first married. I well remember all the attention I used to get. But today, between the dog and the grandchildren, she doesn't have ten minutes a week left to pamper me. It's true that I'm always busy in my cave writing about what's wrong with the world, but I just know she's somewhere in the house not thinking of me.

My mom went and died on me many years ago. And to think she called *me* undependable. It just goes to show you. But she was a nice lady and I loved her.

She really loved me, too, even though she said I was too full of myself. She'd be happy to know today I'm no longer absurd but only annoying. So if I didn't mention it, she was the best mother anyone ever had. Aside from my wife, who isn't actually my mother ... most of the time.

That was fun. I hope you don't think my mother was really like that. Nor was I.

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