Parents should ground the ‘helicopter’ when raising kids

While I’m away, readers give the advice. On not raising a bully:
So often we hear today about “helicopter” parents who, in the words of the old hymn, try with all their might to keep their little “special” darlings, “safe and secure from all alarm.” Cannot be done and even should not be done. If one is not taught how to fight back or does not learn early on about the slings and arrows of misfortune (no, life is not fair), then he/she limps into adulthood and soon realizes that his/her parents did no great favors in their protection, not to mention for their friendship. (How smarmy that sounds: My parents were “The Folks,” not my buddies.)

I was bullied in grammar school by two older boys who made my life hell. One day, I was walking down the street and saw them coming toward me from the opposite direction, on their bikes. “Oh [poop],” I thought. When they got close, I looked them in the eye and said, “Why don’t you just kiss my a**!” They stood there for a bit, shocked, and then began to laugh. As they rode off on their bikes, one of them said, “You know, W- --, you’re all right!” A lesson was learned that afternoon: Although I was no good at defending myself physically, making your bully laugh sometimes works just as well.

When I think of such stories, I am always grateful for having grown up when I did, with whom I did, and where I did. And in having parents and family who did not even try to shield us from reality. So many kids today enter life at a disadvantage.

— C.

On siblings who don’t help with an elderly parent’s care:
I am one of three sisters. When our father died 12 years ago, I became my mother’s lifeline, mainly because I live the closest to her.

Five years ago she was moved from her apartment into assisted living and it was very hard for her being confined to one room. I became the “sole” family caregiver. My two sisters would simply say, if you need help, just let me know. I got angrier and angrier as time went on until my husband suggested (strongly) that I just let it go and give to my mom what time and effort I could. Her last two years were very special to me. We shared in little things, laughed a lot, cried some. I learned things about her life that I had not known before.

On her last day we received a call that her death was getting close and my husband and I went to be with her. I called my sisters, who told me they didn’t need to come because they had their goodbyes. I had the privilege of stroking her cheek, telling her I loved her and would miss her. I had the privilege of hearing her try to speak and to see a single tear run down her cheek.

My anger is gone now and all I feel is sadness that my sisters missed so much joy they could have had during Mother’s last days. I will never understand their behavior, but I guess I don’t have to.

— M.

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