

Griefbacon 3.29.23 : How Dare You

My Aussie friend Elsa in LA and I were kvetching on the phone about our teenage daughters' lack of respect for their mothers. Both of us are in 'creative fields' on extended post covid hiatuses (Is that a word?, or should I go with the Latin plural 'hiati?') which involves sitting at the kitchen table in front of computers swallowing the upchuck of despair. Elsa's daughter Violet now has a driver's license, which means she needs the car all the time, "to take a friend to her AA meetings", etc. This is a bulletproof excuse to use the car, of course, and should not necessitate a conversation with her mother unless she needs gas money. Still, Elsa rebuked her daughter for not asking permission. "You're not doing anything", was Violet's rude response, adding hot sauce to her mother's steaming rasher of grief bacon.

'Wouldn't it be nice if they tried a little sugar, a little respect?' I asked rhetorically. We agreed that the teenage put down is a drag, but we are mothers, which means we exist only in relation to their needs. Mothers are the opposite of people, just like actors, to riff on Tom Stoppard's witticism.

Elsa related how last night a friend of Violet's stayed over, and the next morning Elsa found a rolled up dollar bill in the bathroom. My first thought was, "What LA kid carries anything less than a Benjamin these days?" Apparently someone was doing the cocaine. A concerned friend of mine is always worried her teenage son is 'doing the pot'. I hate when innocent people get drug jargon wrong.

Prefacing her course of inquiry into the dollar bill with the disclaimer that her maternal/therapeutic relationship with Violet has advanced beyond confrontational language, Elsa said she 'had a talk with Violet about the rolled up dollar bill her friend left in the bathroom'. Violet's response was that her friend 'has a problem with cocaine'. Note Elsa knew the correct drug jargon. Elsa, who has had her own fan dance with the drug at various points, gave her daughter

the benefit of the doubt, because what else could she do? Violet was ‘sober’, meaning she doesn’t drink alcohol, because being sober is rampant among the young. Then there was her altruistic ‘just taking a friend to her AA meetings’ explanation. What to make of that? All it takes is one influencer to get a whole generation sober-ish.

I suggested that Violet elided the issue of her own usage by saying her *friend* has a *problem*, implying that she doesn't have a problem. This might be because she doesn't do cocaine or because she doesn't have a *problem* doing cocaine. If she is not asked to explain, she won't have to tell a lie. It is hard not to be confrontational when accusing someone of lying.

Yes, Elsa said, *good point*. Elsa wants to believe Violet, just as we all want to be believed, in spite of the actual truth. We irrationally exuberant incorrigibles operate on the value of belief over truth. We have this in common with all stripes of fanatical Americans.

Let's imagine sprinkling a little brown sugar on honey to make million dollar grief bacon. If the child said, "Mom, I see you are busy working, may I take the car?" The mother would think, ‘What a delightful child I have raised!’, hand over the keys pronto, and add a little ka-ching surprise in her daughter's venmo account with a suitable gas station emoji. Besides it being nice to acknowledge her mother's attempt to present at the kitchen table as a hardworking, unemployed person, she is also exercising her all important empathy muscle, just as she does when she drives her friend to AA or rolls a dollar bill for her friend's line of coke.

Empathy is, after all, the prize pig of the therapeutic post industrial complex. That it is unquantifiable and as cheap as God's grace used to be is the secret to empathy's current popularity. A close second in popularity is the desire ‘to find closure and begin the healing process’, as many a rescued coal miner and survivor of an Olympic snowboarding accident has told an empathetic news reporter.

With all this empathy, which appears to be clobbering its nemesis, grit, in popularity, what happened to compassion? Is the Dalai Lama so passe', is Brene' Brown so twittergenic, that all kindnesses must be tagged 'radical'? Wouldn't it be truly radical to just be kind? Honest?

Our conversation reminded me of an amusing episode which occurred at the pool the other day. It starred a wet two year old with underdeveloped 'r's' which made him sound vaguely British. His name was Harry, a double whammy for the 'r' problem, indeed, and a wildly popular baby name thanks to the radical ginger Prince of Montecito. Little wet Harry kept crying and saying over and over, "*How dare you? How dare you!*" which sounded like, "How dahwe yoo? How dahwe yoo!", because the towel his mother gave him was damp.

How dahwe yoo motha, I dont wike yoo any moore yoo gave me a wet towel!"

He was certainly in touch with his feelings, little *Hawwee* was. I hoped for a Beefeater to bludgeon him for disrespecting his mother, but alas, not a voice was raised, not a soul was stirred to upbraid the little no neck monster. I in my supine position poolside grinned behind my *Newyorker*, plotting my Shouts and Murmurs submission on Prince Harry 2.0, thinking some adult would mock him just a little, so I wouldn't have to. He was clearly imitating someone, and he was fucking hilarious to boot, in a way the Royal family never is.

There was one final plaintive *How dahwe yoo*, before he collapsed on the cement in heaving sobs. *Throw him in the deep end*, I thought. I didn't dare look at him, for still no one laughed or imitated his adorable patois. The mother, a lovely white thing of thirty or so, who had been sipping a skinny marg with her extended family and friends, maintained full composure.

Speaking in an even, deliberate tone, she explained to Harry that she had already suggested he lie on the concrete because it is warm, much warmer than his wet towel. She continued to wrap him

in the damp towel. When the tantrum did not abate, she was nonplussed, adding the ice cold kicker: “*Harry, I am an adult and I know what is best for you.*”

I was flabbergasted.

This would never have occurred to me. This mother’s steadiness, her good judgment, her Queen Elizabethness, her *expertise*, even had she had no afternoon margarita, would still have unglued me with awe. Her rhetoric was newfangled, her delivery, precise and guilt free. Factual. She continued the questionable tradition begun with Gen X parents of never using a negative word like ‘no’ with her child, because it might damage the youngster’s self esteem which would ruin brunch; what was innovative was her assertion that *the adult knows best*. This radical notion, so contrary to the message of Hannah Montana and countless Disney shows, posits that parents and children are *not* equal, and it is actually *the parents* who are superior. *Huzzah!* As Catherine the Great would say. Add a new chapter to the book of revelation-

This new generation of Millennial parents is much younger and wiser and richer than we; we raised our children on the assumption that since we couldn’t impose our poorly informed opinions on them without damaging them for life, it would be better if we let the children decide for themselves. They knew what they wanted, so the logic goes, and as we were usually on a work call, plucking a chicken for dinner, and getting in 20 minutes on the elliptical, it was easier to give them what they wanted. Two hundred dollar an hour therapists who never took insurance warned us that it is not the children of helicopter parents, or neglected wild children who are most at risk, but the ones who are thoughtlessly indulged and granted agency by ingratiating, spineless parents like us. We were the most dangerous parents in the world....

So this old Gen X dog learned a new trick but alas, too late. Using the royal ‘We’ to elide personal blame, we tried to reason with our children, to honor their personhood without pulling

the farcical rank of age; we were notoriously mistrustful of adults as youths, and now that we are adults, mistrustful of ourselves. We are skeptical of our own ability to shake a squirrel from a paper bag. It is after all the squirrel's choice to seek shelter in the paper bag, and who are we to decide what is best for a squirrel? This has led to our current mishandling of the homeless crisis in cities like NY and SF, the failure to pass gun law legislation, the repeal of Roe V Wade, and the intergenerational use of the 'f' bomb in public forums. But we don't wish to point fingers.

Eventually Prince Harry and his entourage left the pool- *how dare they*- and I swam my laps in peace and quiet. All the while I swam, however, I wondered how I would get warm without a dry towel and the Queen. *How dare her*.