

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Navigating Island Parenting: Successful Lessons Learned From My Aunt

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My aunt Annetta was one of the top five most remarkable persons that I have ever met and I am not just saying this because she was my aunt. I am saying this because simply she was. She came to mind recently in a debate that I had with a friend who was trying to convince me that a parent's level of education, job, and stature in society had a lot to do with that parent's success as a parent/ability to parent well. I listened intently to his argument, however I didn't give it much credence to the argument that he posed or to the statistics that he presented. I didn't give much credence to them because I believe that "successful parenting" or "what determines a successful parent" is relative.

The debate with my friend set me thinking about whom society considers a successful parent. Is a successful parent he or she who has the best behaved child? Is a successful parent he or she whose child excels in school? Is a successful parent he or she who produces what we may consider "upstanding citizens?" Is a successful parent he or she who has college educated children? Is a successful parent he or she who has spent every last penny on his or her child? Is a successful parent he or she who has carved or navigated a path for his or her child, in order to achieve a desired result, whether it's a champion sportsman or an offspring who has excelled in a chosen field or profession? Is a successful parent he or she whose child has escaped the clutches of the jailhouse? Is a successful parent he or she who has done his or her very best with the limited resources he or she may have had? Is a successful parent he or she who has made numerous sacrifices? The variables are too numerous to mention.

After exhausting myself by asking the aforementioned questions I found the answer. I didn't have to look very far to dispel my friend's argument. Let me again state, it's all relative. In my opinion my aunt was a successful parent. I can't very well tell you what her level of education was; I can tell you that she worked very hard as a cane cutter on Belmont and Willett's Estates. She was a cook, security guard and laundress. Her social status, the way we define it, there was none. She was not a woman of means however she was kind and friendly to everyone she met. She was well liked, as a result.

I can tell you that she did not raise rocket scientists or children who were immaculately behaved, quite the contrary. What I can tell you however is that without a doubt her children knew that she loved them. They knew this without a doubt, because of the way in which she parented them. In our region, I will say that this is quite rare, because West Indian parents are not known for being affectionate. The issue of whether or not your parent loved you was not an issue. The question or exclamation, "Did your parent feed you or clothe you...well okay...what else you want more than that...what love you talking about..." If you ask me, I think that knowing that one is loved by a parent is success. This is successful parenting.

I had the opportunity to go down memory lane with my favorite cousin Lindsay a few days ago. The topic, our aunt Annetta, who we thought was really something else. We realized that her "success" as a parent didn't just rest with her children but rather it extended to her nieces and nephews all whom she "allo-mothered." My aunt never viewed children as an inconvenience. She was always happy to see you and she really "saw" you. She was a great listener and friend. Although she had five children of her own, her lap was always open or there was always a space on the bed for you. As soon as you entered her door, there was always a pot on the stove and she fed you. If she had prepared something that you didn't eat she wouldn't mind whipping up a meal especially for you, whether it was a ball of corn/fungi or her special Johnnie cakes. There was so much love in her food and in her. In my opinion she perfected the art of mothering which was to make her children, and her "additional" children feel loved and treasured. This is my definition of successful parenting.

It is up to each one of us as parents to define what our standard or marker of successful parenting is or will be. I want to be like my aunt. My aunt passed away from complications of lupus several years ago. I can tell you that she did not leave a will bestowing the world of earthly possessions to her children. She did not purchase them the most expensive education money could buy. I can tell you that she tried her very best

with each one of them. They have all sought and are walking their own paths. What I know is that they carry around with them the fact that they had a mother who loved them immensely. Isn't this, what parenting is or ought to be? As her niece, the benefactor of much of her love and affection, I can say that without a doubt she was a successful parent.

At the end of the day!

I read a saying once that said that children don't care what colour you are, whether you are poor or rich and it doesn't matter what job you have, they don't care about your educational background or your social status, all that matters to them is that they are loved. I firmly believe this.

Words of Encouragement for Your Child

"Everyone has inside them a good piece of news. The good news is that you don't know how great you can be! How much you can love! What you can accomplish! And what your potential is!" Anne Frank "Change your thoughts and you will change your world."
Unknown **Parenting Quotes**

"Above all children need our unconditional love, whether they succeed or make mistakes; when life is easy and when life is tough." President Barack Obama

"The proper way of treating children is identical to the proper way of treating human beings." Rudolf Dreikurs

"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today." Stacia Tauscher

"Having kids ---the responsibility of rearing good, kind, ethical, responsible human beings---is the biggest job anyone can embark on." Maria Shriver

"You will never have this day with your children again. Today is a gift. Breathe and notice. Study their little faces and feet. Enjoy today Mama, it will be gone before you know it."
Jan Hatmaker

"The struggles of today will one day be a distant memory but your children are only children once so enjoy them." Jamerill Stewart

Recommended Reading for Children

Children Just Like Me: A Unique Celebration of Children around the World (Hardcover)
by Anabel Kindersley and Barnabas Kindersley in collaboration with UNICEF

A School Like Mine: A Unique Celebration of Schools around the World (Hardcover) by
DK Publishing in collaboration with UNICEF

National Geographic Kids Beginner's World Atlas (Hardcover) by National Geographic