

Why So Many American Children Respect Nothing

For the last 20 years or so, there has been one regular item on my Christmas list. That item is the annual anthology of old-fashioned Christmas stories entitled *Christmas in My Heart*. The series has been running for over a quarter of a century now, and even if I don't ask for the latest edition, my family fulfills the unspoken wish, instinctively knowing that Christmas wouldn't quite be Christmas without it.

While reading [this year's edition](#), I came across a short story composed by Noel Shanko, a writer from Florida, who recounted the Christmas when he was 13.

Shanko's family had moved to a government housing project during World War II, and although his father had a steady job, luxuries were out of the question. The family's belongings were a hodgepodge, likely cobbled together from secondhand stores and other items that had been discarded.

It was because of this motley assemblage that Shanko was attracted to a beautiful silverware set in a local store window. Although the silver cost \$100 – about \$1,000 today – he determined to buy it for his mother for Christmas.

For a boy who only had a dollar to his name, that was a steep task. Undaunted, Shanko began paying for his layaway item by picking up as many jobs as he could find. He started a paper route. He canvassed for new subscribers, earning 50 cents for each one he recruited. He planted a tomato garden with his father and sold the produce for 10 cents a pound. He earned another 10 cents for every lawn he mowed and every bushel of kindling he sold.

These nickels, dimes, and quarters accumulated over the year. Finally, a few weeks before Christmas, he purchased the set

and brought home the precious package. And then Christmas finally came.

“On Christmas morning, I was up early. It was my job to hand out the presents, and naturally I saved ‘my’ silverware for last. Then the time came – I pulled out that chest from under the tree and said, ‘Mamma, this is for you.’ I watched as she unwrapped that gift and lifted the lid. The only words that I can use to describe Mother’s face are amazement, disbelief, and parental pride. Tears ran down her cheeks as she hugged and kissed me again and again. In years to come, as a father and grandfather, I have come to more fully understand how overwhelmed she must have felt.”

After reading this story, it’s hard not to ponder the difference between being a kid in the 1940s and one today. For starters, many kids would likely not even notice a set of silverware in a shop window. Extracurricular activities and digital toys regularly keep many children preoccupied. These same activities often prevent them from going out and getting an after-school or summer job.

But there’s one major factor which underlies all of these things, namely, the respect and honor for parents. As Shanko implies in an earlier part of the story, his parents were not able to give him a lot in terms of worldly goods.

What they did give him, however, was character. They instilled discipline through their own example, working selflessly side-by-side with their children, not allowing them to give in when the going got tough. In all likelihood, it was this discipline and hard work which planted the desire for Shanko to express such an overwhelming outpouring of love to his mother through his gift.

While there are still some loyal, respectful kids out there who honor their parents in a similar way, I think it’s safe to say that such respect is rare.

Is it still possible to raise children who exhibit the respect, work ethic, and lack of entitlement that Shango demonstrated as a young teen? I think it is. But are Americans willing to abandon the [kinder, gentler, let-me-be-your friend approach to parenting](#) that has been adopted in recent years in order to do so?

The fact of the matter is, we will never have children who love and respect others – especially their parents – if we teach them to love and respect their own selves first and foremost.

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