

14

Road Rage

A child is saved by punishment.

The wistful, somber, unmitigated devotion, adoration, and of course all-embracing love of a mother for her child is universally depicted by the great artists of pre and post renaissance of Italy. In the Duccio Maestà of Siena, for example, there is a hint of the child's resistance to its mother, often interpreted as a foreboding of what is to come: the tragedy of crucifixion, the child will die before its mother. Hidden deep in every mother is such a fear. And every new day brings with it such a threat.

Iris was preoccupied with the challenges of her working day as she walked proudly along Philadelphia's Pine Street with her toddler, sometimes in his stroller, but often, toddling along on his own two feet. How proud she was when he took his first steps! And now, he wanted to run, out of his stroller then back again.

"Sammy! Not so fast! Keep my hand! Don't go onto the road! Watch for the big cars!"

It was just after eight in the morning and they were on their way to Day Care, the street busy with morning traffic of people going to work, and trucks stopping for deliveries. Sammy was being a little devil this morning. He wanted to run ahead. He had so much energy! Iris called out yet again. "Sammy! Sammy! Don't go on the road! You hear?"

But Sammy did not hear, or if he did, he took no notice. And on to the road he ran, right at the intersection of 11th and Pine.

Iris let go of the stroller and ran on to the road after him. Cars screeched to a halt. Sammy turned to her, laughing, then all of a sudden crying as Iris scooped him up roughly in her arms and ran back to the curb.

"You naughty little boy!" she screamed, tears in her eyes. "You must never do that again! Do you hear?"

Sammy looked at her, still not comprehending. He was part laughing and part crying, and probably thinking that he should

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scream like his mom too.

Iris had read somewhere in a child rearing book, maybe her mother's old worn Dr. Spock. Never chastise a child in anger! Calm down and do it rationally, always with a quiet and sensible explanation.

So she set him down on the sidewalk. He went to climb into his stroller, but she grabbed him and pulled him to her and held him by his shoulders. But Sammy squirmed and wriggled. He managed to grab the stroller with one hand and pulled it and it fell sideways. Passersby were a little annoyed at having to walk around this rapidly evolving spectacle.

"Sammy!" cried Iris, "stop it!" She wrenched him away from the stroller and pulled both him and the stroller to her as she flopped down on the old marble steps that protruded on to the sidewalk. "Don't you understand?" she pleaded, knowing of course that he did not understand. She began to cry a little herself, and that was enough to have Sammy follow suit.

They sat for a while sniffing back their tears as Iris hugged Sammy to her. "I couldn't bear it if something happened to you, darling, don't you know?"

Maybe he did know. He hugged her and nestled his nose into her breast, perhaps a slight throwback to the days when he was still on the breast. It certainly was enough to calm Iris down as she looked out at the busy traffic and passersby.

"Now Sammy, I want you to listen to me very carefully," she said. She held him by both shoulders, held him out in front of her so she could look straight into his eyes. "You know I've told you many, many times not to run onto the road. Haven't I?"

Sammy did not answer. He just looked back at her and wriggled a bit. Her hands were hurting his shoulders because she held him so tightly. He wriggled some more and she let go. But then, she stood up, holding Sammy by the hand, pulling him up with her.

"I'm going to tell you again, and this will be the last time. And just to make sure you remember it, I'm going to give you a hard smack, to help you remember."

Iris twisted his arm a little and his tiny body turned around. With her free hand she gave his bare legs a hard slap. Sammy was

a little surprised, but one would not call it shocked. Rather, he simply took it as another thing of the many surprises of life that happened to him every day and every minute of his young life. Because there was no immediate response, Iris took it that she had not hit him hard enough. So she gave him another hard slap, and this evoked a loud wail, close to a scream, from Sammy, who now cried buckets of tears.

“Let that be a lesson to you!” said Iris, also crying. “You must never-- you hear me? Never run onto the road again. Is that clear?”

Sammy wailed some more and did not answer.

“Answer me, Sammy. Is that clear? You must never run on to the road again!” And she gave him another slap, this time rather half-heartedly.

Sammy whimpered and sniffed. He wanted to get into his stroller and she let him do so. He put his fingers in his mouth and sucked them as he sobbed.

Iris leaned down to tie him into his stroller. She kissed him on his red wet cheeks. “Mommy’s sorry, darling! But she just couldn’t bear it if you were killed by a car. You know?”

Did he know?

Moral: A smack is worth a thousand words.

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