

About: [Mother Shaming](#) AND [Parental Alienation](#)

- By Susan Marie CassAdy

Sometime – during the winter of 1981/1982 – I picked up my daughter – for a [“legal visitation”](#). It was the “Christmas break” – for my college – which was [UWGB](#). I had just driven 665 miles (from Green Bay, Wisconsin to Whitehall, Ohio – which, is where she lived – with her biological father. I took her to (the) [Columbus, Ohio Westland Mall](#) – which, was thriving (then). We walked around the Lazarus department store – and, I was able to purchase a few little trinkets for her. When, we were done shopping, we went into the parking lot – and, got into my car – a new [Dodge 1981 Omni](#). As we were ready to exit the lot, my daughter (Dawn) – about eight-years old (then) excitedly exclaimed:

“Well! I am going to tell my daddy – THAT! – you can find your way ‘off’ of a parking lot!”

*Following, is (the) story – behind **WHY** she exclaimed this AND the harms of “Parental aAlienation” & “Mother Shaming”. Please read my [resume’](#) for more details of my formal education AND work experiences.*

“Mother Shaming” - My Sin?

- By Susan Marie CassAdy [1954 -...]

Well, in 1972 – when I was 18 years old - I let an “older man” – 10 years my senior - have unprotected sex with me. Indeed, I was curious. What exactly was “sex”? Although I had kissed a lot of boys, I’d never had actual sex with anyone. He was a graduate – of [\(the\) Ohio State University](#). AND pursuing his [“Masters Degree – MBA”](#). A “good catch” – some said. And, I barely had a high school education.

In fact, a [“midget”](#) of a man, he later apologized. He comforted me [that] he would marry me – if I got pregnant.

And (of course) I did get pregnant. And, “good to his word” he did marry me. He also slapped me around – a few times. And, pointed out – frequently – how dumb I was. The baby was born – 9 months and 2 days – after we were married. I filed for a “[legal separation](#)” – when, I was 3 months pregnant. The Columbus Police “rescued me” - from an apartment -where, I had nailed the door shut – to keep him [drunk & shouting] out.

Unable to “go back”, my mother took me in. She let me sleep in her rented house basement – located in the “[bottoms](#)” area of Columbus, Ohio. Water bugs (also called [roaches](#)) crawled on me at night. The only toilet was up two flights of stairs. So, I learned to “pee” into a plastic five-gallon bucket – and, empty it each morning. As the baby grew (inside of me) – I had to “pee” more and more often. And, I was also suffering from injuries [that] I had sustained in a car accident – on my way to work – as a clerk - for [Kroger’s Grocery](#). The car accident was not my fault. The other driver – had (the Police Officer said) “jumped” a light – Apparently, eager to get to their doctor’s office. My [1965 Rambler Marlin](#) was slammed into a telephone pole- and, “totaled” (my car insurance company said). My female [pelvic girdle](#) was fractured (they thought). There was considerable debate (at the incident) – IF the baby (in my womb) would be all right – or, even live. But, she did. And, so did I. I thank god [that] Doctor L. David Hall was my obstetrician. [Legacy.com](#)

The Franklin County Family Law Judge ordered “[child support](#)” – of \$55.00 per week – be paid (to me). Then, the child’s “father” started being really nice – to me. In fact, he charmed me – into “trying it again” with him. Apparently, it is very easy to be “charmed” – when you are

very pregnant. ([hormones are very high](#)).

In fact, after the birth of our “healthy” baby girl [on August 22, 1973] – at [Riverside Hospital, in Columbus, Ohio](#) – I got into “his” car – with “our” infant – and, we headed to a trailer (that he was renting) in Portsmouth, Ohio. He was [then] the Co-Manager of a Kroger store located there. Soon thereafter, he took a new job – in Pittsburgh, PA – with [FOX Grocery](#). We lived (as an almost “happy” family) in a rented condominium – in Youngwood, PA. I was accepted into the local [Community college](#) – and, began to study COBOL programming. A Columbus, Ohio attorney – James Dodd – was working to get [“us”] a “cash settlement” – for the car accident and the injuries – [that] we had suffered.

After some time passed, he (the father) took a another “new” job. This time, in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He was appointed the “field representative” – for [Super Value Stores](#). His “field territory” covered all of NE Wisconsin and the “Upper-Peninsula” area of Michigan. He left Monday morning (very early). He returned (usually) on Friday night. Upon arrival [at our home], he drank gin, vodka and orange juice; and, usually fell asleep – after a few. This, I was pleased to accommodate.

When at “home”, I judged him: “[surly](#)”, “physically lazy” – and, he grew fatter and fatter. I learned to “[hold my tongue](#)”. I took more classes – in “programming” at the [NE Wisconsin Technical Institute](#). My teacher (there) recommended [that] I “check out” the local State University [[UWGB](#)]. Mr. Bud Jacobs said “*Susan, you have a “talent” for programming computers.*”. Now, about 1976 – [UWGB](#) had just received a new VAX-VMS “main frame” computer system. The one class – that I signed up for – was titled “Programming Time-Shared Computers in

BASIC” – 3 credits. I got an A+! My dear husband complained of the “baby-sitting bills” – which, I incurred. Can’t you take Dawn [our little girl – about 4 years old then] to class with you? Why does it take so long – for you to do the “homework” assigned? He said: “it was obvious [that] I was too stupid – to take “computer classes”. He explained ‘HOW’ – at Ohio State University – when he was assigned to write a computer program – he just “hung out” in the “[OSU code writing terminal room](#)”; And, when an identified “smart student” threw away a draft – of their code; [Then] he would scoop it up – for clues – on HOW to proceed. Bill (his middle name) did not “like computers!” Further, he questioned me: “Why do you like computers so much”? What is so interesting about “computer programming”? “Are you “running around”? “Why don’t you worry about me – when I am gone -and, show it – when I am home?” I recall, I filed for divorce – in Green Bay, Wisconsin – when the song “[Blinded By The Light](#)” was played on the radio. You see, I was (in fact) “blinded by the light” – of education. “Programming computers” could help me – and, I knew it.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blinded_by_the_Light - 1976] Manfred Mann 1976

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcWVL4B-4pl>]

After a rough few months – Bill was “out” of the home – we were (then) buying – by “Court Order”. I “took up” with another man.

One night, while “the other man” was “visiting with me”, (we were sitting by the fire) – Bill knocked on [then] my home’s front door.

The “new man” [having seen the “Court documents”] – proving that I had the right to be in that house; and, Bill had “the right” – to “child visitation”; did, bid me to answer the door – and, let Bill in. I did so.

Bill entered the house. My “new man” stood – and, offered to shake Bill’s hand. Bill grunted. He refused to shake hands. Then, Bill walked about the house - poking at things. He (eventually) went into my bedroom. He sifted through my laundry basket - and he smelled my things. Bill [then]went into the room where our daughter (Dawn) was asleep. He gently lifted her up. He carried her to the room where I was sitting with the “new” man. The “new” man rose – and, politely and calmly excused himself. He stated “good bye” to Bill – and me. He headed for the home’s front door – to properly exit. Bill jumped onto his back!

The “new” man (actually named Jim) – much larger – AND, a full scholarship wrestler – for [Iowa State University](#) – easily flipped Bill over him. They wrestled (a bit). Jim stated “Please man – let’s not mess up Susan’s house!” [Then] Jim “gently pinned” Bill – still grunting and howling – onto the front lawn. I retreated into the house and called the police. Dawn – now quite awake – jumped onto Jim’s back. She beat at his head – with her fists and exclaimed “*Jim! Let my daddy up!*” The Green Bay Police soon arrived – with guns loaded and [trained German Shephard dogs](#). Jim did release Bill – after using him – to shield himself from the well-trained and barking “police” dogs. The police questioned everyone. Jim left. Bill left. Dawn stayed with me – at the house. In the coming months – Bill literally “[child-knapped](#)” Dawn back to Ohio. I learned (of it) ‘only’ when I went to pick Dawn up – one afternoon – from a father-child visitation event. Note: This was NOT “[International Parental Kidnapping](#)”; however, it was against the law (circa 1977).

In fact, everything was gone. Bill, Dawn; And, his rented house was completely empty. In the coming year, I was forced to hire an attorney (with money I did not have). An, Ohio Law Firm [[Tyack Law](#)] – helped

me to locate Bill and Dawn. (Again, with money I did not have). Jim's family helped to pay the legal bills. They wanted me to marry Jim. The divorce went forward. I returned to my maiden name: "CassAdy".

Now, a "full-time" student – at UWGB; I knew [that] I could not afford college tuition, a "[babysitter](#)", a place to live and food – on the amount [that] Bill was "ordered" - by the Brown County [Wisconsin Court system](#)" - to pay. One day, Bill requested [that] I "give him" legal physical custody of Dawn. He argued, [that] his mother [Clara – then, healthy & retired] could "help" him. My mother (who had attempted to move to Green Bay [to help me] – was (by then) "dis-abled". **After much contemplation, I decided to "give" Bill - legal physical custody.** [A] [B] [C].[D] Tom Tyack – retained previously – drew up [the final legal documents]. They stipulated the "terms" – of our "final" divorce. An important stipulation (was) that I retained the right – to "pull Dawn" – to live with me – whenever I deemed it appropriate. I never did exercise this right. Not even – when in 1987 – I built a new Ryland home in Columbus, Ohio. A room was "especially created & designed" for Dawn – but, as she explained (circa 1988): "*Mom, all of my friends live in Whitehall [Ohio].*" Dawn was [in fact] one of my first employees – when, I created my "woman owned" company: [Hans & CassAdy, Inc.](#) She telephoned (one day) – when she was working at the [USA-DOJ](#) – in Washington, DC. She told me "*Mom, I am using everything [that] you taught me. You are so strong. – And, you (Mom) made me so smart.*" Today, Dawn Marie [Burton]-Danielson is the "Deputy Chief of Staff – for our [USA-FBI](#)". She is also an attorney – and, practices law in Washington, DC. [FACEBOOK](#) Bill Burton [her father] married another woman (Holland) – and, they had a child (a girl). They named her Elizabeth. Dawn's husband (today) is Jack Danielson. > [NHTSA](#)
END - #####

[A] Thus, I literally, gave “child custody” to a man (the child’s biological father) – that, I did not want to live with.

[B] Soon after, Bill “mother-shamed” me. When the house (on [Hoffman Road – Green Bay](#)) was sold. [C] He hissed “YOU! Susan, You gave up your child – for a man”! [D]

[C] Of course, the purchase (of that house) was made possible – by the “cash settlement” [that] James Dodd got (for us) – from the car accident [circa 1973].

[D] Well, in fact, that was a small part of my decision; But, the larger part – was: **I gave up my child (to a man that I did not care to live with) – for a “college education”. I graduated – with honors – from UWGB in 1982.** And, the rest is - as we say is - [“hERstory”](#). [END]

SOURCE: <https://herviewfromhome.com/when-will-the-mother-shaming-stop/>

KIDS, MOTHERHOOD

When will the Mother Shaming stop?



We live in a society, where we constantly pre-judge everything – from how we dress, to socio-economic status, and commodities we own. Sadly, our society likes to judge mother's choices for their children. Whether it is in public, on social media, or gossiping amongst each other – people think it is OK to mother shame, constantly judge, give unnecessary criticisms, asking a million questions,

providing their opinions and views as a definitive answer. It is hard learning the ropes of motherhood, trying to get through the day, let alone the hour.

Thrown within the midst of it all, whilst trying to understand what is best for themselves and their child/ren – A random variable comes crashing through, to disturb what little wits a mother has left and ever so gracefully oblige them with their two cents.

Mothers are struggling daily at home and in public – there is always someone watching, judging, and gossiping about ‘that mother.’ That mother who is breast feeding in public or that mother who is bottle feeding. That mother who prefers to co-sleep. That mother that stays at home, or that mother who works full-time. That mother who uses dummies to comfort her baby. That mother who chooses to feed her baby solids before six months. The family going out for a meal at a restaurant. Then there is that mother who lets her toddler use an iPad. Also, that mother’s method of discipline, or lack thereof. Let’s not forget those young, old and single mothers. What about those mothers with children that have been born out of wedlock, or those who choose (or cannot choose) to have an only child. More so, those mothers with up to five children. The ignorance lives on, and on...and on.

Who right is it to judge a mother’s choices? Unless the child is in danger, *maybe*, just maybe it begs the question; why did the mother make that decision – perhaps it is deemed right for herself, and her child? Aside from the choices mother’s make, haven’t they got enough going on? The troubles these mother’s face daily could be anything from a colic baby, to a child with disabilities. We are blind to what lies beneath the frantic, messy haired, tired mother. What personal problems is she going through? Is it postpartum depression, problems with her partner, sleep deprivation or lack of family assistance? No matter what the situation is, it is unfair to make assumptions, and assume it is OK to express these opinions.

What is saddening is that a proportion of the judging and shaming movement are actual mother's themselves. They form themselves as "A Mother Army," an alliance, where anything a mother chooses is scrutinized. I've sat in cafes and seen mother's stare, whispering to each other whilst my son is on his iPad. I have had dirty looks when I have given my son a chocolate bar, or they *think* I am younger than what I really am. It is hurtful. I too as a human being, and like everyone else, like every mother have feelings too. All in all, it is no-ones business what I do, and how old I had my child. My choices in how I bring up my child may differ to another mother's – at the end of the day, my child is well dressed, well fed, and most importantly unconditionally loved.

Society needs to take a step back, and think before they judge and speak. It seems people have forgotten the saying which exudes respect, dignity and etiquette – *If you have nothing nice to say, then say nothing at all.* Simple. As. That.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/27/opinion/sunday/motherhood-in-the-age-of-fear.html>

“ Mother Shaming “



Image

Motherhood in the Age of Fear

By Kim Brooks

Ms. Brooks is a writer. --- July 27, 2018

- CHICAGO — I was on my way home from dropping my kids off at preschool when a police officer called to ask if I was aware there was an outstanding warrant for my arrest.

“No, no,” I told him. “I didn’t know that.”

I needed to call my husband, but my fingers were shaking. I don't remember if I was crying when he answered, only that he was saying he couldn't understand me, that I needed to calm down, to tell him what had happened.

What happened began over a year before on a cool March day in 2011, at the end of a visit with my parents in Virginia. I needed to run an errand before our flight home to Chicago, and my son, then 4, didn't want to get out of the car.

"Come on," I said.

"No, no, no! I wait here."

I took a deep breath. I knew what I was supposed to do. But I was tired. I was late. I didn't want, at that moment, to deal with a meltdown. And there was something else: a small, quiet voice I'd been hearing more and more lately. "Why?" the voice asked.

ADVERTISEMENT

Why did I have to fight this battle? He wasn't asking to Rollerblade in traffic. He just wanted to sit in the car. Why couldn't I leave him, just this once?

If it had been warm out, I would have said no. I knew about how quickly a closed car can overheat, even on a 60-degree day. But it was cool and cloudy. I'd grown up in that same town in the 1980s and had spent hours waiting in the back seat of my parents' station wagon, windows open, reading or daydreaming, while they ran errands. Had so much really changed since then?

So I told him I'd be right back. I cracked the windows and child-locked the doors and set the alarm. When I got back five minutes later, he was still playing his game, smiling. We picked up his sister and our suitcases back at my parents' house and caught our flight home.

It took me a while to figure out what had taken place in the parking lot — that a stranger had watched me go into the store, recorded my son, recorded the license plate on my mother's car and called 911.

When our flight landed in Chicago, there was a message on my phone: "I'm trying to get ahold of Mrs. Kimberly A. Brooks. I need to speak with Mrs. Brooks about an incident this afternoon in a parking lot."

Editors' Picks



Andy Cohen Is Tired of Being 'Dad Shamed' by '

Once I realized what had happened, I felt like a terrible mother. I felt as though I'd been caught doing something very bad, even if I didn't understand what the bad thing was, exactly, or what the rationale was for its badness. I felt, I think, what just about every woman feels when someone attacks her mothering: ashamed. CreditEleni Kalorkoti



Image
CreditEleni Kalorkoti

But had I committed a crime? There's no law in Virginia against letting your kid wait in a car — though, amazingly, [19 states do have statutes addressing this situation](#). The police seemed to think it was child abuse or neglect — that someone could have hurt or kidnapped my son while I was gone.

When I tried to explain this to my outraged father, he said: “Last I checked, kidnapping is a crime. Someone could break into my house and shoot me in the head, but the police aren't showing up to arrest me if I forget to lock my door.”

“I don't think they see it the same way when kids are involved,” I told him.

“The same way,” he said. “You mean rationally?”

I contacted a lawyer who said I would just have to wait to see if the police would press charges or contact the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. And so I waited, terrified, until the morning I received that second call and learned that I was being charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor (my son).

I spent the next months determining the best legal course of action, and also the best course of action for living with the humiliation of being accused of criminally negligent parenting. My story might have ended here. This is what shame does to women: It isolates us and makes us feel our stories aren't really stories at all but idiosyncratic flaws. The only reason my story continued was that I started seeking out other mothers who had been through similar struggles. I found six willing to speak about their experiences, and I expect there are many more out there. I was not the only one who had paid the cost of parenting in the age of fear.

We now live in a country where it is seen as abnormal, or even criminal, to allow children to be away from direct adult supervision, even for a second.

We read, in the news or on social media, about children who have been kidnapped, raped and killed, about children forgotten for hours in broiling cars. We do not think about the statistical probabilities or compare the likelihood of such events with far more present dangers, like increasing rates of childhood diabetes or depression. Statistically speaking, according to the writer Warwick Cairns, you would have to leave a child alone in a public place for 750,000 years before he would be snatched by a stranger. Statistically speaking, a child is far more likely to be killed in a car on the way to a store than waiting in one that is parked. But we have decided such reasoning is beside the point. We have decided to do whatever we have to do to feel safe from such horrors, no matter how rare they might be.

And so now children do not walk to school or play in a park on their own. They do not wait in cars. They do not take long walks through the woods or ride bikes along paths or build secret forts while we are inside working or cooking or leading our lives.

'I don't know if I'm afraid for my kids, or if I'm afraid other people will be afraid and will judge me for my lack of fear.'

I was beginning to understand that it didn't matter if what I'd done was dangerous; it only mattered if *other parents* felt it was dangerous. When it comes to kids' safety, feelings are facts.

As one mother put it to me, "I don't know if I'm afraid for my kids, or if I'm afraid other people will be afraid and will judge me for my lack of fear." In other words, risk assessment and moral judgment are intertwined.

This has actually been [confirmed by researchers](#). Barbara W. Sarnecka, a cognitive scientist at the University of California, Irvine, and her colleagues presented subjects with vignettes in which a parent left a child unattended, and participants estimated how much danger the child was in. Sometimes the subjects were told the child was left unintentionally (for example, the parent was hit by a car). In other instances, they were told the child was left unsupervised so the parent could work, volunteer, relax or meet a lover. The researchers found that the participants' assessment of the child's risk of harm varied depending on how morally offensive they found the parent's reason for leaving.

Dr. Sarnecka and her colleagues summarized the findings this way: "People don't only think that leaving children alone is dangerous and therefore immoral. They also think it is immoral and therefore dangerous."

"It's not about safety," Dr. Sarnecka told me. "It's about enforcing a social norm."

No one knows this better than Debra Harrell, one of several women I spoke to about their experiences. In 2014, Ms. Harrell let her 9-year-old daughter play in a park while she went to work at a nearby McDonald's. It was a safe neighborhood on a summer day with lots of kids. None of this mattered when another parent contacted the police. Ms. Harrell was charged [with unlawful neglect of a child](#) and her daughter was put in foster care for about two weeks.

That same year, [an Arizona woman named](#) Shanesha Taylor was charged with two counts of felony child abuse and sentenced to 18 years of supervised probation, all because she had no child care and had to leave her two younger children in the car while she went on a job interview.

In a country that provides no subsidized child care and no mandatory family leave, no assurance of flexibility in the workplace for parents, no universal preschool and minimal safety nets for vulnerable families, making it a crime to offer children independence in effect makes it a crime to be poor.

And yet middle-class and affluent mothers are not immune from this kind of surveillance and punishment, either. One such mother I spoke with was charged with felony child endangerment when she left her napping 4-year-old daughter in the car for a few minutes with the windows open while she ran into a store. During her arrest, she remembers the officer saying, “Stay-at-home mom’s too busy shopping to take care of her kid? Does your husband know how you take care of your child while he’s out earning the big bucks?”

PARENTS AROUND THE WORLD RESPOND TO KIM BROOKS.

We’re contemptuous of ‘lazy’ poor mothers. We’re contemptuous of ‘distracted’ working mothers. We’re contemptuous of ‘selfish’ rich mothers.

These women’s critics insist that it’s not mothers they hate; it’s just *that* kind of mother, the one who, because of affluence or poverty, education or ignorance, ambition or unemployment, allows her own needs to compromise (or appear to compromise) the needs of her child. We’re contemptuous of “lazy” poor mothers. We’re contemptuous of “distracted” working mothers. We’re contemptuous of “selfish” rich mothers. We’re contemptuous of mothers who have no choice but to work, but also of mothers who don’t need to work and still fail to fulfill an impossible ideal of selfless motherhood. You don’t have to look very hard to see the common denominator.

I presented this theory of mother-shaming to Julie Koehler, one of the last “bad moms” I interviewed. She had introduced herself to me over email with the subject line, “I am the horrible Starbucks mother!”

One day in 2016, Ms. Koehler let her three daughters wait in her minivan, watching “Dora the Explorer,” while she grabbed a coffee. But Ms. Koehler’s story diverges from those of the other women because she is a senior public defender, and as she cheerfully informed me, “I cross-examine cops all day long. I’m not about to be intimidated by a badge.”

The officer asked where she had been, and when she lifted her cup, he said, “So you abandoned your children?”

That’s when Ms. Koehler laughed. “It’s not against the law in Illinois to leave your children unattended. You have to prove that I’m willfully endangering their life by going into Starbucks and getting a cup of coffee where I can see them the whole time. Good luck getting that case approved by a state’s attorney.”

ADVERTISEMENT

The officer didn't end up pressing charges, but instead put in a call to the Department of Children and Family Services. As a result Ms. Koehler had to provide references attesting to her parenting, her children had to get physicals from a doctor, and the family was interviewed in their home, all before the case could be dismissed.

It's not lost on Ms. Koehler that her ability to refuse to be intimidated is the result of her profession and privilege as a white, affluent mom. In her view, this makes it all the more important that mothers like her, mothers like me, stand up for our right to parent our children without public shaming, investigation or prosecution.

"If this happened to anyone of color," she said, "they could have been shot in the street." She continued, "But no matter what color you are, no matter how much money you do or don't have, you don't deserve to be harassed for making a rational parenting choice."

When I asked what advice she would give to other women in this situation, she said: "I would tell them to ask the officer what law she was breaking. I would tell them to ask why and how going into a store for a few minutes meant she was abandoning her child. I would tell her to ask if she was under arrest, and if not, if she was free to go.

"And if it's not a cop but a person on the street, calling them names, yelling at them that you're a terrible mother, threatening to call the police and have their children taken away, then I'd tell them to be extremely calm and clear with that person. I'd tell them to take out their own phones and start recording the interaction. I'd tell them to say calmly and assertively: 'I haven't done anything wrong; I haven't broken any law. My child is fine. I don't know you, so please step away from us. You are harassing me, and you're harassing my child. If you don't stop harassing us, I'll have to call the police.'"

A mother, apparently, cannot be harassed. A mother can only be corrected.

As I listened to her, it occurred to me that I had never used the word harassment to describe this situation. But why not? When a person intimidates, insults or demeans a woman on the street for the way she is dressed, or on social media for the way she speaks out, it's harassment. But when a mother is intimidated, insulted or demeaned because of her parenting choices, we call it concern or, at worst, nosiness. A mother, apparently, cannot be harassed. A mother can only be corrected.

At this point you might be wondering, "What about the dads?"

Dr. Sarnecka, the cognitive scientist, has an answer to this. Her study found that subjects were far less judgmental of fathers. When participants were told a father had left his child for a few minutes to run into work, they estimated the level of risk to the child as about equal to when he left because of circumstances beyond his control.

I love the way this finding makes plain something we all know but aren't supposed to say: A father who is distracted by his interests and obligations in the adult world is being, well, a father; a mother who does the same is failing her children.

Perhaps all this is beginning to change. In March, [Utah became the first state](#) to pass a law protecting “free-range” parents. Other states may soon follow. Lenore Skenazy, the founder of the [Free-Range Kids movement](#), is the president of [Let Grow](#), a nonprofit that helps parents, teachers and organizations find ways to support childhood independence and resiliency. And among mothers I know, there seems to be a slow-brewing backlash to the idea that we should let our lives be ruled by the twin fears of danger and of disapprobation.

I felt these fears every time I stood at a birthday party with 30 other parents, watching for two hours as our children played. I felt it at the park when, just at the moment I took out a book to read, my son stumbled and bumped his chin, and a woman began shouting, “Where is this child’s mother? Is this child being supervised?”

It was the everyday version of Ms. Harrell’s terrifying experience. In the video of her interrogation — aired on television news, for all to see — she cries while a male officer [berates her](#), saying, “You understand that you’re in charge of that child’s well-being.”

As I write this, I am sitting on a bench in a residential neighborhood. It is a beautiful summer afternoon, but there are no children playing on the sidewalks. They are safe at camp, inside their houses, buckled into car seats, plugged into screens, never enjoying what the writer Mona Simpson called “the luxury of being unnoticed, of being left alone.”

Dr. Sarnecka once told me that children may not have the same rights as adults, but “they have *some* rights, and not just to safety. They have the right to some freedom, to some independence.” They have a right, she said, “to a little bit of danger.” And parents, I’d add, have the right to give it to them.

In the end I was lucky. The prosecutor agreed not to pursue charges in exchange for 100 hours of community service. My family and close friends stood by me. I was not placed on a registry of child neglecters. I didn’t lose my job. The truth is, I don’t feel that bad about what happened to me anymore. Instead I worry about all the ways our country seems to be at war with children, even as we insist our greatest responsibility is to protect them.

[Kim Brooks](#) is the author of the forthcoming “Small Animals: Parenthood in the Age of Fear,” from which this essay is adapted. [END] ###