

“You’re right, you’re so right.”



Nikki Hardin

“

Dr. Mary says I have issues about you that I need to work on,” my daughter Jennifer announces after we’ve been talking on the phone for a few minutes. F&#k Dr. Mary and the couch she rode in on, I think. Once again I have been neatly painted into a conversational corner. If I try to glide over what Dr. Mary says and segue into a discussion of *Sex*

in the City reruns or sustainable economies in third world countries, I will be guilty of a lack of interest in my daughter’s emotional growth. But if take the bait, my daughter will open the bulging emotional file labeled, “Mother, abandonment by”. Subfolders include

- The mother who read too much
- The mother who worked too late
- The mother who traveled too often
- The mother who forgot to buy living room furniture
- The mother who never listened
- The mother who had too many boyfriends
- The mother who made us visit our father against our will
- The mother who never picked us up on time
- The mother who made us eat Thanksgiving dinner in an Italian restaurant

In order to prove that I’m not a bad mother, I express mild interest in Dr. Mary’s theories, and then we’re off to the races. My daughter presents all the evidence in a thorough, efficient manner for an hour or two, leading me to wonder how Dr. Mary would like it if she had to listen to this on HER long-distance bill. I stand in the dock in my orange prison suit and decide that this is not the time to plead Not Guilty by Virtue of Insanity.

(“Your father drove me crazy, and those nights I was out late...I was being treated for post traumatic stress syndrome as an outpatient.”) Instead, tonight I will plead out on every count, or else we might have to explore what the members of her group therapy think of me as well.

As her Inner Child drones on and on, *The Mother Who Never Listens* hits Mute on the remote control and moves closer to the tv in order to read the closed captioning of the Andy Gibb biography on VH1. “You’re right, you’re so right,” I murmur at all the appropriate times. By the time Andy has chosen drugs over his relationship with Victoria Principal, my daughter has begun her summation. We’re coming into the home stretch just in time for the funeral and a guest appearance by the surviving Bee Gees.

“Dr. Mary says you did the best you could with limited emotional resources, you didn’t mean to scar us emotionally,” says my daughter.

Can I get off the phone now and do some community service, I want to ask, but that would just underscore my inability to take her problems seriously. Instead I settle for commenting on how wise Dr. Mary sounds.

“Are you being sarcastic?” Jennifer demands.

Just when I thought we were headed for the barn, we’re off for one more lap around the track on the back of my mother the nag.

During the period that Jennifer was in therapy twice a week, I was afraid to answer the phone.

“Get caller I.D.,” my older daughter Kristin urges, “just until she gets past the tragic teen years in her sessions.”

Kristin and I had our own problems when she was going through a particularly surly adolescence, a time when many parents and children have difficulty communicating about sensitive issues (Me: “Can you pass the salt?”—She: “Shut up, Mom!”). I guess we could have used some help ourselves back then, but instead we are now bonding through our mutual fear of looking bad in Jennifer’s therapy.

Kristin and I try to look on the bright side. For instance, it’s so much less expensive to have secondhand counseling in the comfort of our own homes. Thanks, Dr. Mary, for sharing!

Nikki Hardin is the publisher of skirt!.