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## Ari Kaufman: Parenting with heart in the heartland

### Families and teachers make sure the kids behave

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Growing up in a coastal "liberal" family, most of my friends shared similar, ignorant views on what those strict parents in the so-called "heartland" were all about. After my brief teaching career in Los Angeles, I moved to that heartland, where I now work as a freelance writer and full-time researcher for Indiana's War Memorials. I am the only Jewish employee in my office and the only transplant from either coast.

Unlike most state agencies, and because patriotic military folks run the show, office politics are predominantly conservative. My co-workers are warm, family-oriented

Christians who like basketball and fly the flag on their porches. They invoke the lord's name, denounce Islam and support Israel. While this behavior might irk some, I revel in it.

Many pregnant military moms and other small-town families walk through our building each day. I give tours to aging veterans and respectful schoolchildren when requested. The families and teachers make sure the kids behave, which contrasts sharply with what I've observed with Europeans, Americans from more-affluent suburbs and inner-city folks (including here in Indianapolis) where parents and teachers exercise little control over their children.

Too many parents and teachers seem ill-equipped or unwilling to discipline their children. Instead of reprimanding misbehavior like in the "old days," they have been instructed by seminars and school psychologists that children should be allowed to let their feelings out so they don't fester. Teachers and parents are told that "whatever makes a child feel comfortable is the right answer." When I occasionally sent a poorly behaved student to the office at an L.A. public school, the kid would come back smiling as my principal, fearing a lawsuit or hurt feelings, rewarded him or her with candy.

Parents and teachers are told that, "If kids

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aren't allowed to freely express themselves, they won't develop proper self-esteem." Self-esteem? In this era of Facebook and YouTube, esteem is the last thing that needs augmenting. Say what you will about parochial or other "antiquated" schools of discipline, they work – and most inner-city parents who send their uniformed children to well-funded charter schools enthusiastically agree.

Today, many of America's esteem-fortified children spout profanity or even try to kill their parents. This casual back talk carries over into the classroom, where teachers, paralyzed by 40-year-old pop psychology, tolerate assaults and abuse because "whatever makes children feel comfortable inside" is the basic rule. Parents struggle against the same propaganda.

I'm no psychologist, but it seems that insecure 21st century parents want to be friends with their children first. Yet, as I learned during my early days as an inner-city schoolteacher, if you don't set strict limits, children, feeling confused about who's the boss, will rebel. This then devolves into our current dysfunctional social order, where no one teaches students how to behave, to dress, or what is appropriate to say and do.

These people also have busy schedules, but they're more likely to schedule time

with their children than their kids' preschool consultant. Many instill conservative values in their children, who then join the military and become some of our most noble and selfless folks. Many accomplish more with less than residents of our inner cities.

I never believed a word of this until I began traveling across our great land six years ago, moving to its interior three years ago. Political speeches and media anecdotes about the people in "flyover country" and their lives are a disservice because other Americans, who haven't spent the time to get to know the reality, believe what they hear.

It may take a village to raise a child. Normally I'd rightly scoff at such communal balderdash, but it's true in the sense that in small communities, where everybody may know just about everybody else, misbehaving children would be reported to their parents, and neighbors often would intervene directly to correct behavior.

Those kind of villages aren't named Westwood or Greenwich.

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