

## Grandpa Said A Naughty Word

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Few of us realize that the critically important life lessons that guide us through our adult lives are learned before we go to school. Find Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

### Grandpa Said A Naughty Word

[My young daughter] Sophie was sitting on my lap at Grandpa's the other day. As Grandpa was talking to Grandma, he says "Oh, I hate that goddamn show." Sophie looks up at me and whispers, "Ooooh, Grandpa said HATE... that's a naughty word!"

- David Lauer, American father and advocate for good parenting

Four-year-old Sophie had no idea of the significance of her simple heart-felt observation. Her father may have, or he may have thought of the irony of what she said as funny. Sophie's words were hugely important and I will explain why.

First let me take you back many years to a family gathering in Canada. Three generations had gathered for a family dinner on a Sunday evening. The grandson listens to the conversation quietly--having nothing to contribute anyway--as the custom then was for children to be "seen but not heard." The boy has nothing else to do but listen and learn.

The grandmother told stories that took place in the Great Depression, which was not long past. Grandmother and grandfather had survived the Depression in comfort as they owned property as well as a bakery and a grocery store. The grandmother told of many incidents where people without money or food would come to the grocery store asking for handouts. Each was given something.

One feature of most stories was an observation about the cleanliness of the people coming into the store to beg for food. They were usually not clean, the grandmother observed, neglecting to mention whether or not these people might have had access to soap and water, or even a place to live. The child, having no reference other than his own personal experience, thought there must be many dirty people around. He always had access to water and soap.

One story involved a man with dark skin, unusual in those days in a basically all-white city. When grandmother tucked "dirty" and the "N-word" into a sentence in passing, the young grandson exploded. "Oh, Nana, shut up" is all he said. He knew the words of his grandmother hurt someone who could not defend himself. He knew enough to say no more and knew he could not take back what was already out and festering.

The lad was severely reprimanded, isolated from the others present at the time and promised further punishment when the younger family got home. The "sin" had been the boy telling his grandmother to shut up, not the grandmother's expression of racism. Apparently, in that setting and that time, telling a racist relative to shut up was the greater offence. Especially if one of the offenders was a child. And the other a financial benefactor to the younger family.

The grandmother, I should mention--my own grandmother--never again expressed a word that was racist or prejudiced. I can't remember if I was punished at home later, but it would not have mattered to me. I could not listen to prejudice as if it didn't matter, even as a young lad. I felt hurt by words intended to hurt others.

Why? My parents never said or taught me anything about racism or prejudice. My only entertainment in those days was the radio. In the mid-1940s, after the Second World War and before his untimely death, I heard many audio clips of Mohandas Gandhi, fondly known by almost everyone as "The Mahatma" (Great Soul). Gandhi, born into a Hindu family, grieved as untold numbers of Hindus and Muslims died at each others hands during the migrations between India and Pakistan at the time of independence from Britain. However, he managed single handedly to prevent more slaughter than the Brits could ever avoid by speaking words of peace to the Muslims of Bengal.

The Mahatma was a man of peace, a man who put his life on the line many times in the cause of peace, understanding and respect among all people. I learned more from Gandhi than I did from my biological father. His

words guided my life when my parents provided no words of guidance. Gandhi was the parent I learned from as a young child and that learning shaped who I became and what I did with my life.

Someone taught Sophie well. She knew, without thinking, that even using the word "hate" was wrong, while never giving a thought to her grandfather's "taking the Lord's name in vain." While there is virtually no evidence that "the Lord" would take offence at the grandfather's statement, the books that profess to express the Lord's wishes all say that hatred is wrong.

More significantly, Sophie had been taught this life lesson about values and mutual human respect before she was old enough to begin her formal education. That lesson will shape her life.

Someone was parenting right. Note also from the quote that Sophie was on her father's lap. Touching (the loving kind) is another critically important experience in a parent-child relationship. Not only is she receiving good parenting today, she will pass these good skills along to her children when that time arrives. She will "pay it forward" and never realize why. Many will benefit later, though few will know the background story as you do.

My friends, this is the kind of good news, of world-saving news, that our news media never report. This small incident happened in one American household. It is likely happening also in many, many more. The world needs to know.

You know these lessons about parenting. Pass them on. Kids learn about life from the people they live with before they ever begin school. Schools are not empowered or directed to teach life lessons. Young adults need to know this. They need us to do what we can to teach them.

Bill Allin is the author of ***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems***, a guidebook for parents and teachers about what and when to teach children to assist with their social and emotional development as well as their intellectual and physical development.

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