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RED & BLACK ... An Independent Mind

Ok, the logical topic for a July column is "independence" but I think we've already done that.

Independence is not something you "do" and then check off your list – it is a state of mind. A way of living.

I meant the topic in general. Although I'll admit this year's July 4th celebration was different than prior years.

Does that mean you did not dress the bear in the hallway in red, white and blue?

Of course we did, some things never change. Like going to the neighborhood pool, barbecuing hot dogs for dinner, enjoying great Sugar Land fireworks, and ending the day back at home with watermelon.

That is what stayed the same ... what was different?

As I looked at Natasha watching the fireworks, I realized that now that she's old enough to get her learner's permit, everything's going to change. Before I know it, she'll be driving and no longer dependent on me to take her everywhere.

I believe that is called "growing up." Really not much different than when the colonists decided to take control of their own lives and destiny, so fought for independence from the Brits.

Cute analogy. But this "colonist" is my daughter and although I'm trying to prepare her to be a responsible young adult, I can't help but worry about her.

I understand. But, nothing really prepares a country – or a parent – to give up control. You just have to take a deep breath and let them go. It is not as if you are deserting them. You are still there, you are just stepping back.

Easy for you to say, you're watching from the sidelines.

Really? Who does Natasha text when she gets exasperated with you? Who does she look to for advice and suggestions? And guidance?

Her aunt – the epitome of independence. The woman who left home when she was 16 – off to conquer the world.

DISCLAIMER: We are real people. We are not claiming to be experts in any given field, but rather are becoming experts of our own lives.

Do not forget my first stop was college, which allowed me to start working on my independence in a more controlled environment. Very different than being 16, quitting school and then trying to figure out how to survive in the "real world."

Whereas I left home at 17 to continue my education at a prestigious university. Unfortunately, I had no clue what it meant to be "independent."

That is an understatement. You managed to get through the first 40 years of your life deferring your "decision-making" to other people – first our parents and then your husband.

I preferred to remain a "colonist." The thought of taking my ostrich head out of the sand scared me to death. I bet that's how some of the colonists felt – is it worth the fight? Is it worth the effort? And then what do we do?

Reality is "doing nothing" means you accept the status quo. And, as far as I am concerned, you renounce your right to complain. True independence starts with determining what you want, why you want it and then deciding what, if anything, you are willing to sacrifice to achieve it.

Wow. I always thought of independence as more of a "declaration" than a mindset or a way of thinking.

It is both. And, it requires your words and actions to match. Independence is the freedom to make choices, and then execute them.

Easier said than done. And almost impossible to teach.

Not really. For example, last month when Natasha wanted to go to Baylor's orchestra camp, and then when she got there, realized how difficult it was going to be because she had only been playing the bass a very short period of time. How did you react?

I let her complain, although I acknowledged she had a valid complaint. But I also reminded her we had discussed it and it had been her decision to go anyway. And that now she had to take responsibility for that decision and gut it out.

And, how did she react?

She continued to let me know things were difficult, but she never asked me to pick her up early. But what was interesting is that when she got home, I asked her to confirm she still wanted to do Stephen F. Austin's orchestra camp, which was only a week later. She told me her reasons for and against going, and both "sides" were very well thought out.

So, you are "teaching" her independence using day-to-day decisions. If she wants to make her own decisions, she is learning that they have consequences.

Absolutely. But I have to tell you that, as a parent, letting her make these decisions is one of the hardest things I've ever done. Like her grades at school last year. By not "holding her hand" through homework assignments and studying with her for finals, as I'd done in the past, I essentially let her pass or fail on her own.

That is why they call it "tough love." But, you explained to her "why" you were doing that. Plus, you did it as she started eighth grade so she would have a year to practice and be better prepared for high school. It was a way to help her think through – and understand the repercussions – of her decisions at the front end.

Exactly. And although she let things slide to the very end, she still managed to pull it out because she didn't want to go to summer school. But I wish she would take a more proactive approach, rather than her current reactive approach, to decision-making.

Patience, grasshopper.

That's funny coming from you. The woman who has no patience!

I prefer to think of it as "selective patience." And, Natasha is selectively proactive. When it is something she wants. Or when she is forced to because there is no other option. Or when she is offered an "incentive."

Like you requiring her to have specific music goals and objectives in exchange for



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UPCOMING APPEARANCES

July 16 – Texas Career Education Conference

July 22 – Stringfellow Prison

For an up-to-date listing of all upcoming public appearances, as well as details on these, please go to "Future Appearances" at www.redandblackbooks.com.

you paying for her music lessons? I bet the teacher was shocked when Natasha explained that the two of them had to determine what they would be.

If they set them, then they cannot complain they were not fair. Regardless, there are no "free rides" in life. If parents do not make their children accountable for their actions and decisions, their children will have a rude awakening in the "real world." Babying them once they are no longer babies is not what they need.

But your children are always your "babies." And you want what's best for them.

But, what is the "best" decision for them today is not necessarily the "best" decision in the long run.

I am painfully aware of that, which is why this is so difficult. Especially when I see my teenager's emerging "independence."

This is when I will be, to quote you, "Watching from the sidelines." I am going to enjoy these fireworks.

Knowing you, you'll probably start a few yourself.

Count on it.