

Sugar, spice and



AS I

SEE IT

PEG
DeMARCO

everything... individual

There's a terrific article for any mother bringing up a daughter today that I'd like to pass on to you. It's called, "Sugar, Spice & Everything Nice — Raising Strong & Confident Daughters Today," written by Pam Gelman and available online at www.babyzone.com.

Basically, the article struck a cord with me because there was a time when I did everything wrong as Gelman suggests while raising my daughter, Victoria, who is now a 26-year-old woman. Thank goodness I was pointed in the right direction approximately 10 years ago by none other than ... yes, my daughter.

I had longed for a daughter for so long and Victoria, or Vicki, as we all call her, gave me a run for my money from the moment she was born. Wrapped in a blue receiving blanket instead of the standard pink for girls (the hospital had run out of pink ones) the first time a nurse handed her to me, I should have known then that things were not going to be exactly like I had planned. My mother had dressed me in frills and bows, with Shirley Temple curls, and naturally, I wanted to pass that on to my daughter.

Not to be dissuaded, I was able to get her into cheerleading and she again looked adorable in her outfit. Since I can't remember any time I watched her cheer, I have a feeling that she somehow squeaked out of that, too, in favor of playing softball.

Karate came next and she was quick and good with long legs that helped her win several matches. Purchasing a lovely pair of white ice skates for another birthday, Vicki quickly traded them in for a black pair of heavy duty ice skates. It was then that she faced her first challenge: the local ice hockey league's all-boy policy.

She asked for an opportunity to try out for the team and the coach had no choice but to accept her and change the rules; she was the best goalie he had ever seen. I remember praying several times in the stands that the puck wouldn't somehow make its way through the mask and damage her beautiful face.

I started her out with all the Fisher Price toys a child could want and when she turned 5 years old, planned a birthday party for her at McDonald's. The pictures I cherish today say it all — not one little girl was invited, but rather a host of rough and scruffy little boys that scowled when Vicki opened her presents from me — gorgeous dolls that were quickly put aside for the next present.

Right after the party, I signed her up for ballet and she looked adorable in her tutu. She spent that first and only ballet lesson in the corner, refusing to move with her arms folded across her chest, and I found her tutu the next day hidden under her bed in a place she hoped I would never find it.

The dolls I bought her sat on shelves collecting dust while the Tonka trucks had to be replaced several times due to wear and tear.

Yes, she was growing into quite a beauty and it was natural because she refused to wear even a spot of makeup. When she was 16, I enrolled her in a modeling school and she reluctantly did a few shows. Finally, a competition came to town with several representatives from New York modeling agencies. Vicki made it past the first hurdle and the finals were held at a hotel in downtown Charlotte.

She looked fabulous that day, nothing elaborate — just her favorite black jeans and her hair neatly tied behind in one long, thick braid. I had been so excited about the competition, but she took it all in stride. Unfortunately, she didn't make the second round and we wound up crying all the way to the car.

Starting up the car, I looked over at her and it suddenly hit me. "This hasn't been much fun for you, has it?" I asked.

She sniffled and wiped her eyes. "No. I did it for you, Mom."

I felt horrible when she said that because I realized I had always put her in a position that she didn't want to be in. I

had stereotyped my own daughter from the time she was born and didn't recognize her individualism until that fateful day in a parking garage.

I swore I would change — but mothers have a difficult time changing old habits passed down to them from generation to generation.

When prom time rolled around, I begged her to go with one of her friends. Longing to go shopping for a dress with her, instead she handed me a rolled up black knit dress and identified it as what she would be wearing. She had borrowed it from a friend and when I unraveled it and then had it dry cleaned, it truly was lovely, with silver threads running through it. Naturally, I ran to the mall and surprised her with silver pumps.

After much coaxing, Vicki let me add some makeup to her face and style her naturally wavy long brown hair. She looked like a movie star and I basked in the glory of producing such a beautiful creature. She brought me back to reality when she ran upstairs for a moment. I watched in horror when she returned, for now she had on the prom dress with big black combat boots.

"What are you doing?" I asked, watching her stuff the pumps in a plastic bag. She grinned and took her date's arm. "Don't worry. I'll put the silver ones on for the picture," she said before waving goodbye.

I remember she wore those same boots at graduation under her gown, but they served a purpose then, for I could clear-

ly pick her out amongst the sea of black gowns and caps. She's a young woman now, independent, strong-willed, a successful veteran of eight years in the Air Force. Once again, her independence took over recently when a buddy asked her to honor his soon-to-be bride as one of her bridesmaids. She refused to wear the beautiful satin bridesmaid gown, but she had no qualms about wearing the black satin trimmed tuxedo. So, there's a picture of the new groom and my daughter, the usher.

I no longer push my opinion on Victoria, but rather gently make suggestions that she may or may not take. She has a mind of her own and isn't afraid of doing what's different because she believes in it. Even though young men's heads still turn when she walks by, she isn't impressed. She's her own person and determined to leave her own mark on the world.

And somewhere along the line, perhaps I actually did something right. I'd like to think I did.

Peg DeMarco is a local columnist for The News Herald.

LIFESTYLES

Sunday, July 25, 2004