

THE ANTICHAPERONE

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”

--Isaiah 55:8

You know what’s tougher than reaching up, aspiring to roles for which you barely qualify?

Reaching down, trying to extricate yourself from roles you hate, when you are considered to be oh-so-qualified.

Case in point: I never (trust me) EVER aspired to the role of School Field Trip Chaperone. This is not to be confused with Church Mission Trip Chaperone. I love doing that, and who wouldn’t? Those young people have a clearly defined sense of why they are going, and have hearts open to service. School field trip kids tend to operate with a different motto: Run, Hide, Scream, And Shop Till You Drop!

Oh, I figured I’d be a good soldier and take my occasional turn. One trip to Merrymead Farms with the kindergarten would be endurable, no? But surely Jarrettown Elementary could yield parents better suited, temperamentally and otherwise, to shepherd hordes of little angels through the museum and past the Great Historic Site.

It seems not. From preschool on, I have been the Go-To Mom when it came to steppin’ out. Children’s theatre, the mint, the science center—I’ve seen ’em all. Correction: They have all rushed past me in a fevered blur as my sweaty hands clasped two of my hyperactive charges while I endlessly counted the heads of the others. Hence, the Camden Aquarium will always be, for me, nothing more than the site of little Danny’s clever escape attempt, hidden in the fauna of the rainforest exhibit. Baltimore’s scenic Harborplace forever evokes a busload of 80 ebullient fifth graders, shrieking along to the “in-flight video”—Disney’s *High School Musical*—on both ends of the trip. There are headaches no amount of ibuprofen can banish. That is one of them.

On these trips I have been, in many ways, the antichaperone—testy, agitated, petulant, bored. I’m the mom who won’t let them shop, when clearly the rubber snakes at the zoo gift shop hold far, far more appeal than the real live reptiles. I am she who groans in impatience when she must search for yet another restroom, because her small group cannot, simply cannot coordinate their bladders. Yours truly: the spoilsport who refuses to join the other chaperone moms and kids for lunch at Hooters (call me a ridiculous prude, but 11 year old boys at Hooters is just creepy). No one seems that thrilled to have me along, adult or child, which has always suited me fine.

So why is it I am always chosen? And I do mean always. When there is a lottery of any other sort—you know, the sort involving money—my track record is below dismal. But I am quite the lucky girl when names are fished from the King Tut Exhibit bowl. I was even chosen to stroll through the art museum’s Manet show with high school juniors, an experience only slightly less painful than the Baltimore Headache.

Perhaps there is a reason. Perhaps, God sees potential in me where I see none. It just may be that He thinks, if I stop kicking and screaming, I may discover something about myself. Cranky and querulous as I may be, I may be a good chaperone—good in the sense of keeping the kids safe and occupied, if not wild and free. For some of these tiny darlings, a small dose of tough love may be just what the doctor ordered. And maybe, I am here to provide it. God sees what I can't, what I don't want to see. And, time after time, puts opportunities in my path. It only remains for me to take the blinders off and embrace my fate.

Nah. Not ready for listening to God, not in this area. Not yet.

I think it's time to bring out the big guns. Next field trip I will wear a tutu, bare my teeth and snarl at the children, tell the teachers I wish I had a cushy job like theirs, flirt with the museum guards and steal little Danny's potato chips. Chaperone from Hell, that will be me.

It just might work. I may finally be outrageous enough to be stricken from the Big Book of Volunteers We Love.

And with my luck, the following week they will choose another chaperone for the touring production of *Hamlet*.

Starring Jude Law.

Darn. That God is clever.

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