

DOWN HOME: He made parenting a 'bearable' task

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As if our family weren't traveling through enough transition already, I just learned Stan Berenstain died at age 82.

Our youngest daughter, Molly, is finishing her first semester of college, so Joanna and I still are trying to figure out how to live productively in our "empty nest." Our oldest daughter, Lindsay, is getting married in less than two weeks, and we're trying to learn how to be gracious and loving in-laws to Aaron. And our dog, Betsy, is declining by the week, and we're beginning to consider end-of-life issues for our beloved pet.

Up-side all that, the death of someone I never met might appear insignificant. Appearances would be deceiving.

For years now, I've felt like Stan and Jan Berenstain helped Jo and me raise Lindsay and Molly, and they even helped with Betsy.

They were our nightly companions as we read at least one book from their Berenstain Bears series to the girls each evening at bedtime.

The Berenstains created a parallel universe populated by Mama Bear, Papa Bear, Brother Bear and Sister Bear (and, after our girls had moved on to

“chapter books,” Honey Bear). Although they lived in a tree house “beside a sunny dirt road deep in bear country,” and we lived in brick homes beside paved streets in the city, their daily lives mirrored the events, issues and challenges faced by our young family.

So, not only did Lindsay and Molly prepare for bed and learn to read by listening to Jo and me read about the Berenstain Bears night after night after night, but they also learned moral lessons as well.

The Berenstains filled their books with life issues and right-or-wrong problems.

The Berenstain Bears and the Truth, in which Brother Bear breaks the no-soccer-in-the-house rule, then breaks Mama Bear's favorite lamp and tries to cover it up by telling a lie, helped us all learn the value of telling the truth, even when the consequences are painful.

The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble With Friends, in which Sister Bear gets crossways with her best friend, Lizzy Bruin, taught us how to deal with people and the importance of making up.

In retrospect, although we practically read the cover off of *The Berenstain Bears and the Messy Room*, I'm not sure Molly learned much from that particular volume.

The news of Stan Berenstain's death caught me by surprise. I hadn't thought much about the Berenstain Bears the past few years. But all of a sudden, I was lying in the middle of Lindsay's bed, a girl in foot pajamas on either side, reading with great expectation as Papa Bear built a bigger bed for Brother Bear so the soon-to-arrive Sister Bear would have someplace to sleep.

Then I thought about all those people, like the Berenstains and Dr. Seuss and Mr. Rogers, as well as teachers and folks at church, plus family and

friends and neighbors, who helped Jo and me “train up” our daughters.

Thanks be to God, because parenting is too big of a job for parents alone.

— *Marv Knox*

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