

DOWN HOME: Mama Bear always saved the day

May 7, 2010

When our daughters were little, my favorite Daddy-duty was reading bedtime stories.

I savored the quiet serenity of lying on a bed with two freshly scrubbed and tired little girls, sharing my love of books with them. Of course, Lindsay and Molly liked some books better than others, and we read them until the covers practically fell off. But even reading the same book for the 847th time was a still and perfect joy.

I loved the girls' books, too. I entertained myself—and maybe Molly and Lindsay—by making up voices for all the characters. And in December, I read our edition of *The Night Before Christmas* as a rap song. Silly, I know.

The only books that really got on my nerves were the Berenstain Bears, a series by Jan and Stan Berenstain. [Wikipedia describes](#) them as “a fictional family of anthropomorphic bears.” There was Papa Bear, Mama Bear, Brother Bear and Sister Bear. (Later, I understand, Honey Bear came along, but that was after Lindsay and Molly grew into “big books” without pictures.)

On the up side, each Berenstain Bears book taught a lesson. Like problems associated with lying, watching too much TV and eating too much junk food. Or the challenges of learning about strangers, visiting the dentist and making friends.

On the down side, the Berenstains taught many of those lessons at the expense of Papa Bear. In *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV*, Papa Bear gorged on television worse than Brother Bear and Sister Bear. A

similar situation unfolded in *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food*. Papa Bear always came off as a dumb bear—an overgrown cub with worse habits.

So, Mama Bear always had to straighten out Papa Bear's, Brother Bear's and Sister Bear's messes. Ever the voice of wisdom, Mama Bear always drilled home the point of the book. Ever chastened, Papa Bear and his cubs always claimed they learned their lesson.

When I would gripe about Papa Bear's stupidity, Joanna—the mother in our house—told me I was (a) taking these bears waaaaay too seriously and (b) thin-skinned and defensive.

Looking back, I see her point. Still, I wish Papa Bear could've been a smart parent just once. He was loving, funny, fun and a good woodworking bear. But he was dumb.

Considering our own family, I also see the Berenstains' point. While I'm not as undisciplined and clueless as Papa Bear, and I am loving, funny and fun (if not a good woodworker), Jo is the wise parent.

I learned how to be a better daddy by watching the great job she did as a mom. While I envy her wisdom and patience, as well as the huge amounts of time she spent with Lindsay and Molly, I watched and learned and tried to apply those lessons so I would be a better father.

This Mother's Day, I thanked God that Lindsay and Molly have a wise and wonderful mother.