

THIS IS YOUR
BRAIN ON
SHAMROCKS



YOUR BRAIN ON SHAMROCKS BY MIKE FARRAGHER

I just unpacked the last bag from the school band trip down in Wildwood, New Jersey. You would have thought I was going to the Garden of Gethsemane for a weekend of pre-crucifixion suffering the way I carried on to my wife last Friday about the long car ride alone with a gaggle of girls, the crush of crowds in the sweltering sun around the parade route, and the boring band parents in this communal adventure that I shared little in common with.

That belly-aching came to a screeching halt and a lump rushed to my throat as I watched my stunningly beautiful 8th grader board the school bus to the parade route with her clarinet and sheet music for the last time. Another milestone in her life was whizzing by me way too fast, and I decided then and there to put the brakes on my complaining and enjoy the moment before it escaped me.

After the long march, the parents treated the girls to a pizza dinner and all the rides they could stomach on the expansive boardwalk. Each parent had just shelled out \$48 a piece for the “all-u-can-ride” wrist band and against her better judgment, my Annie gave me a nervous peck on the cheek and whispered a rapid fire “thanksIloveyoudad” before her friends could see it. We went to the first ride, an imposing bungee jump contraption, and were informed that this would cost an additional \$15!

“I can’t believe you’re ruining my last band weekend by not letting me go on this,” screeched one of the girls in our party to her mother.

“Really, mom? I can’t go on? Really?!?” hissed another, stamping her feet for emphasis.

Back in the day, this kind of behavior would have gotten me what my dad described as a “a clitter on the gob.” It was then I said a silent prayer to thanks to my Maker that my daughter was raised better than that and for the Continental Airlines customer service representative that instilled in me the lessons on how to deal with a whiner.

Dig if you will the picture: I have just been unceremoniously dumped out of a plane in Newark, body and soul weary from a five hour delay in Cleveland. The skies spewed everything they had at our propellor plane, inspiring me to reach for the barf bag on more than one occasion. My blood percolated to a rolling boil when the baggage carousel stopped without spitting out my luggage and I was in such a fit of rage that I don’t remember stomping over to the customer service counter for my date with Destiny, an expansive black woman clad in a blue flight suit two sizes too small. I repeated the above paragraph to her, only I laced it with profane language and in my “outside voice.” She sat back, chewed on the inside of her cheek for a moment, and nodded appreciatively until I had no more bile to spill on her face.



“You done?” she asked gamely.
“I guess,” I shouted back.

“Well, there’s 2 of us that give a sh*t about your bags right about now and one of us is losing interest real quick,” she replied in an icy yet calm tone. Butter would not melt in this woman’s mouth as she cleared her throat. “So, why don’t you take 5 steps back, think for a few moments about the tone of voice that might best convince me to help get your bags back, and then come back to the counter and we’ll start this joyride all over again. Ya think ya can do that, sugar?”

I learned then and there that it is difficult to walk backwards when your tail is between your legs. It also taught me a valuable lesson in raising teenage girls: nothing good can

come from matching their hormonal drama with melodrama.

“There’s two of us that care about you going on that \$15 ride and one of us is starting to lose interest really quick” would have been the ideal thing for these mothers to say as they diffused the teenaged hormonal bomb ticking on the boardwalk. My two girls have heard a variation of this sentence applied to so many situations that they don’t even bother pulling that malarkey on me any longer.

“Oh, brother,” my daughter said aloud, rolling her eyes. “It’s just a ride and there are tons of other ones on this boardwalk. Let’s just go on something else!”

The gaggle of girls flounced behind her as they lined up for a roller coaster and the two mothers stared at me with their mouths open. On a weekend that found me suffering through bum notes on the tuba and missed cues from the drum corps, I relished this moment that was music to my ears.

Mike Farragher just released a book of essays similar in style to this one called “This is your Brain on Shamrocks. For more information, check out www.thisisyourbrainonshamrocks.com