

Nurturing Trust

While I'm working at my desk my 10-year-old, Jenny, hands me her watch. The tiny pin that secures the band has popped out, and she can't get it back in. I know how frustrating this task can be, so I start to tell her I'll tend to it later. But as we're talking I give it a quick attempt, and lo, the pin pops back into place almost immediately.

I'm surprised it worked, but Jenny isn't. "I knew you could fix it," she says, happily slinging the watch across her wrist. "You can always fix things."

She's wrong, of course. She just doesn't notice the tangle of crippled fishing reels, chipped figurines, and twisted bicycle parts littering my basement workbench, a backlog of mishaps I haven't had the time or talent to repair. But I guess that doesn't matter. Apparently I've managed to reassemble enough dolls and bike chains to support my daughter's belief that if something is broken, I can fix it.

What struck me then was how we unknowingly teach our children to have faith. Jenny's casual conviction that I'd succeed in fixing her watch was, I'm sure, the result of all the occasions, large and small, that I had come through for her before.

I want my children to have faith—in themselves, in others, in the world. I want them to grow up to be adults who trust that what they want to have happen can happen.

The episode with my daughter's watch gave me an answer for all the times I'd asked myself why I stayed up well past

midnight to bake a classroom's worth of cupcakes, why I stitched myself into a knot all day long to complete a holiday pageant costume by nightfall, why I ran as fast as I could from my office to my car so I could be waiting, breathless, when the school bus door flapped open. It told me why I bothered to scrounge around to track down the last copy of the out-of-print book no one else believed could be found, why I attended a school parade while battling a migraine, why I taught myself how to make crepes just because a certain someone told her entire French class that I'd be happy to send in two dozen. It reminded me that it's coming through for kids in simple, everyday ways, rather than expensive, showy ones, that adds up.

Sure, at times I have told my kids, "No, I cannot (or will not) do this for you." But that is a decision, not a letdown. I want my children to learn that I will come through for them, not leap through hoops for them.

Of course, there have been times when I dropped the ball. I've walked into recitals just as my child's big moment ended. Birthdays have passed without cupcakes because I didn't bake them. My children have been the last, lonely ones waiting at after-school programs because I didn't rush fast enough from my desk to get them. And there have been plenty of occasions when I knew what my children wished I would do, hoped I would do, maybe what they even needed me to do, but I did the other, through my own selfishness, inattention, or exhaustion.

Yet here is Jenny, utterly confident that Mom will fix her watch. For all my worrying, it remains the many times that I've come through for her in the past—not the few times when I failed to—that she seems to remember. And as long as I am available and willing to perform those minor miracles on a more-or-less regular basis, I trust that my occasional failures will hover dimly in the shadow of my successes.

Thinking back, my parents didn't do everything for me that I wanted them to do. But if my mother said she would be there, she was. If my father said he would fix it, he did. They performed a series of simple acts that over a childhood demonstrated why I should believe that the way I want things to be is the way they can be. Whether my own children will take away the same message I can't be entirely certain. I just need to have faith. **C**

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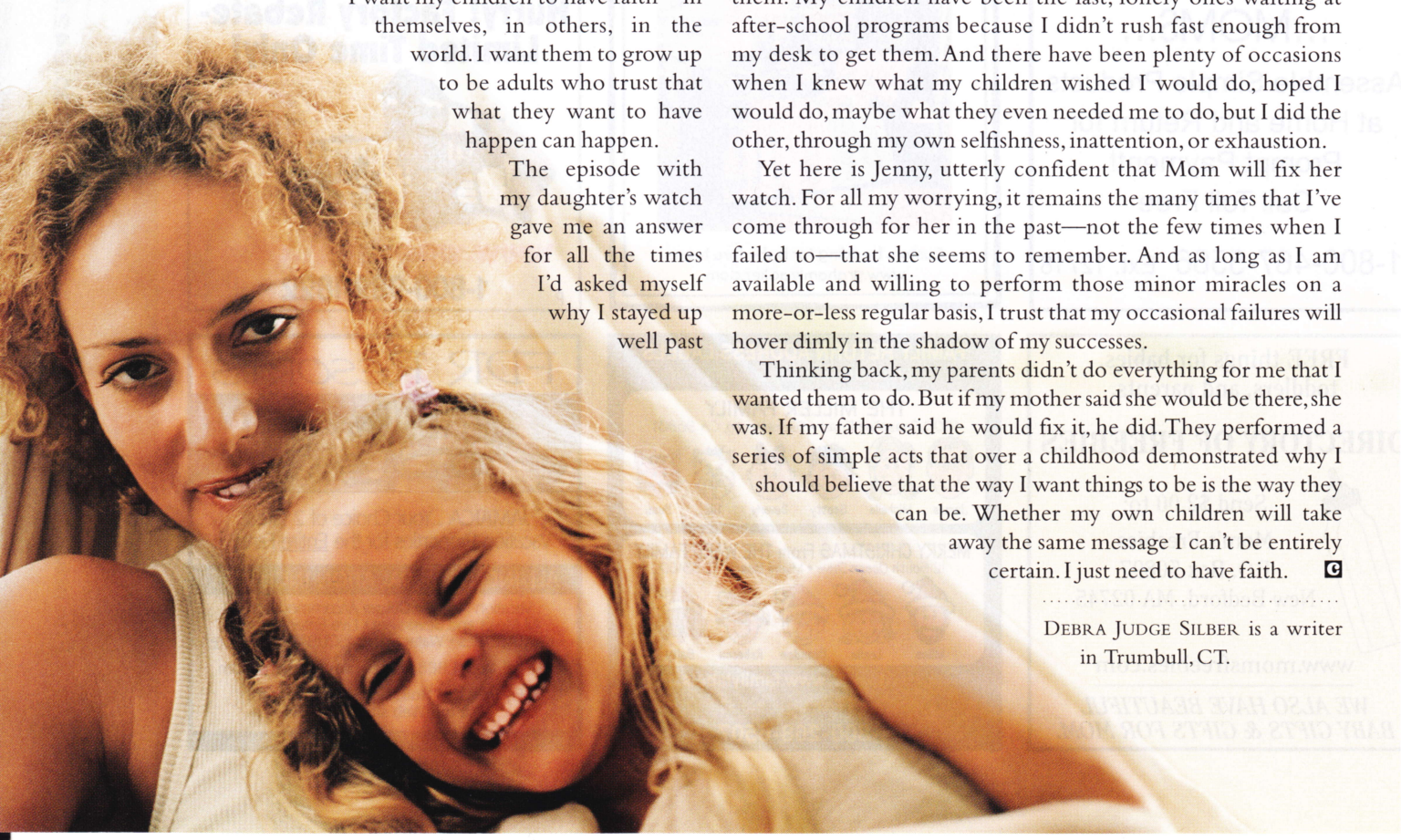


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