

Parenting Solo: Homeland Security

Written by Michelle Greenlee Harris, Columnist

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One of my closest friends surprised me today when I found out that she used some of the same tactics to raise her daughter that our government uses to protect our country from terrorists. The National Strategy for Homeland Security defines homeland security as "a concerted national effort to prevent terrorist attacks within the United States, reduce America's vulnerability to terrorism, and minimize the damage and recover from attacks that do occur". Sounds like a good parenting strategy to me.

Yes I hear the outcry (out of respect I won't call it whining) from parents and child rearing experts alike going on about how a child has a certain right to privacy. To them I say the same thing I say to my own daughter – welcome to my world! And I really do mean my world. When my former husband and I brought home our little bundle of joy almost eighteen years ago she crossed over into Michelleland.

I don't say that to be self centered, I simply mean that within these borders I make the rules that I think are the most appropriate. Anything that I feel threatens the safety and sanctity of the citizens of Michelleland is dealt with harshly – even if that threat comes from within.

Some conservative child care experts say that a child's expectation of privacy ends only when a parent discovers or suspects that there is risky behavior going on. I say that by the time a parent has "run across" evidence of a problem it may already be too late.

I have to admit, I was skeptical of the Patriot Act that followed 9-11. I was not in favor of the roving wiretaps and secret searches that it permitted in the name of protecting our borders. That

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was, of course, before I had a teenager.

My years since becoming the mother of a teen have taught me to take a bit a guerilla approach to protecting our household. Because teens can be as much of a danger to themselves as others can be to them, I have enacted my own version of border patrols and covert surveillance. I believe in pre-emptive strikes and I just don't think a parent can wait for a sign of trouble to start reacting. By the time you smell the fire something is already burning right?

When my friend told me she read her daughter diaries, went through her cell phone and searched her daughter's room at various times while she was growing up - I was surprised. By all accounts her daughter – who is now a healthy and happy graduate student- was always a pretty good kid. Conventional wisdom would say she had earned a right for her mother to respect her boundaries. Her mom scoffed at the thought. The former Army officer said " I had to know what was going on with her so I could form a plan on how to help her be successful. I wasn't going to just sit back and hope nothing was happening."

I am glad to know that I am not alone in taking the risk of overstepping my parental boundaries - for the right reasons - when it comes to raising my child. My version of homeland security mirrors what the government puts forth. I have to help my daughter be less vulnerable to attack in addition to minimizing the damage and speeding up the recovery if an attack occurs. I'm all about protecting my borders – from enemies both foreign and domestic.