**The Joys of Parenting**

Jeffrey Aran’s article, "Mom, You Never Told Me . . .'' describes his transformation from child to parent when he writes about assuming responsibility for his younger sister while his parents are away on vacation. Aran learns a valuable lesson from his experience: Children often fail to appreciate and are inconsiderate of their parents until the children become parents themselves.

Aran really begins to understand what his mother contributes to the running of the household when he has to do the marketing, and he is rather proud of himself when he comes home with “excellent buys and good, healthy, comparison-pried groceries.” Unfortunately, he has to contend with a fussy eater, his vegetarian sister, Kari, who doesn't like anything he purchases. He feels frustrated and angry because of her attitude and complains, “If this is parenting, . . . thank goodness you're coming home soon.'' But his frustrations multiply when he opens the refrigerator the next morning and finds that Kari and her overnight guest have consumed everything he bought the day before even though Kari complained that the food was “unorganic.” He is not so upset, however, that he cannot see both humor and justice in the situation. Now he knows how his parents used to feel when they wanted a glass of orange juice and repeatedly found only an “empty Tupperware bottle with dried pulp stuck to the sides and bottom” in the refrigerator because he had consumed it all.

The author also has to do the housework in his mother's absence, and this gives him another chance to see how unthinking and careless young people can be. He says that “for the first time in my life, I poured cleanser into a bucket, dipped in the mop and put it to the kitchen floor.'' With that first dreadful whiff of ammonia, he learns the unpleasantness of another household task that his mother performs regularly. It is not surprising that Aran is annoyed when he comes home from work and finds that his sister has not properly cleaned up some sugar that she spilled on the floor, so it is already sticky. Again, he admits parallels between himself and Kari when he says, ``Well, Mom, you know how it is, water and sugar make a pretty gooey combination.''

At the end of the essay, Aran thanks his parents for all they have done for him and apologizes for having been an ungrateful son. However, he would never have realized how irresponsible and thoughtless a teenager he had been if he had not substituted as a parent for his younger sister. Kari commits all the same “crimes” that Aran knows so well, but this time he is the victim, not the perpetrator. Clearly, Aran's experiences prove the old saying, “experience is the best teacher.”