



16
MAY



Welcome to Switzerland

GENERAL/COLUMN 7 RESPONSES

It creeps up and grabs you. The heart-bursting wedding vows exchanged, the festivities over...You're flying high as your perfect daughter and her bridegroom ride off amidst bubbles and butterflies.

Then it hits you: You're a mother-in-law.

A mother-in-law? Comedians' favorite fodder? A cartoon caricature? *Moi?* No way, you assure yourself. I'll be the exception.

Determined to get it right, you join the Zip-Your-Lip Club. Its motto? "Tread lightly."

The guidelines? Keep your little mouthie shut, your expression inscrutable (think Sphinx). Find neutral ground and hold that position.

On everything from career plans to furniture shopping to apartment- or house-hunting, you'll channel your therapist: "How do you feel about that?" "What pros and cons do you see?"

Their choices will surprise you. Yoga breathing will save you. "It's a fifth floor walk-up?" (Breathe.) "That'll keep you trim and fit." "Going with a black and white color scheme?" Swallowing hard to stop the gag reflex you say, "How bold!" And when you visit: "The zebra-print wallpaper and carpeting make quite a statement."

When the two of them become three, or more, the degree of difficulty shoots up. (Remember: Their lives, their rules.) As you watch your grandchild dunk tub toys in

and out of the toilet, you think, “They let the baby do *that*?” You say, “What a cutie-pie!”

The stakes get higher as they and their children get older. Decisions about career and life choices; schools and rules. What you don’t say: “He’s changing careers *now*? Just after he got a raise?” What you do say, (after a deep, cleansing breath): “How’s the job search going?” What you don’t say: “She’s ten years old. You let her stay home alone?” What you do say, “Kids grow up so fast these days.”

They lob a live grenade: “We’re considering homeschooling. What do you think, Mom?”

A diehard public school advocate, you tippy-toe gingerly around it: “What do you think, dear?”

“Do you believe it’s healthy for couples to take separate vacations from time to time?” Never at a loss for opinions, you suddenly have none.

“I’ve never thought about that.” (You’d love to add, “Your father and I never found the need for that,” but no, you don’t go there.)

Those wedding bells tolled new roles, for them and for you. Your daughter made a lifelong promise to join her life to his; you acquired an age-old challenge, to keep them close (and your points of view closer). She volunteered. You were drafted. Remember the country that refused to choose sides when the whole world was at war? Welcome to Switzerland.

*Tapping 30 years of non-profit leadership, **Barbara Rady Kazan** founded Achieving Change Together to advance social justice. In her “encore career,” this Silver Spring, Maryland grandmother returned to her English Lit roots to write personal essays and memoir. A contributing author to two anthologies, Contagious Optimism, 10 Habits of Truly Optimistic People, and to BetterAfter50.com, LivingBetter50.com, and NextAve.org, her work appears in Forbes.com, ChangesInLife.com and One Woman’s Day.*

MOTHER-IN-LAW

MOTHERHOOD

SWITZERLAND

6 Comments

Would you like to join the discussion? Feel free to contribute!



CANDICE

MAY 16, 2016 AT 12:31 PM

This is great!! And something I never thought of. What a difficult role, though you described it so well and humorously!

REPLY



Sarah Elizabeth Finch

MAY 16, 2016 AT 2:49 PM

Loved this! As a new mom with a mother and mother-in-law taking on the role of grandparents, this was an excellent reminder for me to bestow grace.

REPLY



SUSAN GOLDSTEIN

MAY 16, 2016 AT 6:30 PM

Hit home hard! Such a difficult role, but we will succeed if we all just follow your lead. Smile, smile and smile ?

REPLY



DESIREE MAGNEY

MAY 17, 2016 AT 7:38 AM

Spot-on great advice and told in such a wonderfully humorous way.

REPLY



Barbara

MAY 17, 2016 AT 11:46 AM

That's the ticket!

REPLY



Lori

MAY 21, 2016 AT 11:27 PM

I love this! You will be a wonderful mother-in-law.