

America's Funniest Home Traumatizations
(Reboot)

Sent 11-~~3-22~~³⁻²²~~2008~~
~~2022~~
(1 of 3)

* * Sometimes I look at old posts and see how they could've been written a little better, or feel that they're just worth repeating. The following is one of these "reboots". I hope this new version reads a bit more smoothly, and maybe its punches will land a little harder.
Thanks for reading! (Re-reading?)

(Originally posted)
August, 2020

Americas Funniest Home Traumatizations
(Reboot)

~~9-28-22~~
sent 11-3-22

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To be clear, I love the show Americas Funniest Home Videos, especially ~~from~~ ^{now that I'm in} prison. To me, AFV is like a gap between the planks of a slave ship, providing glimpses of the real world from inside a hellish parallel universe. Whenever it comes on, I'm always so happy to see normal people living normal lives, even if most of them are falling down or knocking things over. It's real life, and it makes me laugh.

Once in awhile, though, the show airs a clip I just can't believe anyone would find even slightly funny, and those clips invariably involve parents cruelly exploiting their children. Don't get me wrong, I'm no outrage junkie looking for something to be offended by under every (Chris) rock, but... well, here's an example.

A few years ago, AFV ran a clip of a kid and his mom driving home from a restaurant. The young man shows her he still has a glass from the place, as he apparently hadn't realized he was still holding it when they walked out. His mother then decides to milk the moment and ~~pretend~~ to freak out on her kid. "What!?" she squawks. "You stole a glass from the restaurant??" The boy replies that he didn't steal it, he just accidentally walked out with it, and at first he's not too upset, clearly assuming his mother can distinguish theft from unintentional possession, but as she stays her course of mock outrage, doubt soon creeps into his voice and his level-headed explanation morphs into a terrified plea for mercy.

"I'm taking you to the police station," the ~~mean~~ ^{mean} mom screeches, proclaiming that she "didn't raise no thief," and that he's "gonna learn a lesson" when the cops get hold of him. The panicked confusion on his face is heartbreaking: "Mom! No! Please! I didn't MEAN TO!!" He begs her but she coldly ignores him (all part of her act), pretending to drive to the police station to drop off her newly criminal 11 or 12 year old son, whom she's reduced to blubbery, helpless bawling.

Eventually she reveals that he's not actually being delivered to the cops, but her late admission of this bad, BAD joke hardly even seems to register with this traumatized kid. He hears it but he doesn't seem to believe it, and somehow this sick scene was deemed America's funniest video of the week. Ha. Hilarious. I mean, really, what's not to love about callously torturing a scared kid? We all know that's comedy gold, folks.

The way I see it, of all the most important people in our lives, we trust our parents above all to keep us safe and be a bulwark between us and ~~the~~ ^{shed} the uncaring coldness of the world. It seems like that's how the AFV boy had felt about his mother; ~~she~~ ^{shed} represented safety to him, and I imagine that's why he'd told her, with a silly, trusting grin on his face, that he even had the stupid glass in the first place.

After exploiting her son's trauma to win ten grand on a T.V. show, the mother tried explaining that she'd just wanted to teach him a lesson. Well, ok... and what lesson might someone learn from being threatened with arrest by ~~one's~~ ^{one's} own mother for accidentally taking a dish from a restaurant? It certainly wouldn't seem to be a lesson in loyalty, mercy, understanding, unconditional love, protection, generosity, kindness, or any other characteristic I'd call a virtue. More likely, what her trusting, sensitive, and essentially honest son probably learned was the cold, hard fact that if he ever finds himself in real trouble, he could not count on

his mother to help, because she'd clearly be the first to hand him over if he was suspected of ~~offending~~ ^{offending} her uncritically conventional middle class morality.

Did he learn that any violation of the rules of Power and Property, even if accidental, means that Mommy will summon the "authorities" to ~~impose~~ ^{impose} "justice"?

Maybe you'll say I'm over-reacting? "Puttin' too much on it," as the Prisonese would say? No, I don't believe so. After all, couldn't a parent's enthusiastic collaboration with the institutional machinery of punishment be a root cause of authoritarian thuggery and society's taste for unmerciful punitiveness in general? Don't attitudes like this mother's mutilate the conscience of their children, and wouldn't that toxic early influence contribute mightily to the maintenance and perpetuation of our ever-expanding governmental pain-infliction apparatus (i.e. cops and courts and prisons and surveillance; the punishment system in general)? And then, just on the specific, personal level of this video... could that terrified, pansy boy possibly have been any more traumatized if that venomous shrew who calls herself his mother had just beaten him with an extension cord instead? It's doubtful, and I suspect that the ~~psychic~~ ^{psychic} injury he sustained from her callous demonstration of betrayal ~~was~~ ^{was even more} deeply corrosive ^{than any beating} to the character of the man he'll ~~eventually~~ ^{eventually} become.

This woman taught her son a lesson that punishment is necessary to restore order, and that ~~suffering~~ ^{suffering} is expiation. She said she did it "for his own good". Funny how cruelty and betrayal are always for someone else's "own good" in the eyes of whoever needs to justify it so they can sleep better at night.

But hey, the audience judged it the funniest video of the ~~week~~ ^{week}, and the family got paid for it — \$10,000 for first place. Mama's Mammon is satisfied, and in the end, that's all that REALLY matters... right?

Added Oct. 2022

I'm torn... not sure quite how to feel about "Jimmy Kimmel Told Me To Eat All Your Halloween Candy." I want to like it, and I want to say "lighten up" to the über-earnest fun-smotherers who condemn it, yet... isn't it very, very similar to what I just ~~finished railing against?~~ ^{finished railing against?} Lying to and manipulating your kids for adult amusement at their reactions? Painted that way, it seems pretty indefensible. ~ But... is there a place for mildly vicious humor? Are we to just exempt kids from all practical jokes? Do practical jokes ever not come at someone's expense, to an extent?

I'm torn. Just don't know how I feel about this, or how I want to feel.

I'd love to hear your thoughts on any part of it, though.