



HIGH SCHOOL

# Now More Than Ever, I'm Grateful My Daughter and I Share This

by Sheryl Berk | May 12, 2020



For my 17-year-old daughter, school shut its doors unceremoniously in mid-March—there would be no graduation, no prom, no senior spring break trip, just an apologetic email that the school would scramble to provide online courses and keep her occupied while at home.



I learned from my daughter. (photo via Sheryl Berk)





with my husband in New York City.

## I had to rein in my own emotions

I simply had no idea how to react, how to rein in my raging emotions or how to process what the next days, weeks, months might look like. But as parents, we had to suck it up, set a good example and soldier on. At least that was what the email said.

The next days offered little guidance or relief: Life as we know it had ceased and all of my work along with it. A book proposal I had been hired to write was on indefinite hold. "But stuff like this has happened before, right?" my daughter asked me.

I searched my memory for anything in my 50+ years that could compare. The tragedy of 9-11 came to mind, but as horrific as that was, it never involved sheltering in place or shutting down all stores and nonessential businesses. At the time I was entertainment editor for A&E Biography, interviewing Tom Cruise over the phone a mere day after the tragedy. If anything, my work was booming—but this was pre-motherhood, pre-middle age, when I was bold and brazen and let little derail or scare me.

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"No," I replied. "There's never been anything like this."

## We are all feeling our way through this

Which means, in essence, we are all flying blind, [making our way through each day with little or no guidance as to what the future holds](#). My work as a celebrity ghostwriter has all but dried up, Hollywood is shut down and my script pitches with it; my agents are hibernating. I struggle to get out of bed before noon or go to bed before 3 am; it's as if the hours have flipped upside down with no deadlines or school mornings to contend with.

My fiercely independent child is now trapped with me 24/7, a fact that she remedies by going on long runs and shutting her door so she can make FaceTime calls with friends. Slowly, the patterns shift; I become the chief cook, cleaner and laundry folder, and she works diligently at her writing career.

[We have co-written 21 children's books](#) over the years since she was eight years old, with me—the experience pro taking the lead. But now, she is in the driver's seat. She quickly secured a remote internship with a teen magazine and submits stories weekly, proudly printing out the online articles and placing them in a scrapbook.





writes now she feels to be robbed of these precious last moments before college but also insists that her generation will be the most resilient, the most powerful, the most able to change the world in wonderful ways. I listen, I suggest a few word changes here and there. The essay is not just good...it's great, a testament to the brilliant writer she is becoming.

"Thanks mom," she says simply, then hits send. Other times she snuggles up to me on our couch: "Can I pick your brain?" she begins. "This idea came to be in the middle of the night." I buy her a journal and a mini book light so she can scribble down other epiphanies should they strike past midnight. "When do you get your best writing ideas?" she actually wants to know. I pause for a moment then smile: "In the shower."

## I have become my daughter's writing teacher

And this becomes my role over the weeks that follow, unofficial journalism teacher and sounding board, as my daughter's creativity and imagination thrives. I marvel at how she asks my opinion on pitches and runs leads by me—wasn't this the kid who always told me to "mind my own beeswax" when it came to her school essays and rolled her eyes when I recounted my own tales of breaking into the publishing industry. "Mom, that was a long time ago, now everything is digital." She isn't wrong; things have changed a great deal in media. But I still can craft a clever turn of phrase and knock out an attention-grabbing title or caption.

I give her a book, one that I was required to read each semester in college journalism classes, William Zinsser's [\*On Writing Well\*](#). She soaks it in, jotting notes and quoting its passages back to me. One in particular resonates: "Writers are the custodians of memory." How could I have forgotten this? How have I let my voice go silent when I need it the most, to express my fear, anguish and yes, hope, during these times of mass uncertainty?





I write an essay...then another...then another, and I print them out, handing my daughter a pile of pages to read.

"You really want me to critique them?" she asks, "I mean, you're the writer."

No, Carrie, we both are.

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