

# Teen-age babysitters plenty old enough to be accountable

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Today I read Phil Luciano's column in the Peoria Journal Star about a little boy who followed his dog out of the house and was rescued by a stranger as he was climbing onto a busy bridge in East Peoria. All this was while his 12-year-old sister and 15-year-old cousin were supposed to be babysitting, but were playing on a computer in the boy's home. The column, of course, mentions that the mother is single, works full time as a welder and lives in a poor section of East Peoria.

The mother is now under investigation for possible neglect by the police and the Department of Children and Family Services. Apparently the babysitters are not going to be held accountable. Too bad. They are certainly old enough to know better and be responsible, even the 12-year-old.

I can certainly relate to that story. But I was married, living in a nice section of Rockford and did not work outside the home. I had a teen-age babysitter for several hours one summer afternoon for my three children, who were aged six, five and one.

When I arrived home the children were nowhere to be seen. When I asked the sitter where they were, she said my two daughters had taken my one-year-old son for a ride in the stroller. I nearly screamed, "By themselves? If they were old enough to baby-sit I wouldn't need you!" I was quickly becoming hysterical. We lived about a block from the Rock River.

Just about the time I was trying to decide whether to jump in the car or just run around the block, I saw my daughters bustling down the sidewalk, pushing my son in the stroller. They were excited and happy. They had had a wonderful time all by themselves and the girls were feeling very motherly.

My heart started to beat again when I saw them, and then I noticed that my son's clothing was wet from the waist down and his shoes were off. After my asking why, my daughters cheerfully told me that it was such a hot day they had both hung on to my son and dipped him into the Rock River to cool him off. They were quite pleased with themselves.

One can't think of that action for longer

than a nano second to picture what the results could have been.

The sitter was fired immediately, of course, but who would ever believe that anyone who baby-sits could actually come to the conclusion that it was all right to have my three children go off by themselves? Why would she not walk with them? These are questions I'll never have answered. There is no reasonable answer. But make no mistake; the sitter was responsible for her decision, not I. I knew her and her family, who were neighbors.

Teenagers are sent to prison for murder and other crimes, why shouldn't they be held accountable for this terrible kind of irresponsibility, which could have ended in death.

I was just plain lucky to still have my three children. I won't say that God was watching over us because too many bad things happen to people who deserve better luck. I wouldn't presume that our family was somehow chosen not to have a tragedy that day.

But what concerns me about this single mother is that she is being held responsible for the poor judgment of her babysitters. If she were wealthy, married and not working



full time, would she be under investigation right now? I wonder.

My children are now aged 41, 40 and 36.

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