

Crossing the Line

By Reg P. Wydeven
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About ten years ago while strolling through the aisles at the dollar store, we picked up an air horn. We had a bit of a deer problem. Every morning my wife would go out to her garden and see that all of her beautiful flowers and plants were eaten by deer. They particularly loved her hostas, which they would eat right to the ground.

So if we happened to catch the deer munching on the plants, we would blow the air horn. We sprayed the garden with deer repellent, but the horn was much more fun. They would scamper away at roughly the speed of light.

But one of the problems with a wonderful tool is that sometimes it can be used for evil.

One summer night my son was playing at the neighbors. When I returned from retrieving him, I walked through our front door that our daughter, who was six at the time, was hiding behind. As I entered the foyer, she let loose on the air horn. The deer were even impressed with how quickly and high I jumped.

Eventually I was able to pry myself out of the plastered ceiling and gave myself chest compressions to get my heart going again. When I regained my composure, I found her rolling on the ground, laughing uncontrollably. She bragged that she “got me good.” I immediately began plotting my revenge.

I have to be careful, however, not to take my prank too far.

Earlier this month, Heather and Michael Martin, of Ijamsville, Maryland, were each sentenced to five years’ probation for two counts of misdemeanor child neglect. Their arrests stemmed from posting prank videos involving their blended family on their YouTube channel, “DaddyOFive.”

The videos in question involved Emma and Cody, two of Michael’s children with his ex-girlfriend. According to authorities, the children were ages 11 and 9, respectively, when the videos were filmed.

The couple’s controversial videos, which many viewers labeled as abusive, have since been removed from YouTube. The videos showed Heather and Michael destroying their children’s belongings and berating and swearing at them until they cried.

As a result, in July, Frederick County prosecutors charged the Martins each with two counts of neglect of a minor, alleging that the couple neglected Cody and Emma between November 2016 and April 2017. The couple did face up to five years in prison per count and a \$5,000 fine. As part of their probation, Michael and Heather are not allowed to contact Cody and Emma unless approved by a court. They are also not allowed to film the kids for posting on social media.

Heather and Michael still take videos and post them on their new YouTube channel “MommyOFive.” These videos, however, are only of the two of them.

As part of the investigation, a neuropsychologist working with Frederick County Child Protective Services examined the children. The neuropsychologist determined that both children suffered from “mental injury because of the videotaping incidents and what went on during the videos.” While the children suffered no physical abuse, the mental injury was the basis for the neglect charges.

Heather’s three children from a prior relationship were not part of the investigation and “were not found to be suffering from any mental injury.” The couple hope to soon reunite with Cody and Emma, who are now in foster care.

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