

Saints and Sinners: Childhoos innocence is under assault

Colin Powell lost me recently when he said that, while he was in favor of sexual abstinence for young people, if they decided to ignore that advice and engage in sex anyhow, here is what they should do to avoid getting in trouble.

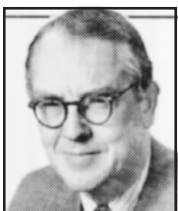
To me, this is like parents sitting down with their children and telling them, “We don’t want you to cheat on your school work. But, if you’re going to cheat anyway, here’s how to do it without getting caught.”

Life between the genders used to be a lot simpler. What happened? According to talk show host Michael Medved, “In every corner of contemporary childhood, innocence is under assault. Parental protectiveness has been overwhelmed by a society that seems perversely determined to frighten and corrupt its own

young in a misguided effort to ‘prepare’ them for a harsh, dangerous future.”

We shower our youngsters, says Medved, with every sort of material blessing, “but we can’t seem to give them the greatest gift of all—a secure, optimistic and reasonably sheltered childhood.”

While this does not bode well for the future, there may be some breaks in the clouds on the horizon. A sociologist has completed a study of 50 sexually-liberated young couples who decided that living together unmarried wasn’t all they thought it was going to be. He predicts we may be wrapping love and marriage in the same package again so that you can’t have one without the other. No longer will it be possible to break up the set.



george plagenz

• saints & sinners

On paper, the young people seemed to make out a good case for playing house. In this way, you could be sure your relationship was the right one before you made it permanent. It would cut down on divorce and broken marriages.

The suspicion persisted, however, that living together without being married was just a way to have the fun of sex with no strings attached.

When we were teenagers, a boy and girl had

a way of finding out whether they were made for each other that was more low-key. It had the same effect of testing the durability of a relationship, but it was much more innocent.

We called it “going steady.”

If you were going steady with someone, it meant that you were pledged not to go out with anyone else. Many parents disapproved of the custom. They figured the teenagers were getting serious too soon.

Often, their worries were unfounded. It didn’t take long for many a young couple going steady to discover that they couldn’t stand each other.

There were those, however, who went from steady right to the altar.

There was Jack Donovan, for example. He and I hitchhiked one summer to Chippewa Lake

to visit some girls who had a cottage there. I thought I had a date for the evening, but when we arrived I found that my girl had another date. So, I spent the evening on the front porch of the cottage talking to Miss Coates, the girls’ chaperone for the week.

Jack, meanwhile, who had thumbed all the way to Chippewa without any prospects for the evening, ended up with two dates. He lined up one date for 8 p.m., and the other for 11:30. I should have known then that anyone with that kind of drawing power would one day get himself elected mayor, which he did.

A year or so after our Chippewa adventure, Jack met a pretty coed named Jean Rawlins. His dance card had only one name on it from then on. He and Jean married and had eight children.

Convert hopes to study to become country’s first black woman rabbi

By Colleen Slevin

Associated Press Writer
DENVER — Alysa Stanton’s spiritual journey started in her childhood, when she and her family attended a Pentecostal church. As a young adult, she explored other religions, eventually choosing Judaism.

Now, at age 38, she is poised to take her faith another step by studying to become a rabbi — the first black woman rabbi in the United States, according to experts.

“I want to be a rabbi who breaks barriers, inspires dreams and builds bridges,” said Stanton, who is preparing to start the five-year course of study leading to ordination.

There are black rabbis in the Ethiopian Jewish community. But if Stanton completes the program at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, the Reform movement’s seminary, she will be

the first black woman rabbi in this country, Jewish authorities believe.

“It’s a reminder that Jews come in all colors and all ethnic groups,” said Rabbi Richard Levy, director of rabbinic studies at Hebrew Union College.

Officials at the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College outside Philadelphia, and Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America said they knew of no black women rabbis.

Stanton, a children’s psychotherapist from suburban Aurora, went to a Pentecostal church in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, before her family moved to Denver when she was 10.

For two years, she studied Hebrew and Jewish thought as a psychology undergraduate at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, then sought out an Orthodox rabbi in Denver for inten-

sive study. She made the 140-mile round trip each week in a gasoline-guzzling car, sometimes paying for fuel with quarters.

At age 24, she decided to convert. “Judaism resonates,” Stanton said, “not just as a religion, but as a culture, an ethnic group.”

At first family members thought her conversion was just a phase — and they took years to adjust. She lost Christian and black friends, who felt she was running away from God.

Stanton said it was painful to lose those friendships.

“I think people enter our lives for different reasons and when that lesson or experience is over, we have to move on,” Stanton said.

Her conversion also drew attention from fellow Jews. At some events, there were Sammy Davis Jr. jokes, and some people asked whether her mother was

Jewish.

She considered becoming a cantor, since she plays guitar and sings, but learned Orthodox Judaism does not allow women to become cantors or rabbis.

In 1992, she began attending a Reform synagogue, Temple Emanuel, in Denver. She was attracted by the social activism of the Reform movement and said she felt welcome immediately in the synagogue.

“I wasn’t an oddity. I was just another new face,” she said.

Two years ago, Stanton began to consider becoming a rabbi.

She said she had an epiphany while explaining to her 7-year-old adoptive daughter that she belonged to her as surely as if she had given birth to the child. Stanton said it made her see who she was, too — a person who had been adopted by a religion and now fit into it.

“I realized you’re not just loved and accepted but you belong,” she said.

As she became more active at Temple Emanuel, the city’s largest synagogue, others began asking Stanton if she ever considered becoming a rabbi. That, and word of older students following that path, helped quiet her own doubts that she was “too old and too poor” to do it.

In fact, she may be a better fit than she had initially thought. The seminary has become increasingly diverse, with women making up half of Hebrew Union’s classes, said Rabbi Roxanne Schneider, the school’s admissions director.

There are more “second-career” rabbis and many of the older students are women since the rabbinate only became an option for them in the last 30 years, Schneider said.

After getting her acceptance letter to Hebrew Union, Stanton stopped by to pick up her daughter at a Pentecostal church where her sister was directing the choir. When her sister told the group Stanton’s news, they gave her a standing ovation.

“We just stand by each other,” Stanton said of her family. “We may not all agree with what each member is doing but we support each other.”

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