

Sometimes as we are growing up, it seems that rules are always getting in our way and inhibiting our freedom. Perhaps we thought if only we are older than we can do as we please without being told to do chores or finish homework before having some fun.

Such was the case for Carol Brosowske, who spent much of her life as a loving stay-at-home mom of 3 and doing a lot of freelance writing and blogging up until she lost a battle with lung cancer in 2017.

Growing up in West Texas, she once wrote a short biographical story called “The Meanest Mother in Town.”

In her words, she had the meanest mother in the entire world. She gave her ridiculous rules to follow, curfews, and long talks about morals and values. Her constant nagging to turn down her music and to know where she was at all times was a hard pill to swallow at times. She had a bedtime as a child and was never allowed to have her own television or a phone in her room. She wasn't able to date until she was 16.

For a measly allowance, she had chores from an early age. Expectations were high. She had to keep her room clean and make her bed every day. Setting the table, helping out in the kitchen, and doing the dinner dishes were mandatory. She was also expected to iron her dad's handkerchiefs and everyone's pillowcases. Feeding the dog was on her list as well. When school was out for summer, her duty list grew.

Her mom was so mean that when she asked for extra cash or something special, she told her to get a job. She had to start working at age 15. Her mom obviously had no idea about child labor laws.

If Carol had a date, her mom would insist he come inside to meet her and her dad. They would then interrogate him about where they were going and give him the curfew speech. Even after she had dated the same boy for quite some time and knew him, he was made to come inside and escort her to the car. Her mom refused to let her go out when he honked his horn to pick her up for a date. So, she says, her mom was not only mean, but embarrassing to boot.

Carol wasn't allowed to watch certain movies or go to a drive-in theater with a boy. Her mom watched her like a hawk when it came to applying make-up. She was sent back to her room on numerous occasions to remove heavy layers. Her mom balked if her skirts were too short. She couldn't get her ears pierced until she was 16 years old, and then that had to be her gift. She insisted her ears were pierced by a doctor when her friends could have done it for free.

If she did something wrong or got a bad grade, she would be punished. Her mom's explanation was always the same, "I do this because I love you."

She wasn't allowed to receive telephone calls past 9 p.m. and the calls could not last more than one hour. If Carol hadn't done her homework, there would be no socializing at all.

One of mom's silliest rules was she couldn't have boys over if she was not home and even if she was, they had to stay in the kitchen or living room. No doors could be closed at any time when a boy came to visit.

She was also expected to be home every night for dinner and eat at the table with the family.

Her mom also signed her up for sewing and ceramics classes in the summer, explaining that she needed to do something productive. She was enrolled in a charm school when she reached the ripe old age of 15 and was forced to learn about fashion, etiquette and how to become a lady.

She was sent to her room for an hour if she misbehaved in church.

Her mom also had the audacity to make her write prompt thank you notes for any gifts she received.

When she got her own car, her mom actually expected her to help out with insurance and she was responsible for buying her own gas. When she started working, her mom made her open a savings account. Half of her paycheck and any cash gifts had to be put into the account, then she could spend the rest as she saw fit. Her mom was adamant about teaching her the value of a dollar and responsibility.

She was first to call adults Mr. and Mrs. and not use first names. She also had to have good manners that were drilled into her head from day one.

She was forced to eat breakfast because her mom thought it was the most important meal of the day. Carol saw nothing wrong with just grabbing a doughnut or two and eating them on the run. But her mom saw to it that she sat at the kitchen table and had her eat bacon and eggs; sometimes making her eat cereal or homemade pancakes.

If she got into trouble at school, it would be worse when she arrived at home.

Several times she would pretend to be sick so she wouldn't have to go to school. Each time her mom could tell she was faking. She had to go to school every single day. No relaxing in bed for her. She saw no reason she couldn't take a day off, but her mom seemed to have a problem with that.

She would threaten her too and years later can remember her saying "just wait until your father gets home." Her father was a loving kind man and

anything but violent but she'd have to listen to a lecture from him a fate she says worse than death.

She vowed that when she had children of her own, she would be one of the cool moms. She wasn't going to be anything like her mother; for her mother was cruel and controlling. She was indeed the meanest mom in town.

Years later, her first child was born, then 12 months later her second one came along, and finally her third. It didn't take long before Carol became the new winner of the moniker "The Meanest Mom in Town," and she says it's a title she was proud to hold.

Indeed, as we age we often see the wisdom of our parents. However, just because we reach a certain age doesn't mean we've reached the finish line of spiritual maturity, for we are all works in progress. No one might tell us to do homework or make our bed at a certain point, but God gives us the gift of a conscience that helps us to discern right from wrong. And Lent is a great time to kind of go back and get a refresher course of sorts on what needs to be done in our lives, looking at what's going right but also how we are doing in terms of following God's laws. Because like the loving parents

Carol had who didn't want her to be miserable but ultimately become a happy young woman and live a fulfilling life, God wants us to have life too and live it well.

This week, we are given the story of the 10 Commandments in our first reading. And while we are familiar with them, the Church often uses them in inviting people to make an examination of conscience because we don't just want to be average, we want to be perfect. So what does each one mean?

The first tablet has to do with how we relate to God. And the First Commandment tells us we shall not have other Gods besides our Lord God. This isn't God being jealous. Rather it challenges us to think about how we worship. Who is our God? Is it really God? Or is our ego, our money, our job at the center of our life? Do we stand up for our faith, and do we trust in the Church to guide us in faith and morals? This gives us clarity about God and our relationship with His Church.

The Second Commandment is we shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain. Yes on the surface we want to not abuse the name of God and use

it profanely. But at a deeper level, we can think about this as do we manipulate God; do we try to use God to get what we want. Like last week with Abraham's story, do we love God as he did or love what God does for us?

The Third Commandment is we are to keep holy the Sabbath day. One can work on Sunday; I certainly do now but did all through high school and college, and often people do chores and have shopping and things to do on the weekend. But it's so easy to let prayer slip, to let coming to Mass slip, to once a month or then even less frequent. Remember Mass isn't about entertainment, it's about growing closer to God who loves us so much, which is why we listen to the word and receive His Body. This is our food for the journey of life.

The Fourth Commandment is to honor our father and mother. Most commentators see this though as applying to the entire family, not just children. So as we think about it do we honor our parents and listen to them if we are still under their care growing up; if older do we show them love and honor? If a spouse, do you honor your spouse and treat him or her as your equal? Do you try to not go to bed angry, work through arguments,



apologize if using hurtful language? If a parent, do you find that balance between being too strict and the “coolest” parent in town? Do you avoid living through your children pushing your wants on them, letting them grow? Do you recognize one child is different from the other and respect them as individuals? Do you try to work things through with siblings whether you are young or old? If we say we love one another and are a loving person but can't love the people closest to us, it's a sign we've got some work to do.

The fifth commandment is you shall not kill. Seems like one most of us can breeze by. But thinking about this, we can look more deeply. Do we promote life, and stand up for the unborn, which is in our hands now more than ever as voters following the Dobbs decision? Do we kill through gossip and slander or wish evil on others? Do we put ourselves at risk and others at risk by driving after having too much to drink? Do we kill others with words and hate?

The sixth is you shall not commit adultery, and is related closely to the ninth, not coveting our neighbors wife. We've seen the impacts all around us of divorce, of the cheapening of the human body through divorcing body

and soul with objectifying the body through images. We need to be honest that there are no private sins; and when we cross the line on this one. We combat it through prayer; through working on a marriage; but even if not married through avoiding certain actions by asking for God's help, by finding other outlets for energy, and above all else remembering body and soul are always linked together and everyone is beautiful inside out.

The seventh commandment is you shall not steal. Most people aren't robbing Fort Knox, but stealing takes many forms; there's stealing things from work; there's cheating on taxes or insurance claims. It also doesn't always involve money. We can also rob someone of their reputation. We can rob someone of hope and joy and sometimes tear others down, sucking joy out of a room through negativity and being nasty. We can rob people of their dignity through bullying them and mocking them. Stealing indeed takes many forms.

The eighth commandment is you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. How easy this one is today through social media, but through conversations, the meeting after the meeting in the parking lot at the church or school. Rumors can destroy; but sometimes we can make something up

to intentionally destroy someone. So do we think about what we post online or put as an “anonymous” comment? Do we think about what might become of what we say after it’s out of our mouths or out there online?

The tenth commandment, is you shall not covet your neighbors goods. Envy brings no pleasure; sometimes we want something just because someone else has it. Daydreaming is fine. But envy can make us miserable. Maybe look at what we do have and list the blessings of what we have been given, and worry less about what others have knowing that true happiness isn’t from stuff, it’s from a loving relationship with God and one another, which the commandments help us to achieve.

All of us are sinners, and I certainly look at these commandments and never think I’ve got no further work to do. I go to confession regularly. I look at my progress but also my shortcomings. And in this, it’s so important to have hope; to remember just how deeply God loves and cares for us.

When we fall, there is always mercy. God does not want us to be enslaved to sin, He wants us to be free. Free will is such a great gift but it can be so easy to misuse it; to fall more and more into sin and justify it, when deep down we know it diminishes us. Carol in real life found incredible joy when

she grew up because of the gift of the rules and boundaries her mom and dad had for her as a child. And what happiness we can find too when we realize we don't have the meanest of Gods, but one who loves us more than we can ever imagine. So lets use this holy season and our lives to ponder deeply how we can respond to that love by following these commandments and helping others to do the same, for when we do they will truly set us free to be people of love and mercy and bring us such incredible happiness.