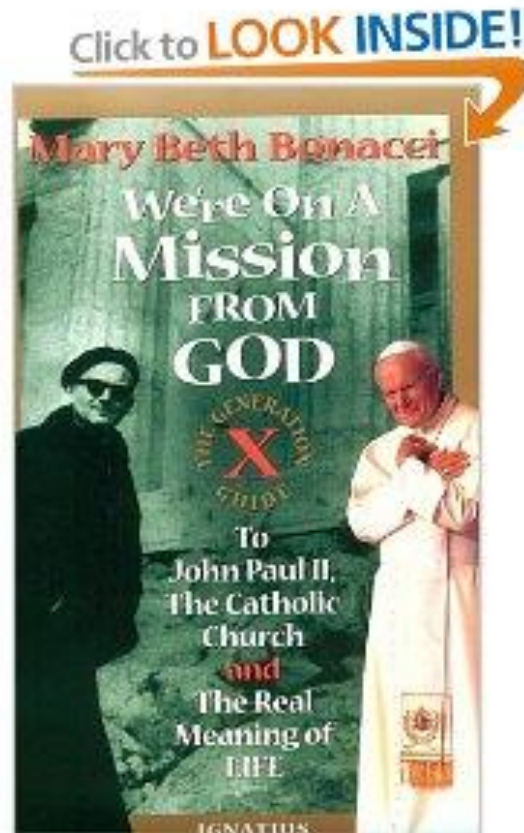


A Summary of *We're On a Mission from God* by Mary Beth Bonoacci



A Summary of *We're On A Mission From God: The Generation X Guide to John Paul II, The Catholic Church, and the Real Meaning of Life* By Mary Beth Bonoacci

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About the Author

Mary Beth Bonacci is a graduate from the John Paul II Institute. She has spoken to Christians around the world, including to the youth gathered in Denver for World Youth Day in 1993. She is also the author of *Real Love*, a book about relationships and chastity.

General Overview

Mary Beth Bonacci addresses issues that are close to the hearts of young Americans today. By using different quotations from John Paul II on God, the Church, truth, evangelization, and relationships, discussions are formed and carried out in a simple and effective way for the youth. Mary Beth Bonacci lists reasons for being Christian, for developing prayer life, for striving for holiness. She explains things that often remain a mystery to the mainstream young person, such as the Sacraments, and the Churches stance on sexual morality. She clarifies the often difficult questions about morality in today's world and the stance that a young person should take. She shows the way to the evangelization that a young person is called to by his participation in the Catholic Church. Mary Beth Bonacci also exhorts the necessity of friendship, a good relationship with parents, and pure dating relationships.

Introduction

The relationship that John Paul II has with young people is not a result of the normal attractions that make a superstar. He does not have any of the qualities that are required to capture the attention of young people, yet he is able to attract millions to youth days around the world. His attraction is the love he shows for everyone, a very supernatural kind of love that allows him to reach out to everyone he meets, both young and old. John Paul II not only loves us, but he teaches us through his writings and sermons. By listening to him we can come to an understanding of what the Church wants for her youth.

Part I: God

Chapter One: Can Being a Christian Make Me Happy?

People living the secular world today find it hard to live up to the rules and regulations of the Catholic Church. Any emptiness they feel in their lives they try to fill with different kinds of immorality. They have so much suffering in their lives already that they feel the extra rules will just make their life more miserable than it already is – that they will cut into the fun they are having. John Paul II realizes the difficulties of life, but instead of filling them with material goods, we should try and make our lives more abundant by accepting the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church.

Christ came to die for us, to heal our sinful lives. If we follow Him we will eventually reach Heaven. This does not mean that life will become easier by any means, but we will have meaning and joy in our lives that cannot be given by anything or anyone else.

Chapter Two: What is the Meaning of Life?

John Paul II as a young person must have asked the questions young people ask themselves every day. He also realizes that it is healthy for young people to question things, for it helps them seek out the truth. If one doesn't seriously question his life, religion, et cetera, and try to find answers, he will never grow. People who do not ask these basic questions will most likely spend the rest of their lives in futility.

John Paul says that we must give our lives meaning. We have the capacity to do good, but this capacity is a result of our relationship with Christ.

Bonacci explains that God left a hole in the very core of our being. We can either choose to fill that hole with God, or we can fill it with other things. This is to turn other material and earthly things into God. Only God can fill this hole, and when He does, our life has meaning.

We need to let God in our hearts and really and truly follow him. We have to let God be in charge of our lives. We need to know that God is our goal; we need to realize this fact and want to attain this goal. Bonacci says that it might take a while before we realize that we need to put God first in our lives.

John Paul II has found the meaning of his life. Notice that he does not seem stressed by his tremendous responsibilities. Rather, because he knows that God is his goal, he is filled with peace. His happiness comes from knowing who is at the center and in charge of his life

Chapter Three: How Holy Do I Have To Be?

Christ wants to be the very center of our lives. God does not want us to be half way for Him but all the way for Him. God wants every little thing we do and every thought that crosses our minds to be for Him. God wants to be the center of our attention because it is the best thing for us.

Sometimes we forget to keep God in the front, but He eventually reminds us who is supposed to be in charge. We tend to forget about God when everything is going well in our lives. That's what the bad times are for, to remind us who is really in charge. God purifies us by suffering.

Part II: The Church

Chapter Four: Why the Catholic Church?

In a society where everything is relative, even good and evil, it is hard to know what to believe and who to trust. Moreover, should one believe blindly everything the Catholic Church says? Protestant churches use the Bible as their source for determining what is right and wrong, but this has led to many contradictions throughout the years.

Some Catholics only practice those areas of faith that appeal to them and discard the rest. The Church teaches what she holds to be true on the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus built His Church on Peter and gave authority to him.

Only the Catholic Church can trace its founding all the way back to Jesus Christ. It makes sense that Jesus would leave behind Him the Church to bring the Good News to all people. The Church is not a stagnant form of government but rather a living body. It is called the bride of Christ. The duty of the Church is to transmit the teaching of Christ to the world. Because of this, the Pope and the Magisterium cannot make up their own laws and rules. The Church is always using the same doctrines to understand current problems and issues.

To be Catholic is to believe in Jesus Christ and to recognize the Catholic Church as the source of His authority here on earth. As Catholics it is important to know what the Church teaches; the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* serves this purpose. If we do not believe what the Catholic Church teaches we reject the authority of Christ.

Chapter Five: What Is A Sacrament?

What else does the Church provide for us besides an authoritative voice as to what is right and wrong? The Church also spreads Christ's love through the world by means of the Sacraments. The Sacraments give the soul grace, the spiritual nourishment of God's love that we need in order to follow God and overcome temptation.

There are seven different sacraments: baptism, confession, the Holy Eucharist, confirmation, marriage and holy orders. We should frequently receive the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Eucharist.

A sacrament has an outward physical part, such as the pouring of water in baptism, or the oil used in confirmation and anointing of the sick. These outward signs are for the physical material part of our nature that needs to see something. God understood that the Sacraments would have to include some tangible form in order to satisfy our physical nature. The outward signs of Sacraments help to show what is taking place spiritually. In a Sacrament the tangible and the spiritual unite.

Chapter Six: Does Baptism Really Matter?

The sacrament of baptism is not some sort of coming of age or naming ceremony. What takes place at a baptism is a result of the fall of Adam and Eve. Because of the sin of Adam and Eve all men on earth have original sin on their souls. Before Christ came, heaven was shut to everyone, for there was no way to remove the original sin. Christ came of His own free will in order to make a sacrifice pure enough to satisfy the Father. By His death, Jesus Christ healed the rift that stood between man and God.

We enter into the Catholic Church through the sacrament of baptism. It washes away the original sin that is on the soul of every man that is born, even today. It makes us a member of the Catholic Church.

Catholics baptize little babies because by washing away the original sin on their souls, baptism can help them to God much more quickly. Children need the grace from baptism in order to grow in faith. Also not all children make it to adulthood. By baptizing them they are assured a place in heaven.

The Holy Father urges us to use the graces we find in the Sacraments for hope and optimism, that by doing good we participate more fully with the Catholic Church and act on the graces received from baptism.

Chapter Seven: Why Bother Going to Confession?

Our relationship with God is not one that is based on emotion. But if one is constantly feeling as if God is not present in his life, one needs to take a really good look at his life. Have you been keeping God in charge of your life? Is there a lot of sin in your life?

In a human relationship we would apologize and make up with a person that we have offended in some way. When we are with someone that we have hurt or violated we do not feel comfortable around them until we have made up.

It is the same with any relationship with God. We hurt Him by our sin, and through sin hurt our relationship with God. There are two types of sin, mortal and venial. Venial sin hacks away at our relationship with God. Mortal sin severs it completely; it is a very serious and dangerous matter to fall into mortal sin.

God will always forgive us, no matter how bad our sins are. God gave us the Sacrament of Confession so that we can go to Him and be reconciled with Him by confession our sins. The Sacrament of Penance provides a tangible and spiritual source of consolation for the soul.

Through the priest, Christ absolves all our sins in the Sacrament of Penance; the relationship with God is restored.

Chapter Eight: We Don't Really Eat Christ's Body Or Do We?

Catholics really do believe that when we receive the sacrament of Holy Eucharist we are actually receiving the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. This is not something that the Church made up – it is something that Jesus emphatically tells us in Scripture.

The Eucharist gives us life that we need in order to gain eternal salvation. When we receive Holy Eucharist, Jesus is actually physically and spiritually present within us. It gives us the grace we need to live a holy life from day to day.

We cannot receive Holy Communion without preparing for it first. We must prepare ourselves while we are at Mass and not allow ourselves to become distracted. We must make sure that our souls are free from sin. Moreover, we should frequently receive the sacrament of Holy Eucharist, since it is the food our soul needs to survive.

Chapter Nine: What Does The Church Really Say About Sex and Marriage?

Despite what many people think, the Church has a very positive idea on sex and marriage. John Paul II spoke on the nuptial meaning of the body. He knew there was a lot of confusion in the world about sex and marriage and he wanted to clarify.

The pope explained that sex is a very beautiful thing when in the context of marriage: sex is a gift from God Himself and that we must live the truth of our bodies, but within the context of marriage.

God first created Adam, and then as a companion for Adam, God created Eve. Although they were naked, they did not stand before each other in shame, rather they were unashamed. The reason they could do this is because these two people totally and completely trusted in each other. Adam was only concerned with the well-being of Eve, and Eve with the well-being of Adam. For Adam and Eve, sex was a way to show how much they trusted in each other, it was a total gift of self to the other person.

God designed sex to speak a language. When we sexually give our body to another we are telling that other person that we want to be with that person forever. This language has never changed, even though society today wants us to think otherwise.

In the sacrament of marriage, God binds two people together for the rest of their life on earth. Some people ask about annulments: is that a Catholic divorce? No. An annulment takes place when the Church examines the circumstances surrounding the marriage and then the Church decides that no valid marriage ever took place.

After the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve became ashamed of their bodies. This is a result of a lack of trust. Now that sin has entered the world, Adam can use Eve simply for sexual pleasure, and Eve knows this. The trust in the relationship has been broken because each is thinking not of the best interest of the other, but rather of the best interest for themselves.

Even though sin entered into the world, the language that sex speaks has not changed. It still tells the other person that “I want to be with you forever.” The problem today is that many people say one thing with their bodies, and think another thing with their minds.

Marriage is the sacrament that binds two people together for the rest of their lives. It says to the other person, “I want to be with you forever.” When two people give themselves to each other sexually within marriage, their minds and their bodies are saying the same thing. Outside of marriage, sex physically tells a person “I want to be with you forever,” but the person might not be thinking that. Sex outside of marriage uses the other person horribly.

Lust can still come into marriage, and people can use each other within marriage. But marriage, because it is a Sacrament, provides the grace to help people live. By letting God take charge of a relationship we can be sure that it is in good hands.

Chapter Ten: Whom Does God Call To The Religious Life

A priest is a man who shares in the ministry of Christ, as he has the power to act as Christ; forgive sins and consecrate bread and wine. The priesthood is for men alone. Since the priest is acting for Christ, we have to take into consideration that Christ was male, not female. Even the Holy Father recognizes that the Church does not have the authority to make women priests because Christ was not a woman.

The religious life is for women, and men, who are not called to the priesthood, who live a life dedicated to God alone. People who live the religious life are free to follow God completely, freeing them from responsibilities they would find as single or married people.

Priests and religious are asked to take vows in order to give more freedom to their lives. By taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, these souls are able to worry less about material things and dedicate their lives more fully to God.

God calls special people to live the life of the priesthood or the religious life. Those who follow the call of God are very happy. Joining the priesthood or religious life is not about rejecting love but accepting the love of God.

Chapter Eleven: What About Other Christians?

For a long time there was only the Catholic Church. Then came the Great Schism, and the Eastern Orthodox Churches broke away from the Catholic Church. This was followed by the Protestant Reformation and then Henry VIII’s break from the Church. The breaks continued until we have many, many churches that are separated from the Catholic Church.

There have been attempts to bring other Churches back into union with the Catholic Church, but it is a slow process.

It is important to work with the people that are separated from the Catholic Church and to treat them lovingly. It is important to talk with them and help them see the truth about the Catholic Church, for many are led astray by horrible misconceptions.

Chapter Twelve: Why Do We Pray to Mary?

One of the biggest problems that Protestants have with Catholics is that they think we worship Mary. Christ preserved Mary from all sin because He wanted an appropriate vessel to come to earth in. God also created her without original sin so that she might be able to raise Jesus Christ, who is God.

We do not worship Mary; we honor her. The Holy Father says that she guides us to Christ and teaches us how to follow Him. We can ask Mary for help because she is the mother of Christ and He is ready to listen to anything she asks.

Jesus gave us Mary for our mother as He hung on the Cross. She cares about us and understands our suffering. She wants to lead us to her Son.

Part III: Truth

Chapter Thirteen: What If I Am Not Sure That I Believe All This Stuff?

Because we are human we have probably all doubted our religion at one point or another. Doubt doesn't mean that we question whether or not God exists, but it asks why we believe what we do.

Doubt is an invitation from God to better understand and learn about our faith. An intelligent person asks questions and finds answers. However, there is the danger that one will just give up entirely and not take the time to find the answers. When in doubt, find an answer from a priest or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Most importantly, we need grace from God to understand what His Church teaches us. Pray to God for understanding to help you find answers to your questions.

Chapter Fourteen: How Should I “Clarify My Values”?

In the secular world today, truth is relative and everyone has different value systems. God created everything with an inherent value that does not change from person to person. We need to know the truth in order to love. We cannot respect other peoples systems of values when they are in conflict with our own. If they conflict with ours, which are from the Catholic Church, the source of truth, then they are not true. We can always find the truth by turning to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.

Chapter Fifteen: How Do I Know When To Trust My Conscience?

If we have a properly formed conscience we will know the difference between right and wrong. Society today leads people to mis-form their consciences, so that they do not have any qualms about doing what we know to be evil.

John Paul II says that to have a good conscience is like having the voice of God in the back of our minds, telling us what is right and wrong. In order to have a good conscience, we must understand things the way they really are. Then we must love Jesus above all other things. We should listen to our conscience and not let it be polluted by the corrupted ideas and opinions of people today.

Chapter Sixteen: Am I Supposed to Love Myself?

Christ told us to love our neighbors as ourselves; we are supposed to love ourselves. John Paul II tells us how we should love ourselves. We should love ourselves not because we are beautiful, talented and popular, but because God loves us so much that He died on a cross for us. The talents that God has given us are the extras of His love. God gave us those talents to develop and use for good. We have an obligation to use them.

We also have an obligation not to sin because it hurts both ourselves and God, who loves us very much.

Real self-love is to understand the dignity that God created you with, and to understand that God loves you very, very much.

Part IV: Evangelization

Chapter Seventeen: What Are We Supposed To Be Doing While We Are Here?

John Paul II says that our life has meaning when we give it as a free gift for others. We are happiest when we live for others and not for ourselves. As humans, we were created to go beyond ourselves, and we are happiest when we are doing just that.

We are required to do two things in this world. First, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and then we are to make the world a better place. We might not be able to fix all the problems in the world, but we can fix a few.

Chapter Eighteen: God Wants Me To Spread the Gospel?

John Paul II is calling young people everywhere to spread the Gospel while living their lives. We know we are happiest when we are following the Good News of the Gospel, so how do we spread that happiness to others? The best way to spread the Gospel is to live it. People will follow our example or ask us why we do certain things. We need to be ready to answer their questions by studying what we believe. If we live the life that Christ intended us to live, and love our neighbors as ourselves, we can bring others to the faith just by our examples.

Chapter Nineteen: But How Can I Get Up the Guts To Talk To My Friends About This Christianity Stuff?

How do we find the courage to look unpopular and tell people why we do the things we do? How can we convince people that our way is the only way? We can't do it by ourselves – we need God's help. He is the one that will do the convincing.

Before Pentecost, the Apostles were afraid to spread the Good News too. They needed the grace of God before they could go out and preach the Good News without fear. The Apostles received the grace they needed when the Holy Spirit descended on them in tongues of fire. We receive the grace from the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation. This grace gives us what we need in order to go out into the world.

The Holy Spirit helps us as we spread the Good News; He also helps those to whom we are spreading the Good News. We cannot go against society by ourselves; we need God to help us along the whole way.

We also have to prepare ourselves and understand what the Church teaches in order to bring others to the faith. But the Holy Spirit will help us here too. When we pray for guidance and instruction, the Holy Spirit will help.

Chapter Twenty: Could It be Hmm . . . , Satan?

We know what side of the battle we are on and who is with us. But who is fighting for the other side? Despite the attempts of the world to merely laugh him off, Satan does actually exist. Satan is a fallen angel who attempted to make himself like God. As punishment he was sent to hell, and many angels followed him there.

It needs to be clarified that Satan is not as powerful as God. God and Satan are not two forces that continually struggle. God allows Satan to do what he does in the world.

Satan tries to get us to join his side by working on our free will. He tries to get us to choose sin by making it appear to be appealing. He is always watching us, trying to find our weakness and cause us to fall into sin through them. We can avoid giving into Satan by staying very close to God. We need the grace of God to resist Satan.

Chapter Twenty-One: Is The Church Really Against Contraception?

Very few people understand the Churches teaching on contraception. Through sex one can tell another that “I want to be with you forever”, and through sex God allows man to participate in His act of creation by bringing a new baby into the world. This is a very beautiful thing. In the sexual act God is there creating new life. When we use contraception, we take God out of the picture.

In the sexual act men and women become ministers of the plan of God – they help bring into the world people He has thought about and loved even before they existed.

If you were conceived outside of marriage this doesn’t mean that God thinks that you are some kind of accident. He still loves you and made you fit into His plan.

Catholics do not have to have as many babies as they possibly can. Everyone is called to parenthood in a different way; some people can have large families, while some people cannot. But this does not give any Catholic couple the right to use contraception. If pregnancy needs to be avoided this can be done naturally, without excluding God from the picture.

Natural Family Planning (NFP) takes into consideration the fertile and infertile times of a woman’s cycle. To avoid pregnancy the couple only has to avoid sexual union during the woman’s fertile cycle.

NFP can be abused if the couple is avoiding pregnancy for selfish reasons. NFP is not Catholic birth control because it still lets God participate in the sexual union – it does not exclude Him. Moreover, a contraceptive tells a woman that her fertility, which is a gift from God, is a problem. Contraceptives are also harmful to health and often are not even contraceptives, since they actually cause abortions.

Chapter Twenty-Two: Abortion: How Can I Impose My Morality On Anyone Else?

Abortion is a very touchy subject in today society. We wonder if it is alright for us to impose our moralities on other people. It is alright and we should. Think about other illegal immoral acts that take place. We impose our morality on those people, so why not on people who take the lives of their children? There is a victim in an

abortion, we just do not see the victim the way we would in any other crime. Also, abortion is supposed to somehow solve any problems that the woman is experiencing. How does killing her baby help financial problems? Abortion has never given anything to society, ever.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Abortion: So It's Wrong. What Am I Supposed To Do About It?

The Pope emphatically stated that we must aid the pro-life movement. But what can we do? The first thing we should not do is kill abortion doctors. Killing abortion doctors is not the solution to the abortion problem, and it gives a bad name to pro-lifers. It is also like playing God, which is exactly what we are not supposed to do. Moreover, by killing an abortion doctor, the doctor loses his opportunity to repent of his actions before he dies. There is one example of an abortion doctor that actually converted and became one of the most pro-life people ever.

We can defend life through the government, working on passing legislation that will protect and help the unborn. We can educate people about what the unborn child really is – a baby, not a clump of tissue. We can use direct action, where people stand out in front of an abortion mill and protest through prayer and try and persuade the women who are going in not to kill their children. Or we can directly help at a pregnancy center, giving women the courage and financial aid they need to have their babies.

Chapter Twenty-Four: Should Christians Be Environmentalists?

We should take care of the earth to the best of our ability because it is a great gift that has been given to us by God. The earth is also a source of life for us; we need pure air, clean water, and healthy plants and animals in order to survive. However, we should never put the earth in front of ourselves. We were not created for the earth, but the earth was created for us. It is wrong when forests take precedence over the need for housing. It is wrong when thousands of dollars are used to help an animal when children starve on the streets.

Chapter Twenty-Five: Why Is Life So Unfair Sometimes?

Sometimes it seems like we are wallowing in undeserved suffering. It seems like everywhere we turn life is just miserable. John Paul II tells us to have courage. We are going to suffer; the secular world is telling us a lie when it says that we do not need to suffer. Christ suffered for us. We will have to suffer in order to spread the Good News. The Holy Father says we will struggle. God does not like to see us suffer, but He knows that it is good for us to suffer. If we face our suffering with courage in this life, we will be rewarded in the next.

Chapter Twenty-Six: Ask Not If Your Country Can Pray For You

Our country was founded on God, but now we are starting to lose that God centeredness. We need to pray for our country that she might always stand up for what is right and just. We still need to work to help get our country back on the right track, but we need to pray most of all. We need to pray for the leaders of our country, that they will lead us in the right direction.

Part V: Relationships

Chapter Twenty-Seven: To Whom Can I Turn When I Really Need A Friend?

We are always drawn to people who love us. When we have a problem we should always turn to Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar. He is always there in the tabernacle ready to hear our problems. We should tell Him everything, our desires, anxieties, hopes, dreams, fears, and troubles. God will also speak to us, but we need to listen for Him in silence. We cannot expect to hear His voice in the noise of everyday life.

When we listen to what God is telling us, we most often find that He is encouraging us. He gives us the strength to go on farther and farther.

When we pray we should also reflect on all that Christ has done for us. We should stop and think about the Passion, and what Christ went through, all because He loved us. John Paul says that in the silence of prayer we can come to a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ's passion and death.

Prayer is a way to develop our relationship with God. For this reason alone we should pray very often before the Blessed Sacrament – it is the right sort of relationship to cultivate and encourage.

Chapter Twenty-Eight: How Does My Relationship With God Affect My Relationship With My Friends?

The magic we feel in a relationship with a friend or a loved one is the love and presence of Jesus Christ Himself. Aristotle says that with friends, the higher the common object of interest, the higher the friendship. Friendships based on God are the highest form of friendship. We need to have friends of our own faith, and friend of other faiths so that we might lead them to the True Faith.

We need to be careful that our friendships do not lead us away from our Faith. We need to be especially careful of this in our dating relationships. If we are dating someone that does not share our own beliefs about purity and sex we are in a very dangerous situation. We need to be sure that we do not let the other person lure us into doing things that we know are wrong. If the relationship is continually leading into sin and impurity, we need to end the relationship. It would be wrong to continue in such a relationship that could possibly cost one's soul. If God is not in a relationship it is not a loving relationship because God is the author of love.

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Talk to My Parents?

The Holy Father has pointed out that today there is tension between different generations that did not exist before. We need to build “bridges of communication” between ourselves and our parents. This way we can come to understand why they hold certain ideas and enforce certain rules. We also need to come to an understanding of why parents enforce the rules and regulations that they do, since it is not to keep their children from having fun, but from being hurt badly.

Parents also need to know what views and ideas that their children hold. To them it would be a great relief to hear that their child has the same moralities and believes the same things that they themselves do. It does not mean that all disagreements between parents and children will disappear, but it will make one's relationship with his or her parents a lot easier.