

from ALWAYS LOOKING UP

1 I hate to say it, but I know parents who regard their children as instruments to be played. It's all a
matter of what strings to pull and how finely they're tuned. I see them, to extend the metaphor, more
as jukeboxes. Put in your two bits, maybe give them a bit of a nudge to get them going, but nine times
5 Tracy and me. To discover what they've discovered, to hear them recount their joys and successes,
to let them have full ownership of all they've accomplished, and credit themselves for what they've
learned, is the best and easiest part of parenting for me.

It's much harder, however, to let them own their failures and disappointments. The truth is, of course,
that you have no choice. To some extent, the load can be shared, but it can never entirely taken away.

10 This experience will be familiar to any parent, and Tracy and I have been through it with our four kids
at least a dozen times: crouching in a bathroom at three o'clock in the morning, holding a damp
cloth to the forehead of a young child who, having no idea what just hit him or her, retches from a
kneeling position into the toilet bowl, simultaneously shivering and sweating. The drama will probably
15 be reprised three or four times over the course of the night. No one will get any sleep. The sheets are
off the bed in a sticky rumpled pile by the washing machine because the first time it happened you
were too groggy to realize why the kid was waking you so urgently. Between purges, you pop in a
thermometer to see if the fever has broken. The younger the age, the more you ache for the child. All
the while, you supply a running commentary: "I know, baby. It's all right. Almost done. This is the last
time. It'll be okay."

20 But this isn't what you want to say. What you really want is to rock your head back and shout . . .
"please, give it to me. Let me take it." But you don't do that, because you can't do that. It doesn't
work that way . . . Those of us who are blessed to have children . . . can at least appreciate these late
nights in the bathroom as relatively gentle reminders that you can't take away your child's pain. You
can only be present, be aware, be responsive, be compassionate, and love that child with everything
25 you have.

Of course, my forty-seven years, my childhood, the ups and downs of my career, my experience with
and ultimate surrender to alcohol, my diagnosis and subsequent life with Parkinson's disease¹, as well
as everything before, after, and in between, have taught me something about resiliency². No matter
how well intentioned, if I somehow convinced my children that I could remove their problems and
30 relieve their pain, spare them the ups and downs of life, I'd be doing them a huge disservice.

Michael J. Fox

¹ Parkinson's Disease: A disorder that affects the nervous system and a person's ability to move normally. The symptoms become progressively more serious over time.

² resiliency: The ability to overcome challenges