Message to the Next Gen

CARRIE ELLIS, Editor

By CARRIE ELLIS, Editor

Dear Niece,

Thank you for making me a very proud aunt today. It’s my first time, and I’m extremely excited about the new addition to our clan. I plan on spoiling the bejesus out of you, being there for you, and doing everything that a good aunt is supposed to do, at the best of my ability anyways, and always.

That being said, there are certain uncertainties ... Some things I can’t do or guarantee, although I wish I could. I can’t shield you from the nightly news; I can’t protect you from the air you breathe; I can’t buoy you up from oil-contaminated waters; I can’t promise there’s never going to be nuclear fallout or terrorist attacks using our nation’s own resources. These are the sorts of things that people fear today. Odd, I know, as it sounds.

Your mother wrote down many of the headlines breaking around the time you were born. You can even look them up in your baby book when you’re old enough to read. Unfortunately, a lot of them sound like horror stories — in some cases, they were even preventable accidents caused by greed or a lack of attention to detail.

Some of them, BP being the longest running story, went like this: *Gulf Oil Leak May be Bigger than BP Says*; *Health Issues Surface in Gulf Oil Spill*; *USW, UMWA Demand Action to Elevate Worker Lives over Profit*; *Oil Spills Escalated in this Decade*; *Drill Rig Crew Pressed to Work Faster, Survivor Says*; *Compensation Program Must Protect Gulf Coasters, Not Shield BP*; *Gulf Oil Spill: Why Another American Disaster?*; *BP Chair Says Sorry for ‘Small People’ Remark on Gulf*; and *BP Spill Hits a Somber Record as Gulf’s Biggest.*

My intention is not to scare you into submission — an overly cautious agoraphobic

who is too afraid of the world to enjoy it or an overly zealous environmentalist who is too afraid to step on the grass — but to inspire you to take what your previous ancestors gave you and improve upon it. We can never ask ourselves to save the world alone, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't even try to contribute our talents to make it better for the next generation.

(Sometimes it takes a birth in the family, like yours, to remind ourselves that we have a legacy to leave, and it's up to us to decide whether we would like it to be positive or negative.)

Knowing that I can't help protect you from all that is unpleasant, I realize what I can do is make sure that you pay attention to the place in which you live and the people with whom you share this earth. I say that because now that you're here, I want the best for you, and I know that some day, you will feel the same way.

In the meantime, I also want to help teach you that you can, and should, eventually come to make your own informed decisions, not just listen to your dear ol' dilapidated aunt. I want to help teach you that what is good is not always right. I want to help teach you that you can make a difference, then show you that it's possible.

And it is possible ... if only by voicing an opinion sometimes.

For example, right now legislators are discussing whether they should levy a tax on all major polluting facilities, such as power plants and oil platforms, in case something similar to the Deepwater Horizon — the BP oil rig that made all the headlines — happens again. Many people in my industry disagree with this because it means that some companies, even though they do everything right, may get punished by essentially having to pay for someone else's mistake. It sounds like something that you would learn is wrong in preschool, but it's true.

Do you think that the companies that were responsible for the environmental disaster should take a time-out by compensating the victims and remediating the environment? I do (not that you have to agree with me). I think we should teach companies that do wrong that they will eventually be caught and the rules will eventually be enforced. It's called accountability.

Contemporary headlines are a prime example. Even BP claims that it will pay for its current predicament, although it remains to be seen. On top of everything else, I tell you this because I want to also help teach you that you should be responsible for your own decisions and actions. The challenge is that this mind-set must be rooted in reality — not just on paper or in your mind.

I also want you to know that the reason I keep hammering on these topics — integrity, precaution, environment and how they are all interrelated — is because I don't know how I, as a first-time aunt, or as an editor for that matter, can responsibly avoid them.

Even if you don't agree with me, I hope some of these things interest you because I

look forward to meeting the future you, and hearing about what you think about my generation and what it left your generation to deal with someday …

Do you have a message for the next generation? How have you explained it to your children? What do they think? Drop me a line at carrie.ellis@advantagemedia.com *[1].*

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