

Ship of Fools

Protecting a 16-year-old sailor, not enabling dangerous dreams, is a parent's responsibility

Joanna Weiss, Globe Columnist
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ITHINK it's a parent's job to realize their kids' dreams," Abby Sunderland's father told the *Los Angeles Times* last winter. This was just before he waved his 16-year-old daughter off on what was to be a six-month voyage alone on a small boat, her effort to become the youngest person to sail around the world nonstop and unassisted.

Here's a proposed rule of thumb: any record that requires more than 10 syllables to explain does not need to be broken. At any rate, Abby did not succeed. A massive storm in the Indian Ocean knocked out her mast, launching a massive international rescue effort. She has since abandoned her 40-foot boat and boarded a French fishing vessel, from where she has resumed her blog.

Actually, she has a panoply of interlinked blogs,¹ set up to track and promote her journey, including one that sold T-shirts and shoes with an "Abby 16" logo. They're flooded now with comments offering gratitude and praise, calling her a role model and an inspiration.

So this is the definition of bravery now? Embarking² on unnecessary risk that jeopardizes the lives of rescue workers? When I thought of a 16-year-old bobbing alone in the Indian Ocean, surrounded by 25-foot waves, I didn't feel inspired. I felt sad. And when I thought about her parents, I felt furious.

Abby's fans would call me a naysayer,³ I gather from their posts, and tell me I lack a spirit of adventure. And I'll admit that parenthood requires one to overcome a certain intolerance⁴ for risk. I can't watch my 5-year-old daughter climb the monkey bars without feeling like I'm going to have a coronary. God knows what I'll do when she starts driving.

¹ **panoply** (pān'ə plē) of **interlinked blogs**: an array of blogs that are linked together.


² **Embarking**: setting out.

³ **naysayer**: one who opposes or takes a negative view.

⁴ **intolerance**: condition or quality of not accepting.

30 But parenthood also requires you to invoke⁵ maturity where your child lacks it, whether it's telling her that she's too small to slide down the fireman's pole or that her sailing journey will have to wait until she's old enough to come to her senses. It involves helping her figure out the difference between a dream and a fantasy.

Perhaps someone should have stepped in to impose some parenting standards on the Sunderlands; last summer, a court in the Netherlands stopped a 13-year-old girl from making her own unadvised solo sail. Better yet, we could give up a
40 culture that treats accomplishment as a race and turns risk into its own reward. Abby Sunderland couldn't drive without a learner's permit, but her journey on the high seas got her fawning press⁶ and endorsement deals. Now, some fans on her site have offered their own money to recover her lost boat. One pledged to play an extra \$5 a day in the lottery, just in case.



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When will he realize he's simply a pawn in the Sunderlands' audience-building scheme? From onboard the French fishing vessel, Abby has declared, *quelle surprise*,⁷ that she's writing a book. Her father also disclosed that he's been
50 shopping a reality show with the working title "Adventures in Sunderland." (What good fortune this family has, to have a name that lends itself to puns.)

⁵ **invoke:** to call (a higher power) for assistance or support.

⁶ **fawning press:** favor-seeking press.

⁷ **quelle surprise:** What a surprise!

Childhood fame is always some mix of the child's dream and the parents'; so it was with Jessica Dubroff, the 7-year-old who died in 1996, trying to pilot a plane across the country.

With the growing temptations of book deals and TV series, the balance may be shifting even more. We'll surely hear more from Jordan Romero, the 13-year-old who just became the youngest person to climb Mount Everest. We
60 probably haven't heard the last of the Heenes of Colorado,⁸ who at least had the sense not to actually put their child inside the Mylar balloon.

But while there's clearly a market for immature stars, we shouldn't confuse "youngest" with significant "first," and we shouldn't call these publicity stunts anything but what they are. Abby Sunderland may find a way to convert her misadventures into lingering fame. But while she seems to be a skilled junior sailor, calm in the face of danger, that doesn't make her a hero. It just makes her very, very lucky.

⁸ **Heenes of Colorado:** a reference to a widely reported incident in 2009 in which a six-year-old boy was said to have floated away in a helium balloon. The report turned out to be false.

Trace and Evaluate an Argument

An **editorial** is an opinion piece that usually appears in the opinion and commentary section of a newspaper. An editorial is a type of argument in which the writer expresses one or more opinions about an issue and uses facts to support those opinions. A **fact** is a statement that can be proved. An **opinion** is a statement of belief or feeling. Like an argument, an editorial can include a **claim**, which is the writer’s position or opinion; **reasons and evidence** that support the claim; and **counterarguments**, or responses to differing opinions.

Analyzing the Media

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the text.

- 1. Cite Evidence** Reread the editorial and fill in a chart like this one to cite the facts and opinions you find.

Type of Evidence	Examples
Facts	
Opinions	

- 2. Identify** Which sentence in the editorial represents the writer’s claim?
- 3. Analyze** In the first quote, Abby’s father says, “I think it’s a parent’s job to realize their kids’ dreams.” What is the editorial writer’s counterargument to this statement?
- 4. Summarize** What point does the editorial writer make in lines 41–62?
- 5. Evaluate** How effectively does the editorial writer convey her opinion? Evaluate how clearly and convincingly the writer presents her evidence and ideas and concludes the editorial.