

# She's Gonna Blow!

Julie Ann Barnhill



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Copyrighted material

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Verses marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Verses marked MSG are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Verses marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Scripture quotation on page 161 is from Psalm 56:3 NIV.

*Cover by Terry Dugan Design, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

## **SHE'S GONNA BLOW!**

Copyright © 2001/2005 by Julie Ann Barnhill

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Barnhill, Julie Ann, 1965–

She's gonna blow / Julie Ann Barnhill.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-7369-1552-4

1. Parenting. 2. Mothers—Psychology. 3. Anger. 4. Parenting—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

HQ755.8.B377 2005

649'.1—dc22

2004030049

**All rights reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

**Printed in the United States of America**

05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 /VP-MS/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

You Have Never Been Alone .....	9
---------------------------------	---

## Part One: Exploring Mount Momma

1. How <i>Did</i> I Get Here? <i>Some Unwelcome Discoveries About Motherhood, Anger, and Really Blowing It</i> .....	17
2. Volcanoes 101 <i>Understanding How She Blows</i> .....	33
3. Warning Signs <i>How to Know When You're Gonna Blow</i> .....	47
4. Underground Issues <i>Understanding Why She Blows</i> .....	63
5. Volcanic Damage <i>Recognizing When You've Gone Too Far</i> .....	105

## Part Two: Climbing to Sanity

6. The Bedrock of Truth <i>Exploring the Biblical Foundations for Change</i> .....	135
7. Keeping Things Cool <i>Some Practical Strategies for a More Peaceful Life</i> .....	163
The Way We Are, Snapshot 1 .....	209

## Part Three: More Help and Proof You're Not Alone

8. When You Need Someone to "Hear" You .....	221
9. When God Becomes Part of the Solution .....	231
10. When You Need Raw Honesty .....	239

11. When You Feel Guilty . . . . .	245
12. When You Feel Alone . . . . .	255
13. When It Sounds Ridiculously Simple . . . . .	261
14. When You Feel Overwhelmed . . . . .	267
15. When You Have Regrets . . . . .	275
16. They Blew It Too! . . . . .	279
The Way We Are, Snapshot 2 . . . . .	291

## **Appendixes: Help, Resources, and Information**

### Appendix A:

<i>Short and Sweet Strategy Thoughts and Tamers</i> . . . . .	299
---------------------------------------------------------------	-----

### Appendix B:

<i>Could You Be Depressed? Symptoms and Resources</i> . . . . .	303
-----------------------------------------------------------------	-----

### Appendix C:

<i>Resources and Recommended Reading</i> . . . . .	307
----------------------------------------------------	-----

### Appendix D:

<i>What Can You Expect? A Summary of Child     Developmental Stages</i> . . . . .	321
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Notes . . . . .	331
-----------------	-----

# How Did I Get Here?

## *Some Unwelcome Discoveries About Motherhood, Anger, and Really Blowing It*

The veil was lifted for me one gorgeous Saturday morning in an Effingham, Illinois, bank lobby. That was the day I realized with 100-percent clarity, like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, that I wasn't in Kansas anymore!

I was standing in line that summer morning with about 12 other customers and my 18-month-old daughter. The lobby was bustling with customers, all waiting for over-stressed tellers who would have preferred to be out sun-bathing rather than give change to yet one more customer.

The banking center had an open design that made all the “personal bankers” privy to the comings and goings of their customers. In addition, the bank managers had their offices along the perimeter of the building, each enclosed with glass walls that afforded every titled employee a front-row seat to any banking spectacles—such as the one I was about to present.

I was third in line, and little Kristen was standing directly behind me. Even many years later, I can still remember distinctly the clothes that she and I were wearing.

Kristen sported a cute summer outfit with a large red strawberry on the shirt and tiny baby strawberries on the matching shorts. Her silky dark brown hair fell just to her shoulders and drew up into bouncy tendrils that framed her chocolate brown eyes. Her smooth olive complexion and mischievous expression had caused more than one fellow mother to exclaim, "How adorable!"

I had delivered my second child, Ricky Neal, about three weeks before and was sporting the appropriate clothing for one who until recently had been very pregnant. My oversized T-shirt, knotted loosely at my hips, strategically camouflaged the results of carrying a nine-pound-eight-ounce bundle of joy. The black, stretchy Capri leggings accented at the calves with a wide band of lace did their best not to give away the Oreo cookie raids preceding his birth.

I might not have been quite as adorable as my toddler daughter that morning, but overall I felt pretty terrific, because I had netted \$717.83 from a garage sale that previous weekend. Yes, you read that right—seven hundred seventeen dollars and eighty-three cents! I had gotten rid of the 4-H sewing machine I had used about five times since eighth grade and the dining room furniture that we had all used way too much. I had put a price tag on just about everything—even my husband Rick's unused golf clubs and useless baseball equipment from high school. If an overzealous shopper hadn't called and talked to Rick, I would have actually sold the clubs and ball equipment! Nevertheless, my home was less cluttered, and as I stood in that bank lobby, the Wal-Mart sack in my hand was weighted down with my \$717.83—mostly in quarters, nickels, and pennies.

While Kristen and I waited, she entertained the captive audience with such feats as spinning around until she was dizzy, scrunching her nose and lips to make an obnoxious

breathing sound through her nostrils, and making faces at the people behind us. I, of course, felt delighted to have such a cute and precocious child.

I had moved up to second in line when Kristen started to turn her attention to me. Her mother. The woman who had agonized 14 hours, surviving on ice chips alone, to bring her into this world!

Yes—she began to turn her attention, all 18 months' worth, to me. The woman who thought the sun rose and set on this child.

"Next," said the teller.

I stepped to the window and plopped my sack of dollars, quarters, nickels, and three pennies on the cold marble countertop. Teller-girl threw me a deadly look and began sorting coins.

"Oh," I volunteered brightly, "I've counted it already, and there is \$717.83. I got it all from a garage sale!" I smiled, knowing she'd appreciate my attention to detail and my business prowess.

"You don't say?" She rolled her eyes and started counting, "Five, ten, fifteen..."

I glanced back to check on Kristen and then rested my elbows on the countertop, leaning forward and relaxing, just taking it easy and thinking how I was going to spend all that money.

"One hundred five, one hundred fifteen..."

This was the point where Kristen turned her full attention to me. I felt a small, tentative poke on my, er...backside.

I ignored it.

Bad decision.

Then, another small—but decidedly stronger than the first—poke against my backside, accompanied by a singsong voice proclaiming, "Big bottom, Mom! Big bottom!"

Poke, poke, prod, prod.

I whipped around and saw my three-foot munchkin grinning from ear to ear. With each prod and poke, her tiny voice grew in confidence, bolstered by smiles and chuckles from those in her immediate vicinity.

I lowered my head, unknotted my shirt, and whispered delicately, "Kristen, stop poking Mommy's bottom...and quit saying 'big bottom.' It isn't nice to talk about Mommy's bottom. Now, don't say the word *bottom* again."

I turned back to the teller, who was trying with little success to quell a smirk and count dimes accurately. Not a peep could be heard from behind me. Good.

But no, the silence following my little chat with Kristen was *not* good. Definitely not good. She had used those brief moments for thinking, and now the small poke flowered into an all-out punch. With her tiny yet accurate pointer finger aiming for the rear, Kristen proclaimed for everyone, teller and glass-ensconced manager alike, to hear:

"Big butt, Momma! Big butt!" (Well, I did tell her not to say "bottom.")

Then, as I melted into a puddle of public humiliation and the teller snorted aloud with laughter, I saw the light! It all made perfect sense.

From a simple bank transaction to the ordeal of combing through laundry to find baby booties that matched, my life had been irrevocably changed—and I was the last to figure it out.

I had gone from designer size-tens to plus-size stretch pants with lace, and I was the last to get it.

Intellectual banquets of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis had degenerated to Spam sticks of *People* magazine and Mercer Mayer, and I was only now beginning to understand...that my life would never be the same again.



**T**imeOut/Tamer: Times like this are good occasions to start repeating the same mother's creed: "This too shall pass." (It really will—no matter how you feel at the moment!)

Yes, until motherhood I had never been accosted and mortified by a three-foot-tall relation. Until motherhood, I never knew to look *forward* to winter because kids need fewer baths then. Until motherhood, I had never publicly discussed the size and shape of my uterus nor used the medical terms *adhesions* and *circumcision* in the same sentence.

This moment was only the beginning. Motherhood was to be the impetus of monumental changes in my life...and the most surprising ones began in the bathroom!

### Porcelain Petitions

There I sat, chin to rim with our family commode, wedged between a cold porcelain tub and a veneer-covered vanity and shaking my head with dismay.

*How did I get here?* I asked myself. *Didn't I graduate with a college degree? Doesn't my resume read "Educator Extraordinaire"?* Who would have thought it?

My eyes were drawn to the answer to "How did I get here?" She was poised precariously on the edge of a chipped and chilly toilet seat. Kristen Jean Barnhill, her two-year-old legs juuust long enough to bend and clutch the bowl with her ankles, was hunched forward, lips firmly set, assessing me with an impish and determined gaze.

Note I did not say "precious" gaze.

I said "impish and determined."

Fellow sisters in mothering, I had followed the rules. I had read all the necessary and recommended mothering material. Dr. Penelope Leach (note to self: This is not pronounced Pen-a-lope) was my mentor via books. Dr. T. Barry Brazelton, Dr. James Dobson, and a host of other Wise Ones had kept me on the edge of my parenting seat.

With bated breath I had combed through each issue of *Parenting* magazine, eager to create child-pleasing culinary delights with bread, baloney, cellophane-wrapped toothpicks, and cleverly shaped cookie cutters. My VCR was set to record *American Baby* at 10:00 A.M. CST. The speed dial on my phone was programmed for 1-800-They Still Hurt.\*

I had this mommy thing down to a science. I could change a diaper and effectively identify and remove cradle cap while propping a Playtex bottle for a hungry baby with my chin. Nothing could deter me from the coveted degree of Mommy Ph.D. Nothing—except...

#### *The Number-Two Zone.*

I had shelled out \$697.34 for baby books over a two-year period. I had purchased every baby manual written and trusted the “professional” advice that I read. Somebody owes me a refund! Judge Judy, here I come!

Not one person, publisher, or professional ever gave the slightest hint that a two-year-old child...*the same child who couldn't find her way out of a snug turtleneck...* could voluntarily shut down all bowel action. Just like that. Here today, none tomorrow.

---

\*Disclaimer: The author feels it imperative to confess that she never once experienced a La Leche, earth-mother, one-with-the-baby moment while breastfeeding child number one. She did experience one-with-the-body torment that involved her breasts and adjectives such as *engorged*, *cracked*, *infected*, and *EXCRUCIATING!* Her daughter learned to love formula, and the author does not feel guilty...much.

On this particular evening, I had stood guard at the potty for two hours. Two hours—give or take a diaper change for the baby—of earnestly imploring my darling daughter to let nature have its way.

*Earnest Imploring #1:* “Come on, sweetie pea, cutie-patootie, let Mr. Two take a trip to toilet land.”

*Response:* Impish and determined.

*Earnest Imploring #2:* “Kristen, honey, if you do, Mommy will eventually walk upright again, and then I’ll get you the biggest, best, greatest chocolate ice cream we’ve ever had!” (Yes, moms, that spells B-R-I-B-E-R-Y!)

*Response:* Impish and determined.

*Earnest Imploring #3:* “Precious, your friend Bailey does number two, and she’s only [eyebrows raised with a “tsk-tsk” expression] one year old.”

*Response:* Kristen pinched her eyes tightly shut, scrunched her face like a prune (a side effect from the eight glasses of said juice she had consumed with dismal results), and replied in an impish and determined voice, “But Mommy, I don’t waaaaaaaaaaaaant to.”

*Heavy sigh.*

You know, there are a lot of things we can make our children do. We can *make* them “give your little brother a hug and say you’re sorry.” We can *make* them “get that look off your face!” Occasionally we can even make them happy.

However, there is no way to *force* a child to respond to nature’s call if she doesn’t want to, as I was discovering at that very moment.

Now, I’d like to tell you that I handled this situation in a gentle, tender, longsuffering adult fashion. After all, I was the mommy. I’d also like to tell you that I find a 12-ounce steak cooked medium rare served with salad with bleu cheese dressing and baked potato slathered in butter and sour cream unappetizing. “But mommies, I caaaaaaaaaan’t!”

What I did was yell.

"Kristen!" I hollered, "I'm sick of sitting here waiting for you to go to the bathroom!" I smacked her sharply on her right thigh and threatened, "Do you want a real spanking? Do you? If you don't go to the bathroom right now I will give you a spanking."

I just knew Kristen was doing this to irritate me. I knew she had to go, and I knew she was old enough to do it without such a production! The longer the two of us sat there, the angrier I became. I began to bellow on and on about the medical complications of holding in what Kristen was holding in. I stormed out of the tiny bathroom, arms waving wildly—blowing off a little steam, so to speak. Finally, I was out of steam, threats, and ravings, and I collapsed on my bed, stared at the ceiling, and let loose a high-pitched wail that indicates complete mother meltdown!

Kristen was stupefied by this most recent eruption. I was mortified that I had totally and completely lost it!

Minutes passed, and finally I returned to the scene of the crime. The 21-pound proper noun was still sitting on the seat. I placed my hands on her cheeks (*facial*, ladies) and hoarsely whispered, "Go ahead and pray, Kristen. Maybe God will help you."

As I knelt down in front of her, she raised her tiny, guilt-inducing, tear-stained face, and asked with a trembling voice and solemn, childlike faith:

"Jesus, help me poop."

You know what happened next. (Grumble, grumble... should have prayed two hours ago...grumble.) As I tucked her into bed, I kissed her repeatedly and tenderly rubbed the fading imprint of three adult fingers on her slender thigh. I brushed my hand against her forehead and pleaded with God to banish this maternal blowup from her young memory. After one last kiss and a disgusted shake of my head I asked myself, "How did I ever get here?"

## What Kind of Mother Am I?

Perhaps you find yourself in the same position as I found myself. I was a mother thankful for her children but completely blindsided by the person she had become *after* motherhood. In the days, weeks, and months that followed my first two births, I scarcely recognized myself.

My journals are full of entries written before I delivered either of my first two children. I filled those pages with all my longings to hold them and to love them. I wrote of how I had prayed, even as an eight-year-old girl, that I might one day be a mother. I promised in those pages to be the greatest, most wonderful mom in the entire world.

I was going to be what every mom longs to be...“a good mother” (I know you’re nodding your head in agreement here!)—

- dynamic
- involved
- compassionate
- fun
- inspiring
- loving

Honestly, I didn’t have a clue.

All those grandiose pledges worked so well on paper. I could spend hours completing each profound thought and then put my pen aside and go about my pre-children activities, activities such as teaching school, reading wonderful books, and engaging in long, satisfying conversations with adults.

Then came Kristen and, 18 months later, Ricky Neal, and what I became in those brief few months wasn’t even close to my original list of “good mother” adjectives. Now the list read more like—

- impatient
- discontent
- irritable
- depressed
- disappointed
- angry

*Angry?* Since when had I been an angry person? I had never thought of myself that way. I would get miffed or irritated or even hacked off, but angry—as in yelling, screaming, or acting out in an uncontrolled manner? Never!

Somehow between the ages of 23 and 24, I became an entirely different woman, and I didn't like it one bit.

**T***imeOut/Tamer:* Do you find yourself assuming that you're the only mother struggling with anger toward your children? The mother you least expect may be burdened with the most secrets of anger and rage. Make a point of *really listening* to the mothers around you, and reach out to them. You never know—you may be the lifesaver that someone has been praying for—and you'll find comfort in knowing you're not the only one.

## Not Alone

I remember attending a women's Bible study when my children were young and the issue of my own anger was heavy on my heart. I went there that day with a sense of anticipation and relief. What better place to find understanding and help than in a gathering of other Christian mothers? So during the prayer request time, I took a deep breath and unloaded!

I told the women, who knew me well and whom I considered to be close friends, of my frequent anger and frustration toward Ricky and Kristen. I told them how I had debated with myself that very morning about dropping my kids off for child care and just driving far, far away in my van for a long, long, long period of time. I told them I was afraid of what I might do if I got as tired and impatient as I had the previous day.

I bared my soul that day to those sisters in Christ.

The response?

“Well...” (awkward silence) “...would anyone else like to share?”

I can smile about it now, but then...whew! I wanted to curl up and die—which at the time, I might add, sounded more appealing than returning home alone with two small children!

So many of us have been there or are there right now. While I was preparing this book, in the space of two weeks *eight* women asked to read the rough draft! They wanted answers at that moment or at least wanted to commiserate with someone who understood.

I’ve read and reread hundreds of handwritten letters, e-mails, and hastily scribbled notes that mothers have sent me since I’ve been speaking on this topic. I’ve spoken long-distance with frantic mothers and have become an active participant in electronic message boards that deal specifically with children, moms, and anger management. I believe you will identify with many of their stories and perhaps hear your own voice crying out in theirs:

I used to be a real patient person. I also worked full-time then. Three-and-a-half years ago my husband got a new job 70 miles from where we lived, making three times the salary

with much better benefits, so we moved. We had a three-year-old boy (who's now six) at the time, and suddenly I was an at-home mom...just as I had always wanted. At first it was wonderful. Then hubby began working extra hours and started school, so he was rarely home. We had a baby girl (who's now two), and I started feeling very stressed about always being home with two kids and no husband around. A little over a year ago, I got violent toward my then five-year-old. I yelled and smacked him so hard he fell down. I knew I needed help and I hated what I had become.

—Anonymous

I struggle a lot with this. I come from an abusive background. My mom yelled a lot and was very impatient. She neglected me and left me alone a lot. I also was whipped with a belt.

—Brenda

Our son is on this teasing kick. He takes great pleasure in getting me riled up. This may or may not be a preteen thing. I try not getting upset. He pulled it this morning real bad. I work a 12-hour shift today...and he got me so worked up this morning I didn't know how I would be able to concentrate on work.

—Carol

As a child I was sexually abused by an uncle, verbally/minor physically abused by my mother. No father or "normal" male role models. I have done the counseling, got the badge to prove it. I know all of the psychobabble and could probably run my own group for survivors. What makes me angry is that I have no parenting skills nor any idea of what a normal, healthy, parent-child relationship is.

—Anonymous



My daughter has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. I get so tired and frustrated of the same routine when dealing with her. As a single mom I feel helpless, alone, and angry. I can't change the way she is...but how I wish I could just step away from all of it!

—Terry

I just have such a hard time not yelling. I get so angry and haven't found (or to be perfectly honest, researched) good outlets for my anger. Instead I get all stressed out and miserable. I do not hit or spank my children! I am thankfully totally different than my mother! However, I do find myself to be impatient at times and I yell often. I hate getting angry.

—Aranda

Can you relate to these women? No matter what you are going through, you are not alone in this struggle with anger and how it plays out in your home and with your children. In your community, at your workplace, sitting next to you during worship, or at the park cheering beside you at the latest Little League game are countless numbers of mothers who are ashamed and frightened by their feelings of rage and their angry, uncontrolled behavior toward their children. They are caught in a hopeless cycle of blowing it and reaping the poisonous consequences of guilt, regret, and self-condemnation.

Not exactly what we signed up for, eh? I remember so vividly the loneliness and anguish of my early mothering years. I would beat myself up over the bad things I had said, done, and thought. I'd find myself pledging "I'll never," and hoping for some miracle—and before I knew it I would be at it again.

I learned the hard way that I was fully capable of exploding in fury and anger. It was at the expense of my children's early years that I finally came to a point of self-examination and hit upon the concept of my anger resembling a volcanic eruption...Mount Momma.

### *Real Mom Points to Ponder*

1. Have you experienced an "aha!" moment of mothering? Where did it take place and who was involved? What is the most surprising fact you have learned about yourself since becoming a mother?
2. What parenting issues tend to be trigger points for your particular kind of anger? Under what particular circumstances do you tend to "lose it"?
3. How did you tend to communicate your feelings of anger *before* children—verbally? physically? through withdrawal or silence? Has your "anger style" changed since becoming a mother? Is the intensity level lower or higher?
4. What childhood or early adulthood ideal of "good" mothering have you regretted giving up the most? (Examples: being able to stay home full-time, successfully juggling work and family, being a "crafty" mom, *enjoying* the infant stage of children.) Stop and consider how much influence these resentments are playing out in your anger toward your children.
5. Name two moms you know who seem to be struggling with anger toward their kids. How could you use this

book as a tool to develop creative conversations and encourage one another towards change?

6. Are you harboring any secrets in regard to your anger and your behavior—things you do and feel when no one is around? Three years ago, after reading an interview I gave a local newspaper regarding anger and motherhood, my father-in-law called and asked my husband if I had been misquoted. He couldn't believe I admitted, "Yes, I acted abusively toward my children." I had hidden my explosive blowups well—even from the eyes of my in-laws. Who would have a difficult time believing your story of anger?