

CPI *Unrestrained* Transcription

Episode 21: Sue Scheff

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Terry: Hello, and welcome to *Unrestrained*, the CPI podcast series. This is your host, Terry Vittone, and today my guest is author and parent advocate, Sue Scheff. Hello and welcome, Sue.

Sue: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

Terry: You're welcome. My guest, Sue Scheff, is an author as well as a parent and family advocate. Her expertise is educating parents that are struggling with their out-of-control teenager and Internet safety for both kids and parents. Sue is the founder of P.U.R.E., or the Parents' Universal Resource Experts Incorporated. That's an advocacy organization to educate parents about the schooling program options available to pre-teens and teenagers experiencing behavioral problems.

In her book, *Wit's End: Advice and Resources for Saving Your Out-of-Control Teen*, Sue chronicles her own difficulties with her teen, as well as offering prescriptive advice for parents who may also be at their wit's end.

After being victimized online and cyberstalked due to her advocacy work, Sue won a landmark case for Internet defamation and invasion of privacy, and since then, her name and voice have become synonymous with helping others that are being cyber attacked, as well as educating kids and adults about their online reputation. She tells the tale in her book, *Google Bomb: The Untold Story of the \$11.3M Verdict That Changed the Way We Use the Internet*. Like her previous book, *Google Bomb* also offers prescriptive advice to help others.

These days Sue is a passionate cyber advocate, as well as a regular blogger on Huffington Post and drgreene.com. She is also a contributor to a wide variety of parenting and Internet safety publications and websites. Sue has been featured, interviewed, and quoted on ABC News, 20/20, Dr. Phil, the BBC, CBS Nightly News with Katie Couric, CNN Headline News, and many others.

Then Sue, let's begin and start today with how your advocacy and authorship work began in the experience of trying to deal with behavioral issues with your daughter, Ashlyn, in her teen years, and how that led to both the formation of

P.U.R.E. and the writing of *Wit's End*.

Sue: Well, I think like with many parents even today, thankfully, I didn't have to deal—this goes back almost 15 years now—I didn't have to deal with the technology that all parents are struggling with today. Thankfully, we didn't have that back in the late 1990s. It was basically, and again with what parents deal with today, good kids making bad choices, and that's exactly what I went through with my daughter, to the point where I was at my wit's end.

She struggled with defiance. She was a gymnast, and she had broken her foot, and she got to a point where she was out of control, and she begged to try public school. There's nothing against public schools; they are really great. We lived in a very good area; it was an A-rated school, but she just started hanging out with the wrong kids. And it wasn't the kids; it was my daughter choosing to make bad choices.

Terry: Well, also you have an Olympic caliber athlete here [Sue's daughter Ashlyn] who has a devastating injury, and it seems so life-changing at that age.

Sue: Right, and she was never exposed to "What do I do with all this free time?" She just got mixed up in a wrong group, and she did start drinking, and I'm sure . . . In my book, if you read the book, it says, "Not my teen, she didn't use drugs." And then her chapter is "What my mom didn't know." She was smoking marijuana, etc. We just really started butting heads, and I tried therapists, and then she was put into outpatient and everything like that. Then the last result, the last thing I tried was letting her move into my mother's home. By the end of the 10th day, my mother was like, "I don't care what it costs; I don't care where you send her."

We were just all at our wit's end. This is back in like 1999, believe it or not. You got online (it was AOL), did a Google search, and one group of programs came up repeatedly, and they send out, back in those days, it was like the VHS tapes and these brochures, and they overnight them FedEx. They would come to your front door. They sold me on this group of programs, and they sent me to these groups down in south . . . it was in South Florida, when I lived in South Florida. They sold me hook, line, and sinker; they duped me. As a matter of fact, they told me it was a horseback riding, therapeutic boarding school.

I sent my daughter there, and the next thing I knew, it was, in my opinion, like a cult. I wasn't able to see my daughter, speak to my daughter. It ended up, at the end, where she was put in a box for 17 hours a day. Seriously, it was like this . . . it's in the book. I don't know, it was horrific. Yeah, there was just horrific treatment. Right. It's in the book; it was proven in the trial. Anyway, and then people listening to me are like, "Oh my God, how did you tolerate this?"

Well, the parents are put through these training seminars that are seriously cult like, and I was at my wit's end. I was desperate to get my child help, and they kept saying trust the program, trust the program, so I had to trust the program. That's what I did, because I desperately wanted to get my daughter help. By the end of six months, there was an incident at the program, where all these kids were rushed to the hospital, and they didn't tell some of the parents.

Terry: Oh, this is the food poisoning!

Sue: Yeah, the food poisoning incident, and I had received a letter from my daughter in the mail, and I had been receiving letters. And she couldn't win because every time she sent me a bad letter, the school would tell me, "Oh, she's just manipulating you. She lied to you when she was at home; she's lying to you now." They really had you. And every parent out there with a troubled teen knows how teens are; they manipulate you. I thought, "They're absolutely right. She's manipulating me."

When Ashlyn had written to me, "Mom, I was in the hospital. You never came to see me. Why did you leave me there?" I was like, "Oh my God, she was in the hospital and I didn't even know." I was on the next plane up, honest to God, and that's when I picked her up. Once I brought her home is when I started finding out about everything that was going on. I had created this organization, P.U.R.E., to help educate parents on this very deceptive big business of teen help. And I posted my story online of what happened to my daughter. The next thing you know, they sued me for Internet defamation.

Terry: This organization that ran this residential therapy program that apparently had no clinical expertise and were deceptive in their practices and brutal in their practices. You wrote about them online and they sued you, correct?

Sue: That's right. I should explain to you, they sold themselves as a horseback riding, therapeutic boarding school. They didn't have horses, and they didn't have therapy. The horses were on a neighboring farm I guess there. My daughter never got to ride a horse. The therapy was not included. If you wanted therapy, you could pay for someone extra to come in. Mind you, the program was, I want to say it was 4 or \$5,000 a month that my family paid for. It was very expensive and it didn't include therapy. So, yeah, it was very deceptive, very deceptive. Anyway, yes, I posted the whole story online.

The school was Carolina Springs Academy; it's closed now. I can freely speak about it because I did win the court case. It was under the umbrella of Worldwide Association of Specialty Schools and Programs (WWASP), and I will share they still have at least . . . they used to own 22 or 23 programs. They have I think three or four of them still operating in the US today and I think a couple of

them in Mexico now, but they sued me to take my story down. I just fought back. I was very fortunate to have an insurance policy that paid out over \$1 million to fight them in their jurisdiction.

I had to go out to Utah actually, even if the school was in South Carolina. According to the contract, when they sued me, I had to go to Salt Lake City to their jurisdiction. Really, I was in front of a jury of their peers, which is fine because no one condones child abuse. No one condones fraud. I posted this story.

Defamation, to everybody that's listening, is based on truth, and I posted the truth. Truth is your defense, so not only did myself, and all the children that were abused, but also the parents that were lied to, came up and testified. My insurance paid for this, flew in all these witnesses and people testifying to what happened to them at Carolina Springs. Not only Carolina Springs, but a variety of other schools that were under their umbrella, of the fraud and the abuse. I won.

Terry: Excellent. So you founded P.U.R.E. then as a way to vet these residential therapy programs for other parents that were experiencing similar problems with their kids. Is that accurate?

Sue: Right. What I did is said, "You know what? The fact of the matter is I still believe parents need help." This is one bad apple in an industry where there are a lot of good schools. It shouldn't destroy it for parents that need help, because I do know parents out there that have kids that desperately need help. Then I met people in my city that had sent their kids to good programs. I'm like, "Geez." Because it's such a hush-hush mentality among parents, they don't want people to know that their child is not perfect, so to speak. Do you know what I'm saying?

Terry: Sure.

Sue: It's sad because had one friend told me that her daughter was sent to this other program, I could have known about it, but then again I wouldn't be . . . I believe everything happens for a reason.

Terry: And you know what? In *Wit's End*, you speak to the fears that a lot of parents have about sending their children away, and you overcame your own fear, but it was without the benefit of this conversation that might have happened.

Sue: Right, and like I said, I just think God knew that we could sustain it, and there was a reason for it because we have helped thousands in the past 15 years, thousands and thousands of families that don't know anything about the teen help industry. We give them helpful hints, the questions to ask, for questions to

ask programs, and I always tell parents there are more good programs out there than there are not so good programs.

Question the schools, the facilities. Things that they [interested parents] didn't even think about. You can call the local sheriff's office and say, "Hey, how many times are you called out to the facility? Do they have frequent runaways?" Call the parent references. Of course they're going to give you good parent references, but say, "Hey, it sounds like you had a great experience there. If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be?" You're going to get a little bit of the negative. These are things that parents don't even think about.

Terry: These are the strategies and expertise that P.U.R.E. can provide to parents who are seeking options for their troubled teen. I think now would be a good time to tell them about the website. It's at . . . ?

Sue: It's at helpyourteens.com, and we provide free resources and helpful hints to look for residential therapy. What is it? There's facts and questions, and we give parents launching pads, too. I have literally gone out there and visited schools and programs throughout our country, so we have first-hand experiences. I get emails, phone calls from students, from parents, from employees, from different schools and programs.

There are some schools I think are fabulous. There are some schools that are, they're okay, but the biggest tip I give to parents is when you're looking for a school or program, look for a program that implements what I consider the ACE factor: A for academics, C for a good clinical component, and E is the enrichment program.

So many parents miss out on the enrichment programs because you're focused on punishing your child, but what we need to start doing is building the child back up again. To make those positive choices. An enrichment program would be like an animal-assisted program, like working with the dogs or the horses. Maybe sports, maybe culinary, maybe fine art. Something that really will motivate your child, and parents sometime . . . myself included, like I just thought, "I just want to . . .," I knew Ashlyn loved horses, but at the same time, I was like, I've got to teach her a lesson because she's a spoiled rotten brat.

That's the mentality. Parents will call us up, "I want a good boot camp." I'm so against boot camps. I'm really almost against wilderness programs, too, because they're short-term programs, short-term results, and they'll charge these parents astronomical prices. They have to remember, it took the child a year or two to get to where they're at; it's going to take longer than six to eight weeks to get out of that behavior.

Terry: That's a very fair point, no doubt. You write in *Wit's End* that residential therapy is considered sometimes a controversial option. Why does this type of treatment cause controversy, and why are you such an ardent supporter?

Sue: When people go online, what happens is a lot of times they stumble upon the fear-mongering sites. The fear-mongering sites are built upon kids, and they're not kids anymore; they're adults and young adults that were in programs back in the 70s. The programs back in the 70s were like from the Straights, I think the Seeds, or these old programs that are shut down now, even from the WWASP programs that my daughter was in. A lot of these kids just haven't recovered and what they're doing is they're creating this fear-based atmosphere about these programs.

Unlike myself, where I completely understand that, yes, there is some negativity out there; there's some controversy in some programs. However, you have to make an educated decision that my child needs help. And what these people do is, I'm not going to even name the websites because these websites are getting attention and what they're doing is, like parents will call me, "Oh, but I read such and such, and they said that program was bad." I said, "You know what? The program is not bad. They don't like programs because they believe all programs are bad."

What it does is that it prevents a parent from actually getting that child help. What I will do is I'll share with the parent, "This is how you go and research a program. Contact Department of Social Services; contact Department of Family and Child Services; contact licensing. Do your own due diligence. Don't listen to this." I don't want to name . . . again, I don't want to give them any credence.

But these people that are forming these websites (and they can look pretty legitimate), they're former, I hate to say it, institutional patients that just hate—and they don't even have relationships with their own family anymore—hate all programs, and they don't want parents to get help. It's just kind of sad, and that's where the controversy lies. The other controversy about it is there is really no government regulation against these programs. In other words, you and I can go open up a program on the corner and no one really regulates us. That is kind of scary.

Terry: That's amazing. Yeah, it is.

Sue: Yeah. This is why parents really need to be educated on what to look for. I tell parents this all the time. It's a huge financial and emotional decision, so you need to step up and say, "Hey, can I see your academic accreditation?" Be sure that when your child comes home, that their academics are going to be transferable back into the school that they're going to. Otherwise, that \$50,000

you just spent, you're going to have to now spend more money getting them caught up academically, because that's what happened to me. Yeah, so these are questions that parents don't think about, and it's the same thing; check out the credentials of the counselors.

A lot of parents call us up, "I want a Christian boarding school." Well, that's good, but I would first and foremost look for a therapeutic boarding school that has a spiritual component, because these "Christian schools" fall under a different umbrella, and what they have is mental Christian counselors. You and I can go and become a mental Christian counselor in a six- to eight-week course and become certified. It's not the same thing as an LCSW or a Ph.D., where you can file your insurance and get some reimbursement.

These are things parents don't know, and I've made it my mission, and I've run my organization for 15 years to educate these parents. That's why P.U.R.E. and helpyourteens.com is really valuable to parents. I'm on the phone a couple days a week to help parents. Whatever they can't get on my website, I try to answer questions online or answer the phone.

Terry: That's very important and positive work, Sue. It sounds like a great resource. I'd like to switch gears just a little bit here and go move to your next book. It's almost a no good deed goes unpunished story put into very, very stark action in your book, *Google Bomb: The Untold Story of the \$11.3M Verdict That Changed the Way We Use the Internet*. Give our audience a quick idea of what the book is about and how and why your reputation, you've proceeded it with the story, but about how your reputation on the Internet begins to be viciously attacked because of your encounter with the Carolina School and the administrators that ran it.

Sue: Okay. Well, what happened was, so now you know what happened when I defeated them in that court case. They were mad. They were really, really mad because the story remained online. Obviously it hurt their reputation. What happens when you can't beat someone legally? Of course they took it to the court of appeals; they took it to the Supreme Court, and I won, and I won, and I won. Like I said, it was well over a million dollars in legal fees, and I won, and I won. I didn't pay it, everyone that's listening. I had insurance that paid it. What happened was they took to the Internet and they retained this woman, and when you read the book, I believe her name is Clark in the book, correct?

Terry: That's correct.

Sue: Yes, okay. They retained this woman that went online and started writing the most vicious things about me. I exploited children; I'm a kidnapper; I'm a crook. And then what happened is all these trolls started coming in, from Alex to Ginger

to . . . all these people, and it was the most hellacious Internet defamation, and it literally destroyed me. Just ruined me, by 40 years old. I thought I was losing everything. I had to—

Terry: All that chatter on the Internet served to, on Google search results, put those negative results first.

Sue: Right up to the top. Right up to the top. And I didn't even know this. What happened was I was sitting in my office (and P.U.R.E., my organization, had really grown huge), and I had a therapist call me from California, and he had been referring all kinds of parents to us that had troubled teens. He needed placement for residential therapy for troubled teens, and he says, "You know, I have to tell you, Sue, I cannot send families your way anymore." He goes, "Have you been on Google lately?" I really hadn't. I didn't even think of it. He goes, "Well, Google yourself." I was just mortified.

I could not imagine, and it was like the whole first "Sue Scheff is a crook. Sue Scheff exploits families. Sue Scheff . . .," and even . . . I don't know, it's in the book. Something about red panties . . .

Terry: Oh, that whole thing, yeah.

Sue: Yeah, the whole sexual thing, and I was like, "Oh my God." Then they were getting ready to expose, this is really bad, my personal . . . It was a sealed deposition that had all my kid's private health information in it, even my divorce decree.

Really, because when you go in (for anyone that's ever been through depositions), it was a sealed deposition, and there were only two people that had the sealed deposition, my lawyers and WWASP, Carolina Springs lawyers. That's it. This Clark says in her deposition when I sued her that it amazingly ended up in her mailbox. You read *Google Bomb*, so I'm sure you've read that. Now, how could that end up in her mailbox? We don't know. Obviously—

Terry: Someone willfully breaking the rules of discovery.

Sue: Right. Yeah, so she was obviously retained by WWASP, and it was further cleared up when we deposed her that she was paid, by them, a substantial amount of money to go out there and defame me online. When we did go to trial, I was awarded the \$11.3 million jury verdict, which was not collected . . . Well, we did collect a portion of it through the insurance, but definitely nowhere near \$11.3 million obviously, but still, it was nice to be vindicated because that's what the jury saw of what she had done to me. Literally done to myself and done to P.U.R.E.

It was so nasty and vindictive, but what I want people to understand is this is what happens when people don't get their own way offline. They believe they can take it to the Internet, because the Internet is like a free for all. But it's not, because free speech does not condone defamation. But on the other hand, this was back in 2003. There weren't any Internet defamation lawyers back then. There really wasn't . . . there might have been a few that I really didn't know about. Here in South Florida, I didn't know any.

I had to hire, he was a PI attorney, but he was very smart, and he was very good, and he learned on the way, and defamation is defamation. But here today in 2015, people come to me all the time, and the fact of the matter is you can't afford it. To hire a lawyer you need to have a defendant that is collectable, and the majority of the time the defendants are not collectable. I was fortunate to be able to afford to hire David Pollack at the time, but I didn't think it was going to go as far as it did, but it did. It cost me almost \$200,000 to defend myself, but I had no choice.

The Internet was just flooded with what it said about me. I want everyone to understand in 2006 when I won the case, Lady Justice vindicated me. I came out of that courtroom, I was so excited, I won, and it wasn't until I got in the car and I sat down and thought, "Oh my God, yeah I won, but you know what? The Internet is unforgiving." Because the judge, we didn't think back then to have the judge make her take all that stuff down, and even if they did take it down, everyone knows about those cached files; it'd still be up there. Really, what did I win? A piece of paper that says you have \$11.3 million that you're never going to collect. The Internet still has all that stuff floating around on me.

I was very fortunate at the time that the very first online reputation company was opening its doors, and if you don't know who that is, it's reputation.com, which used to be Reputation Defender. Yeah. That was Michael Fertik who was only . . . It was him and two or three other people at the time. Now he's like the largest one out there. They were just opening their doors, and I was one of their very first clients and I was just very, again, very fortunate.

Terry: In *Google Bomb*, your co-author . . . I'm going to change a little bit to technology and the cyber world, and your advocacy, and some of the issues there. Your co-author in *Google Bomb*, John Dozier, Jr., the late John Dozier, writes, "Here's a simple proposal. Parents, if you cannot use and understand the technology your kids are using, then don't allow them to use it, period." How can parents realistically work with that advice today and with ubiquity of digital devices?

Sue: Okay, in John's defense, we wrote the book back in 2008, and I'm going to say that he probably didn't realize back in 2008 because again, when I came off of this trial back in 2006, and then in 2007 we started working on my reputation,

we didn't have the social media platforms. We didn't have the apps, the sites. We just didn't have what we have today in 2015. I'm going to say that he didn't understand there is no way for parents to understand all the technologies there are to keep up with.

Offline chats will help keep your child safer online. And the fact is you're never, ever going to keep up with what your child knows. I advise parents every day, it's just like asking them, "Do you have homework?" or "How was your day at school?" Have those cyber talks too, and ask your child, "Did you learn any new apps today? Let me show you what I learned. Show me what you learned." It's the same thing.

Terry: That's excellent, very good.

Sue: Absolutely.

Terry: Well, okay. And on to some more recent blogs that you've written in your work as a cyber activist. I love this one. Your recent blog post is called "Digital Citizenship Is As Important As Potty Training: Let's Start Cyber Civics Classes In All Schools." Could you talk, Sue, about the concept of digital citizenship and the reasons that statement is becoming more accurate, seemingly with each new day, and why kids need to be educated in cyber civics?

Sue: Well, I think first of all, cyber civics, in my opinion, is almost as important or more important as health education, because it's something that's changing every single day. Sex education is pretty much the same, but as far as digital citizenship, and when you look at the Career Builder survey, every year it's increasing that the potential . . . employers are not hiring or not even interviewing, you're not even getting invited to an interview, because of your social media behavior. Not even your content, but your behavior. Last year it was 53%, the year before 43%, and the year before that 34%. Every year it's increasing pretty significantly.

Terry: When you say your behavior, do you mean your presence online, in other words?

Sue: Right, your social media behavior. It's not even your content; it's how you're behaving online. What I'm saying to you is from the moment your child is given a keypad, you should be teaching your child online behavior offline. The kindness and the empathy starts offline, and it should be driven online. In other words, how they act offline is how they should be acting online. It's the same thing. It's no longer about thinking before you post; it's about pausing before you post. I say this all the time to parents. Your online persona should be a reflection of your offline, of who you are. They shouldn't be two separate people. They

should be the same person, and with that, it should start before they're even given the keypad. That's what I mean as important as potty training.

Terry: Right, excellent.

Sue: Because the fact is your online digital reputation is going to determine the college you go to and the job you have, as well as most likely, who you're going to end up dating.

Terry: It reaches that far. Right. So it better be accurate if you hope to succeed.

Sue: Right, most people are turning to these online dating services, and the fact is, once they find out your name, they're going to Google you. It's gone that far in life. Your online reputation . . . you never get a second chance to make a first impression. The statistics show people are going to Google you, and the first impression they're going to have of you is your digital reputation. It's just that simple. For people out there that think it's not true, you look at the studies. It is. I talk to adults about this very frequently, and the adults . . .

I had a friend that recently, her business went under, and she couldn't get a job because she had no digital presence, and she refused to get on LinkedIn, refused. I said, "You have to have some type of online presence." You just have to in today's . . . because you saw the other study that came out that having no online presence is just as bad as having a sketchy one or a risky one, so definitely.

Terry: You've written that a parent can be a cyber mentor, but you've also written that it's a role for all ages. I think that's a really interesting statement. How can people of all ages assume the role of a cyber mentor?

Sue: Well, I'll tell you, I agree with . . . peer-to-peer mentoring is great because sometimes with peer-to-peer mentoring, kids can relate better to their peers than they can to their parent, but another one I really love is if a grandparent mentors, because sometimes a grandparent can mentor you as far as senior mentoring.

In other words, they respect their grandparent more than even with their parent online/offline. A child can mentor the grandparent on technology, whereas the grandparent can mentor their grandchild a little bit on wisdom, the social wisdom on offline things. That type of mentoring is great, too. Mentoring, offline cyber mentoring, doesn't necessarily have to mean social media itself, because let's remember, we need to merge both of these things. Online/offline has to be equal. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Terry: Excellent point. Yes, I do. I do.

Sue: We have to really understand that we are the same person, because this is what it's going to become. It really is.

Terry: Right. It's ironic in a way that you're saying they have to have a parity between your actual self and your representation online. I think a lot of us suspect that some Facebook profiles for those of us in midlife represent a person from maybe a decade before.

Sue: Right.

Terry: Right? And if you do have a social connection with somebody, they have to notice the discrepancy between how you portray yourself and who you actually are.

Sue: Well, the other thing is, is when you have a parent or grandparent that's helping you mentor, one of the biggest things a parent or grandparent, or even a peer, a peer can help you, or older sibling, you have to teach them that when they're in doubt, or especially when they're being bullied online or harassed online, when in doubt, it's time to click out. Don't be afraid to click out, and only a mentor can give you the strength to do that. Usually it's an older person. Clicking out is a really big . . . it's a hard process for some kids, because they really get engaged with the negativity sometimes, but if you have a mentor there, especially a grandparent or an aunt, an uncle, I keep leaning towards grandparents because I do know I work with my own grandchildren on this, but it's important to be there for them.

Terry: Right. Well, the incredible emotional reach of the cyber world, and one of your recent blog posts is titled in fact, "Don't Let Cyberbullying Ruin Fitness." That sort of reach is dramatic; could you talk about how cyberbullying has such an extensive reach and some takeaway tips for responding to this kind of cyberbullying?

Sue: What kind of cyberbullying? With fitness?

Terry: Yeah. First of all, the blog post, "Don't Let Cyberbullying Ruin Fitness." Maybe talk about that post first so people get an idea.

Sue: The fat shaming, and the body shaming, and the hair shaming, and all of that. As far as the digital citizenship, is that what you're talking about? I guess I missed that one.

Terry: No, no. I just think that, what are some ways that kids cannot let cyberbullying

ruin fitness if they're being shamed for their body image? The blog goes on to talk about how you cannot let cyberbullying ruin it.

Sue: Oh, I'm sorry, yes. I'm so sorry about that.

Terry: That's okay, Sue.

Sue: The fact is, cyberbullying is 24/7, 365 days a year, and this is why it's so damaging, and it magnifies them 1000%. It's not like they're being bullied offline and being bullied in the hallway, and it goes away, and you forget about it three or four days later, three or four weeks later. There is no rewind when it's online. It doesn't go away. And what happens is it gets to be published, and then another person talks about it, and another person, and another person. Then what happens is, I think of it more like if you remember the telephone game.

One person will whisper it or share it with another, and then it gets worse, and it gets worse, and it gets worse. Before you know it, that one little post about this girl having thunder thighs has ended up being a complete thunder rage. This poor child, she just starts hibernating, and before you know it, it's go drink bleach and die. I was going to say something nasty afterwards, but it's just mean; it's cruelty. And the tips are, you don't engage! These kids have to learn to tell an adult. This is where the mentors can really come in.

Save the evidence, obviously. Screenshot—these are tips that people everywhere know—screenshot the copies of the harmful post. Block the cyberbully, obviously. Review your privacy settings, because this is something that parents and kids don't do a lot. When you review the privacy settings, you have to do this weekly. I do it weekly. I'll tell you why. Especially on platforms like Facebook, they tend to change their privacy settings all the time on you, and the next thing you know, you're exposed. I'll tell you something else that you don't hear a lot. Review your friends list.

Whoever that bully was that started taunting you about your thunder thighs or your hair, teasing, shaming—see who else are friends with that friend. Maybe you should de-clutter your friends list. It's a good time to re-evaluate who your friends are. The other thing I can tell you is not to instigate. Tell your other friends and family members, "Don't instigate it and don't republish it." Tell your other friends not to republish the post. Do you know what I'm saying? Because I see that a lot, where the people will copy and post it, "wasn't this cruel?" Don't engage. That's the number-one tip.

Terry: Yeah, giving attention to those people is coin of the realm.

Sue: Right. My biggest tip really is, when you tell an adult, and what parents need to

understand when they're talking to their kids is that—and this can happen in your daily or regular cyber chats—the child needs to know, and this is the number-one reason why kids don't tell adults, is their fear of losing their lifeline, fear of losing the Internet. The parent needs to understand and to tell their child you're not going to lose the Internet; you need to tell us if you're being harassed online.

Terry: That's an excellent point.

Sue: They also need to know that they're not going to get in trouble for being a snitch. They're always afraid they're going to get in trouble for being a snitch, and those are the two main reasons why kids don't tell.

Terry: Excellent. During our pre-interview, we talked about such seemingly far-flung concepts as hair shaming, shaming somebody for their hairstyle or the way they wear it, or toddler shaming, for the appearance of their child. It's just seemingly unbelievable. And you said this, which I think is very quotable, "We live in a shame-based nation." That is a fascinating, I've got to tell you, and disturbing concept. Talk about that for our listeners a little bit if you would.

Sue: I think it's actually very sad that so many people get a high off of harming and hurting others, isn't it?

Terry: I'm as amazed as you at the entertainment value in that.

Sue: Yeah, I think when it hit me was Monica Lewinsky's brilliant TED talk. When she said we're using people in public shaming as a blood sport, and then she further spoke of Tyler Clementi and the struggles with death by humiliation. I think you can't put it more directly. That's what people are doing when they have these direct, brutal attacks on someone, whether it's about their hair . . . I was reading on this page, I think it's Proud To Be Me, about these young girls who struggle with their hair every morning, whether they have that curly hair that they can't get down because they're teased just violently about their hair.

So they spend hours before they go to school getting their hair just the right way, so that they're not teased about it. Why? Why do we have to live in such a mean culture? And it's not just in school. People will snap pictures, post it online, and the next thing, it goes viral. That's just not right.

Terry: No, it's the way we've been trained to succumb to our petty tyrannies by things like backbiting reality shows, and Internet trolls, and this whole false shroud of anonymity people feel that they have to make these hateful and defamatory statements about their neighbors.

Sue: Their neighbors and I want to take it back to the offline parenting. I think, and I don't want to say I'm blaming parents, but the people that are doing this teasing and this brutal behavior, where are their parents? Who taught them to do this? You know what I'm saying?

My grandson came home from school the other day, I had to pick him up, and he said, "There is this little girl, and she's so mean, and she keeps being mean to everybody on the playground."

I'm like, "Well, did you tell a teacher?"

"Yes, we tell the teacher all the time."

I said, "Well, she must be very unhappy."

"Yes, she's very unhappy."

Well, what's going on in her home life? Something has to be going on. What's going on in these kids' home life that they have to come to school and just be so mean? It's the same thing with the fat shaming, the face shaming, with Renee Zellweger, with the face shaming. Then the toddler shaming, like you and I were talking about. Cruelty at its worst. Why would somebody . . .? They started a whole Facebook page with all ugly toddlers. Why? That was adults, by the way. That wasn't kids; that was adults. That really takes a lot of nerve.

Terry: Yes. The level of negativity or why that negativity raises up to the level of entertainment, I think that's where we get this idea that we live in a shame-based nation. It's hard to refute that when our entertainment is based on denigrating other people.

Well, anyway, you had another interesting concept in our pre-interview. You mentioned that the 2014 word of the year for, I think, the people at Collins Dictionary was "overshare." I wonder if you could talk about that concept and problems that occur with oversharing.

Sue: Oversharing I think is exactly where we get some of our attention for cyberbullying, cybercriminals. Oversharing is exactly what it sounds like—when you share too much information on the Internet, and in my opinion, there's no reason why. Parents have to be aware that number one, one of the biggest businesses online is child pornography. When you're out there posting a zillion pictures of your children's first day of school, especially when they do first day of school in front of the school name, etc. Yeah, it's just not a good thing. Or you're oversharing where you're eating, and you're keeping on your geo tags and stuff like that.

Or you got to share here, I'm having dinner. I get it if you're a foodie this and that, but there comes a point where you're oversharing just too much information. If you want to share, that's fine, but there's lists. You can create friends lists. There are family lists and this is where I think people are missing the point. I don't have anything against you wanting to share your information or share your photos, but create a limited list. Like on my Facebook page, I have lists of just family, just friends, maybe just authors, safety advocates, so that when I go to share certain photos, I don't have to share them with my 4,000 friends. I share them with the limited. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Terry: Yes, I do. Sure.

Sue: This is what parents should do, too. I'm not quite getting why they feel the entire universe wants to see little Suzie and Joey. That's what I'm saying, and it's the same thing with teens, and I think what parents need to understand is your children look to you as the number-one influence in their lives. It's been proven in study after study after study. They're following your lead. If you're oversharing, they're going to be oversharing. The more you put out there, the more at risk you are for being harassed/bullied. They will take pictures, they will copy, they will paste, and they will manipulate. It's that simple, and they can do that. We've seen that done over and over again.

Terry: Good advice.

Sue: Do you understand what I'm saying?

Terry: I do.

Sue: Protect yourself.

Terry: Right, and develop the expertise to limit the audience that's going to see a group of pictures that you put up on Facebook. Be familiar with how the platforms work.

Sue: Right. Well, Facebook and Instagram. There are privacy settings put there for a reason. It's that simple. Use them and then check them on a weekly basis. It's real simple to do.

Terry: Now Sue, in our pre-interview you said that you've got a new book in the works that's exciting. I'm wondering if you're willing to give our listeners just an idea of the theme or what the book might be about a little bit.

Sue: It's about digital shaming; it's about surviving and overcoming digital shaming.

Terry: Excellent. Excellent. Is there a scheduled release date for that?

Sue: No, not yet.

Terry: Not yet? All right. We're going to publish all your website addresses with this interview, but for now, let's review them quickly for our listeners who might want to visit them right away. I know you mentioned the P.U.R.E. site which is, again?

Sue: Helpyourteens.com.

Terry: Helpyourteens.com. Then you have both suescheff.com and suescheff.net, correct?

Sue: Right, and the suescheff.net has a free chapter of the *Wit's End* book. Then the suescheffblog.com actually has all those blogs you are talking about.

Terry: Tons more, too. Tons more! You're a very prolific blogger, and I think our listeners would be very interested in those, and I urge them to visit. My last question, Sue—thank you for this interview today; it's been fascinating—who inspired you to be such a proactive and a dedicated and just an energetic parent? You've created a lot of great resources to help other parents. Was there somebody, a bright light in your past that you tried to emulate?

Sue: A parent?

Terry: No, a bright light or just someone that . . .

Sue: Honestly, you know what inspires me every day? Is that when I go online and I look at . . . there's more good out there than there is negative. There really is, even online, as we just got finished talking about all the shaming and all the negativity. I look at organizations like I Can Help. I look at organizations like Ripple Kindness, Spark Kindness.

I was just up at Harvard. I was invited up there for the Caring Common in Education. There is so much kindness out there online; that inspires me. I'm in the process of writing about digital shaming; it's because there is a way to overcome it; there is a way to survive it because we are surrounded by so many people and organizations that are really fighting to build up empathy and kindness out there.

Terry: That is a beautiful thing.

Sue: That is what inspires me. It truly does. Because you know what? I couldn't

overcome everything I have overcome without all these individuals out there fighting for kindness online.

Terry: Sue, I cannot think of a better note to conclude our interview. My guest today has been Sue Scheff. She is the founder of P.U.R.E. She is the author of *Wit's End: Advice and Resources for Saving Your Out-of-Control Teen* and *Google Bomb: The Untold Story of the \$11.3M Verdict That Changed the Way We Use the Internet*, as well as a new book that we will look forward to. Sue, I want to thank you very much for joining us today on *Unrestrained*.

Sue: Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it.

Terry: All right.