

Eckmann Journal
March, 2007

I just reread my February journal before writing this one. Last month I was much more optimistic. This month I intend to look more into my dark side. Last month I finished reading, *The Alchemist* which is all about “omens” and having a personal journey.

I am deeply affected by what I read. I still have a nightmare about a little girl, Billie that drowned in the book, *The Weight of Water* by Anita Shreve. Today I have been reading, *We need to talk about Kevin*, by Lionel Shriver. This book is not for sissies. I don't necessarily recommend this book but it has caused me to think about my life and my parenting and my relationship with boys and men.

I often believe in the “omen” of “threes.” When something crops up in my life three times I think it is time to pay attention. The first of the threes occurred last Thursday after an undergraduate class that Simon and I are teaching. One of the males in my class asked me why I didn't like him. I was stunned that he thought I didn't like him. I asked him why he thought I didn't like him. He said, “Every time I say something you either disagree or look at me with disdain.” I have learned not to argue with this type of honesty. He is a good student and an excellent thinker and he simply stated his experience of me. He told me what he sees in me. The truth is I think very highly of him. So I was shook to the core that this young man experiences me the opposite way of how I think I'm projecting to him.

The second of threes was that I have been feeling somewhat estranged from both of our sons – at least in comparison to my relationship with our daughters (we have two boys and two girls). Our eldest son lives in Vancouver, Washington and our youngest son lives here in San Diego. I have been noticing that I get along great with our youngest son's wife but that our youngest son rarely, if ever, looks me in the eye or begins a conversation with me. Last night the family got together for dinner and I found myself wondering if when I was not in the room if spoke more freely and laughed more.

The third three is the reading of this book *We need to talk about Kevin*. I did not choose this book as it was chosen by a member of our book club. The book is a series of letters written by a mom whose son who goes on a rampage in his high school and murders a teacher and ten students. In the letters the mother recalls her feelings of inadequacy as a mother. I do not have sons who are murderous but I do have feelings of inadequacy as a mother more with my boy children than I do with my female children.

So, here I am Sunday night writing my journal and I'm feeling that I have a masters and doctorate in leadership and I missed many opportunities as a mother to impart love and leadership to our male children. I think I missed these opportunities more often with the boys than I did with our girls.

Can I get along with boys? I am carrying some deep-seeded anger at men? Do I have an axe to grind? Here is a quote from the book that started me wondering about some of (not so hidden) differences between women and men in general.

For all of our squinting at the two sexes to blur them into duplicates, few hearts race when passing gaggles of giggling schoolgirls. But any woman who passes a clump of testosterone-drunk punks without picking up the pace, without avoiding the eye contact that might connote challenge or invitation, without signing inwardly with relief the following block, is a zoological fool. A boy is a dangerous animal (page 62).

How can men and women treat each other equally where there are some basic intrinsic differences in our strength? Why do my sons appear to be distancing themselves to me? Why did a young male member of my undergraduate class think I didn't like him, when in fact I do like him?

My relationship with my dad was pretty good (actually better than my relationship with my mom). My grandfather was a nightmare and molested many of my cousins and me. I've been married before. I have long-term girl friends. I find myself comfortable teaching and consulting with either men or women. I have a great relationship with Simon, my boss. In business I have been successfully mentored by men more often than women. I have a wonderful relationship with Jim. We have been married 22 years. We go to bed holding hands every night. He makes me smile. I know I would be lost without him. Jim and I have seven granddaughters and two grandsons.

Well, this is reflection without too many answers. I know I need to talk to the undergraduate student and find a way to build a bridge with him. I also, know that I need to find ways to connect more with our sons. Perhaps since reading is such an avenue for learning for me I need to continue to read books that are authored by men and are about men.

This means that I plan on thinking deeply about how I affect men. I want to be an encouragement to both men and women. I want to put down any old habits of the heart that I have toward men. My personal journey includes finding ways that I am currently "off-putting" to men and to learn to treat all people regardless of gender with respect and dignity.

I have a lot to learn. I'm open to feedback.

Please remember to read the Stanford Article on learning. I've read this numerous times and I keep learning more about how to improve my own learning.

<http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2007/marapr/features/dweck.html>