

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Reflections in the Mirror

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When you look in the mirror, what do you see? Maybe it's just one of those very hectic, busy days you really don't give much thought to what's looking back at you. You have a meeting to go to, kids to get to school. The morning rush is on! How about at bedtime? When you look in the bathroom mirror to scrub your face all you see is a very tired person. You may at times, see your reflection and wonder "who is that person?"

Maybe it's time to slow down and give yourself some down time. Don't think you have to go any deeper in thought. Just simply take a deep breath and make a nice, warm cup of your favorite tea. Also find your favorite lounging chair or couch and silently sip away. Make a choice to put aside your "to do" list still undone. It will always be there tomorrow.

One of the sweetest gifts in life can be some pure "silence." One way to test it out is with a trusted friend. Both of you turn off your phones and any other sounds or noises in the room. Put a non-ticking timer on, but don't look at your watch or any clock. Then sit down together but don't say a word for two minutes solid. Be sure to look away from each other, or even better, close your eyes and take several slow, deep breaths.

What did the silence feel like? Were you amazed at how long just two minutes felt like? Most people are. We are so used to having noise perpetually around us. What

was it like . . . terrific, pleasant, restful? Or uncomfortable, awkward? Hopefully for many silence can be creative, build trust, give rest, bring balance, quiets your internal racing, and allows transformative listening to emerge. Want to experience these surprising benefits of hearing just silence? Begin today and daily give yourself “moments of silence.”

Thomas Paine considered reflection a notable means for experiencing courage in life opportunities and challenges. *“The real man [woman] smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection.”* May our “moments of silence” we give ourselves each day bring a smile on our face, freedom & strength from stress, and greater courage and wisdom in reflection.

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Rescued from Reflection Ruts

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There are just days where some thoughts just won't stop. It's definitely one of those weeks for me, not just days. Whether something is going on at work or home, it seems a never-ending story spinning in circles. For me it has to do with some unfair things happening with one of my grown up daughters.

That's when the Momma Warrior, or more likely Monster, just can't let it go. I have to do something or go crazy! The first thing that comes to mind is "Call up 'that person' making my daughter's life miserable and tell them to 'chill' or they just may have to face off with 'Momma Warrior' who always wins, hell or high water!"

I know. It's probably not the best thing to do while in this very uncomfortable and risky "Reflection Rut." Definitely not a good thing to do without my daughter giving me an ok. Otherwise, Momma Warrior, or Monster, will only make it worse for the one I love so dearly. And we all know there are always two sides to every story, no matter how much we want to support and protect our children, whether little ones or all grown up. How do I get out of this energy-draining, negativity of a "Reflection Rut?"

Over the many years of making a mess out of being that Momma Warrior or Monster, I have come away with two gems that have kept me from repeating a messy outcome. The first is to tell myself to "chill" first! I must make a choice to simply be silent

until the monster side of me settles down to at least its miniature size! Hopefully, the mini monster would shortly fade away.

Part of this “pause” includes affirming my grown-up daughter is more than capable of handling her life challenges and battles. One of those tricky tests for every mom is to let go and let her do what she does best in the situation. That way, my daughter will become even stronger and more confident in handling just about anything life and people can throw her way.

The second gem I continue to learn is to “listen” more than talk. And for this sanguine, talkative personality that I am, that’s a hard one! One advantage I have at my young-at-heart age of 70+ is I simply get tired more easily fighting other people’s battles they need to wage and win on their own. Yet, most of the time, it’s just best to listen and ask questions so they can figure it out themselves. Of course, I will be there in their corner if they ask for counsel, advice, or just to be their friend, or Momma in this case. In the end, it’s often best to hold the counsel or advice and instead offer questions to get them thinking outside the box. Being cautious with advice is a good thing. And you know, mommas tend to think we all have the answer! Sure!?

It’s amazing with some simple, open questions how we can actually understand and often discover the solution to a problem or challenge. And if a solution doesn’t soon surface, in the meantime, the person struggling will gain affirmation and some peace while waiting. It means, though, we need to have an open, safe, accepting heart for our friend or family member. No need to push, control, or require anything.

With these two gems of “chilling” and “listening” with a confident and caring heart, my reflection rut softens and fades. I confess, with every phone call from those I love

and hold dear, it's a daily practice. When I continue to practice, I will find more constructive and hopefully wiser ways to be rescued from my reflection ruts in life. I hope you do too my friend!

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Say Thank You Where Ever you Go

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With Thanksgiving just around the corner, we typically think about expressing gratitude to our spouse, our children, our close relatives. And well we all should, gladly. Yet, what about those that serve us every day in our own communities? Do they ever get a thank you? Or just complaints? If you just ask any grocer, pharmacist, gas station employee, they will undoubtedly say thank you's are few and far between all the complaints they routinely get.

Let's change that this Thanksgiving season! I wrote portions of this article in 2008 and considered it worthy of including it here again. Here's your assignment for the rest of the year and beyond, but particularly during the next couple weeks. Below, you will read a list of services we always take for granted...for example, that the gas station will be open, the pharmacist will have your prescription ready, and your grocer will have the produce and items you routinely buy.

I want to hear these people say they got an unusual number of sincere and genuine thank you's that made their job serving you and the public much nicer this go around. Think about all the places you frequent and regularly buy goods and services. I am sure I haven't covered them all. So, add any to the list of people to say thank you to. Write down this list on a separate piece of paper. If you know someone in particular, put

their name down and the date you commit to saying a special thank you. Whether by word, deed, or gift, you will then see many more smiles this holiday season than ever before—in spite of what is going on in our nation.

We all know with our nation's continuing economic woes and frightening world events looming over us all, it may not be easy to think about someone else—particularly someone who doesn't always deliver your mail on time or at all, or those at the pharmacy who may lose your prescription. Yet, we have to remember there are people inside that Valero or Chevron station facilitating our ability to pump our own gas and maybe even get a cup of coffee on the go. And, by all means include the letter carrier. There is nothing like a kind word to someone who may not be doing exactly what you want, that will surprisingly move them in the right direction of responsibility and improved service to you and others. You may ask, "Why should I make the effort?" This is why.

As a nation, we are in the midst of a major move of negativity, anger (even rage), violence, depression, fear, and doomsday talk. Although we must be wise in how to address our difficulties, we must never relinquish a hopeful heart toward the future and our treatment of other fellow human beings. One of the first steps is to treat others as you would like to be treated. Yes, here comes the Golden Rule again—and at a very timely moment in our nation's history.

Begin to proactively engage in not only working to preserve your own livelihood, but also begin helping others who serve your needs and may even seek your help. It all begins with offering a kind word in compassion, understanding, and gratitude for their

very presence as a living, breathing human being. So, rise up and say a thank you to even those who may not seemingly deserve it! Amazing things happen when you do.

Maybe this will even be your opportunity to reduce the number of gifts for yourself under the Christmas tree, and spend some on others that may just need a little more hope. They will then genuinely know someone was thinking about them, appreciates their service, and cares about what they are going through too. Remember, this is really not about you. It's about that other person who goes to work every day so you can have the service (albeit, not always done well) you need.

If you take this to heart, you will be a very busy person over the next several weeks and months. But you will also be one of the happiest too...experiencing the joy of encouraging others and bringing hope to those special ones that are always taken for granted. If you personally experience something special you would like to share as you say your thank you's, by all means email me so I can pass it along to my readers. Please, no complaints about their service on this one! Happy Thanksgiving to one and all!

- Local Grocer
- Pharmacist
- Gas station employee
- School teacher and administrative staff
- City utilities and other services that bill you
- Nonprofits that make all the difference
- Car repair person
- Veterinarian

- Your doctor, nurse, massage therapist, nutritionist, any healthcare/wellness provider you know
- Restaurant owner, server, cook/chef, even fast-food servers
- Health food store owner
- Insurance agent
- Discount clothing store you frequent
- Gift shops you routinely visit
- Bank clerk
- Post office personnel, letter carrier
- Video store clerk
- Telephone, Internet server representatives
- Gardener
- Parks & Recreation people that make it possible to enjoy the outdoors
- Police, Firefighters
- Artists in all media—visual, performing, literary
- Directors, Staff, and Volunteers of Cultural centers—museums, theatre
- And, don't forget your neighbors, for sure!

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Reflecting Ahead...Resolutions

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Nov 27, 2015)

At this time next year, presidential elections would have taken place. So, before another year races by us, let's reflect on what's going around us between now and then. I sense more and more people are anxious and some are outright scared about what's going on in our nation and world.

Like the 2008 elections, we are wondering about our livelihood and future. Are we at a point this time where we will be very surprised at the election outcome not predicted by the media or the polls? Like 2008, some will be just saying they will be glad when the elections are over, and we all can get back to a more normal life—not centered on which candidate to hate the most.

So, with that in mind, I have resurrected portions of my 2008 Reflection lifeskill article. I felt it was time to revisit and remind ourselves even more keenly that none of us can live in a bubble anymore. Since 2008 many arenas of our world have only intensified. And it's affect basically will depend on what you consider important to your values and way of life.

And again, what a time we live in! Returning to our normal life may not be what everyone expects or wants. There is a sense, no matter who is elected, we are all going to be on a different path than we assume. What does this really mean for us all? Maybe,

we just might not take things so much for granted anymore. Now, that is something to reflect on.

For many of us in November, we may also begin to think about making New Year's resolutions that we may or may not keep. The most common resolutions tend to be: stop smoking, get fit, lose weight, enjoy life more, quite drinking, get organized, learn something new, get out of debt, spend more time with the family, and help others.

Yet, as worthy as these resolutions are, I believe we will come away by the end of November 2016 with a broader viewpoint beyond our own self. My hope is those resolutions you declare hold firm throughout 2016. Here is what I wrote in 2008 and believe holds true now and for 2016. In observing others around me and reflecting on my own perspectives of what might happen during the 2016 elections, let's hope we find ourselves and our nation more secure and proactive in our lives. Do any of these statements ring true for you?

- We are going to be more carefully watching how we spend our money.
- We are going to be more engaged with helping and serving others, sharing our core values with each other at home, our neighborhoods, our communities, our nation.
- We are going to more clearly know what is most important in our lives and act on it.
- We are going to be more proactively informed and vocal on what our political representatives are actually doing, locally and nationally.
- We are going to be more proactively interested in what's happening around the world, and how events will impact our nation and lives.

- We are going to be more a part of the solution rather than the problem—taking personal responsibility for our lives in every arena.
- We are going to stop complaining and doing the blame game; be more positive in our outlook; forgive and be forgiven; and be kinder to others, even when we disagree.

These are just a few comments gleaned from others and thoughts of my own that seem to be repeated lately, just as in 2008. Yet, they are being more intently voiced than at other times. What others have you heard and thought about? This is your opportunity to start making a difference right now in your family, your community, your nation and the world by embracing a broader commitment of New Year resolutions shortly coming your way for such a time as this.

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