

From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



New Year Relationships

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 4, 2013)

As this New Year has begun and has added yet another one to my years, I can't help but reflect on those relationships in my younger years. I wonder what my high school best friend Diane is doing today, how my grown children's Godparents are up to today, and what my first house we bought looks like now.

So I went back into my 1962 high school yearbook and did a net search for my two best friends without success. I did rediscover a little celebrity trivia...that actor Tom Selleck graduated that same year at my high school, Ulysses S. Grant High, Van Nuys, California. And no, I didn't personally know him, but like many other girls we did have a crush on him and a couple other hunks.

What and who do you remember about your younger years? Have you ever thought about renewing some old friendships? How far back do you want to go? We all know some old relationships are best left alone. I remember a few that were not very happy with me from miscommunications or offensives I can't even remember. Whatever they were, I only hope they let it go and moved on.

What reasons would you have for renewing old relationships? What value would it bring to your current life? My daughter compared it to an old shirt in her closet. Are you connected to that shirt that brings up memories. And are they

memories to hold onto to or to move on from? Has your style and values changed? Possibly, the quality of your current relationships may suffer because you won't let go of the past. Personally, it is important to look at who and why you associate with certain people.

If the new year is supposed to be about reflecting on the past and where you want to go this year, a very important place to start is with your close relationships and how they affect your core values. And how many relationships are superfluous? Are they really essential? Another question is what better role can you play within the relationships you have right now?

Maybe you will find in giving that shirt to someone else you actually let go of the past and bring you both some joy. You will then be able to more freely appreciate what you already have in your current relationships, and the clothes in your closet! So, as you consider my daughter's perspective and questions to ponder, may this New Year bring you closer to your goals and relationships that will make all the difference in your life.

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What's Holding Us Together?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 11, 2013)

For many families, they wonder if 2013 will be a number 13 year of more troubling and tragic events, at best, unsettling occurrences. I definitely understand their uncertainties all around us. Yet, what really does hold us together no matter what comes our way?

I asked myself that question this week after receiving a phone call of an accident that has impacted the life of one of my daughters. What do you say to those you love and care for when things go wrong? What holds us together when you have gotten more than just a few of those calls through the years? When the phone rings, how often do we expect the worst rather than good news . . . when bad things have happened through the years over and over again?

Yes, so many good things and even miracles have happened in the midst. But those bad memories seem to carry more weight, at least when another call comes in. Again, my question remains, what holds us together?

I had to dig deep into my emotions and thoughts to unravel the challenge my heart was experiencing. My first thoughts were repeated with "I just don't understand." Yet, if I really dig deeper I will find the "why" for many of them. And when I still don't understand, what keeps me going?

I had to look at where I put my confidence about my life and those I love. What values do I have at the core of my being? Aren't those the ones that hold me together? What are my core values that have sustained me through those years . . . believing that everything will be ok?

I have personally experienced many miracles in my life. However, this phone call somehow shook that core for the moment. In that moment I had a choice to make. Do I fall apart or continue to stand on those core values no matter what? Stand not only for myself but also on behalf of those I love.

The first challenge was to realize that I still, being human like everyone else, kept some of my confidence in my circumstances of the good life all around me . . . my house, my husband, my car, my projects, my community. Whatever was familiar and comfortable seemed to be holding me together. . . until this phone call initiated this challenge again.

So, here I am in that choice to make. Do my circumstances good or bad determine my confidence or do I continue to stand in those core values that have sustained me no matter what? In spite of my seemingly unbridled feelings, I choose to hold onto to my core values as they hold me and my family together, no matter what . . . my faith in God to intervene with His goodness and provision in the midst, the gift of family held dear always, the gift to see goodness more than the badness in this world, and to know that time is a friend who will soften the moments so we can see a brighter day tomorrow.

And just so you know, my daughter has declared, no matter what has happened, that this year will be a good 13th year!

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Respect or Rancor for our Reps

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 18, 2013)

No matter how hard we may try to do the right thing and have the right attitude, there is always someone at sometime who will be angry about something they think you are doing wrong. Unable to come to some consensus or mutually respectful resolution, you are left with any number of arrows and barbs that won't let go. And perpetually angry people will continue to dig the barbs even deeper.

No matter what you try to do to smooth things over, angry people want to be angry and always seem to find a target. And what an easy target are our community representatives. Anger is a normal emotion we all have. Yet, the way we handle that anger only demonstrates those strengths or weaknesses in our own character. Whatever happened to the motto, "Treat others the way you want to be treated?" And what about this ole idiom? "Never judge a person until you've walked a mile in their shoes."

Relationships are built by respect and destroyed by rancor. And the solid commitment to walk in respect regardless of the rancor surrounding us is a keen testament to those who definitely deserve respect. Whether the anger is predicated on real evidence of wrongdoing or not, we still must make a choice with our response to that anger in all relationships. Keep in mind one of Mark

Twain's wise quips. "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." Sad, but true. Just put "rancor" in place of the word "lie" and it still holds true. So, we all must be on guard against letting the lie or rancor drag us along. Seeking truth alongside respect keeps us comfortably at home in our own shoes or even in those of a persistent angry adversary. Not easy, but the choice is simple.

A most recent example in my community involves the possible annexation of a little over 28 acres on the north end of town and its potential impact on the community, particularly if a truck stop goes on the property. With many city council meetings and a crowd of people in opposition showing up, there were any number of respectful and rancorous voices heard before the council and throughout the community.

Those voices for some consisted of appreciation to the council for seeking citizen opinions and input; and for the council being open to hearing and giving serious consideration to their concerns. Others took a more rancorous tone with accusations without evidence of slipping stuff through and making secret deals for personal financial gain. What is often amazing is our city council representatives and mayor made commitments and were elected to serve our community (along with their families) without any salary. How many of us would step up to sacrifice in that way for the good of the community? And how many of us really have what it takes? I believe few of us do.

For many on both sides of respect and rancor, confusion seems to be the result so far. And ignorance of the sequence of events, process, and the

council's legal constraints and required procedures fuel the confusion. It takes respect, time, work, and a willing mind to help unravel the confusion together.

The confusion is understandable when rancor, miscommunications, even lies are easily circulated. Remember Mark Twain quip mentioned earlier? What is the solution? Let's keep in mind the other earlier phrases with how we would want to be treated by others and our willingness to walk in their shoes for a mile or two. So, if you decide to look into this issue on behalf of our community, do so with respect for all, working together to seek the best resolution for all concerned.

Here are a few resources to consider. Call your local representative and respectfully ask for the facts and resources to help you understand the process required to make the best decision for our community.

City Council Representatives:

<http://www.ci.boerne.tx.us/index.aspx?NID=77>

Truck Stop articles: <http://www.ksat.com/news/Boerne-residents-oppose-truck-stop/-/478452/18060234/-/14hluo0/-/index.html>

http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local_news/article/Truck-stop-foes-warn-of-changes-to-lifestyle-4191097.php

Group opposing truck stop: <http://www.stoptruckstop.com/> (this group has a petition. Before you sign any petition, do your homework, talk with your representatives, and listen respectfully in order to make an informed decision.)

Next Boerne City Council Meeting: Tuesday, January 22, 2013, 6:00 pm, Municipal Court Offices, 124 Old San Antonio Road.

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Do You Know Your Neighbor?

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Jan 25, 2013)

In our hectic daily lives between work, school, church, volunteer activities, family responsibilities, and the many other things on our “to do” list each week, how many of you have connected with your neighbors? Do you really know your neighbors on either side of your abode and across the street? How many years have you lived in your neighborhood without making those neighborly face-to-face connections?

According to Aaron Smith, Research Specialist, Pew Internet survey report, June 9, 2010, *Neighbors Online* (<http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2010/PIP-Neighbors-Online.pdf>), “Americans use a range of approaches to keep informed about what is happening in their communities and online activities have been added to the mix. Face-to-face encounters and phone calls remain the most frequent methods of interaction with neighbors. At the same time, internet tools are gaining ground in community-oriented communications.”

This survey report asked about online connections to communities and neighbors and found in the twelve months preceding the survey:

- 22% of all adults (representing 28% of internet users) signed up to receive alerts about local issues (such as traffic, school events, weather warnings or crime alerts) via email or text messaging.
- 20% of all adults (27% of internet users) used digital tools to talk to their neighbors and keep informed about community issues.

Overall, physical personal encounters remain the primary way people stay informed about community issues. In the twelve months preceding this survey:

- 46% of Americans talked face-to-face with neighbors about community issues
- 21% discussed community issues over the telephone
- 11% read a blog dealing with community issues
- 9% exchanged emails with neighbors about community issues and 5% say they belong to a community email listserv
- 4% communicated with neighbors by text messaging on cell phones
- 4% joined a social network site group connected to community issues
- 2% followed neighbors using Twitter

These findings come from a national telephone survey among 2,258 Americans.

As you can see from these stats, only about 46% have actual face-to-face conversations with their neighbors. Much of the remaining encounters involve technology, whether by phone, email, online blogs and social networks. Yet, these remaining methods of connecting are still more distant than actually coming out of our caves to say hello face-to-face.

Yes, all our lives are very busy. How do we find a way to not just know who our neighbors are but also ways to help each other when the opportunity presents itself? For many, that opportunity often arises from some difficult or tragic event affecting one's neighbor or neighborhood.

How do we find ways before some problem or tragic event happens? Here are some possibilities. However, it means that somewhere in your busy life you may need to say goodbye to some other activity or routine you do as you come and go from your home.

- When you drive into your neighborhood, don't rush by; say hello to that neighbor in their yard. Introduce yourself. Get to know them.
- On an evening or weekend, don't hide in your house or backyard; be out front working on your car, lawn mowing, or just sitting on your front porch swing sipping some lemonade on a spring or summer day or hot chocolate on one of those cooler days.
- Go for a walk in your neighborhood in early evening and weekend. You will be surprised at how many neighbors you meet, greet, and get to know.
- When you say hello and start to get to know each other, exchange phone numbers/emails. Be sure to not to give it away to anyone else without their permission. And don't abuse the privilege of having each other emails with all kinds of spam.
- Learn their interests as they learn about yours. Whatever the interest, such as golfing, bird watching, whatever it is, invite them to go along.

- When a neighbor is going through some tough times, offer to help in whatever way is appropriate. But don't be pushy or bother them too much.

These are just a few examples. What ways have you connected with your neighbors. Check out this July 27, 2011 PRNewswire link to find out ways Americans are helping their neighbors, particularly during these difficult economic times . . . <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-survey-finds-83-of-people-are-willing-to-help-a-neighbor-who-has-financial-problems-126230188.html>. May you be encouraged and challenged to be a friendly, helpful neighbor who makes all the difference in the lives of those around you at home and in your neighborhood.

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