

Saving My Daughter

I think everyone has a moment in their life when they instantly know why they are here. For some, it is a gentle whisper of a thought – a tiny nudge that says “pay attention to this”. For others, it’s a 2x4 slamming into the back of their head, screaming “HEY STUPID! YEAH YOU!!! OVER HERE!!!!” I thought I belonged to the gentle whisper club, until my real purpose whacked me from behind when I wasn’t paying attention. How we find our purpose isn’t really all that important. What really matters is what we do with that knowledge once we get it because it defines the rest of our existence here on Planet Earth.

But before we go there, I want to tell you a little bit about me. My story begins where it begins for most mothers – the first time I laid eyes on my newborn. From that moment forward, I was no longer a self centered, egotistical human looking out for number 1. No... I suddenly become a protector, a provider and an educator. My wants and needs quickly became secondary to the needs of my children, if not forever, then at least for the next 18 years or so.... ok, yeah, forever.

But being a Mom was especially difficult for me because of my chosen career. I was an airline pilot and my schedule was brutal. It was not unusual for me to be gone for 5 days with a day or two off and then back out for another 4 days. Fortunately, my husband had a day job and was more than able to take care of our growing family. But I hated being gone. I would see their crying faces pressed up against the glass as I left with my suitcase and it would haunt me for days.

I decided after the first few years of being a Mom that I needed a career change because it was killing me to be gone so much. The best option seemed to be a

business of my own since going back to school would have been both expensive and time consuming, so I tried everything, but without a whole lot of success. It was tough to work full time, raise 4 kids and start a business, but looking back on it all, everything happened for a reason.

My first nudge from fate came on September 11, 2001. Every airline pilot that I know had a piece of their heart ripped out that day. I was no exception. The unthinkable was now a possibility and we all expected it to happen again. We looked at every passenger as a suspect and when I left my little kids at home, I honestly wondered if I would see them again. Terrorism was now a reality and my life was changed forever.

I got serious about leaving the airline at this point and since my kids were the most important thing in the world to me, it made sense to consider a business that revolved around them. Because I was concerned with the approaching teenage years, I became a parent coach who specialized in the parent/teen relationship.

I put all of my new knowledge to work in my home, but unfortunately, once again, life got in the way of my business start- up attempt. I think it was just easier to keep doing what I was doing, even though I was miserable beyond belief. But there was more to come...

The next nudge was my cancer diagnosis. All through my treatment, I thought seriously about leaving my career again. Not only did I now have to worry about terrorism, but also my health was a serious concern. The stress was getting to be too much. I started thinking about a more fulfilling career that would allow me to actually make a difference in the world, but I

was struggling financially because of my illness and felt trapped in a job that didn't fit me anymore.

Third nudge from the Universe.... My marriage fell apart and suddenly I was a single mother airline pilot with cancer. Not good! Bankruptcy followed the divorce and I finally cried Uncle and resigned from what USED to be the most amazing career in the world. I accepted a job as a Mercy Flight pilot in my hometown and thought things were finally on the upswing.

But here's where the Universe picked up the 2x4 to whack me upside the head.... Through all the drama of the last 10 years, the one thing that never failed me was my relationship with my children. The 5 of us got along beautifully and I gave full credit to my training as a parent coach all those years before.

Until now.

I will spare you the details, but my relationship with my 16 year old quickly spiraled out of control, and I mean OUT. OF. CONTROL. Every parent's worst nightmare was my new reality. And I could not understand why this was happening to my perfect family.

After a particularly horrible night, I volunteered to take my daughter directly to the psychiatric emergency room of a nearby hospital to avoid arrest. That night was the beginning of a very long downhill slide for my entire family. Everything changed that night and I felt powerless to save us.

Simple conversations turned into shouting matches. Punishments were met with suicide threats. Upon a thorough search of my home, I found evidence of drugs and alcohol and I was absolutely blindsided by the thought of it all. We started counseling but it was obvious that she wanted nothing to do with it. Trust was non-existent and her relationship with her siblings was at an all-time low.

Her friends were the only ones she would talk to and if I tried to keep her from them, she would erupt into a screaming, violent person that I did not recognize. I was defeated.

Professional counselors were telling me they were not able to help her since she was not willing to participate. I felt like a complete failure, especially since I had successfully handled so many life challenges in recent years.

This one had me down for the count. Why couldn't I, a Certified Life and Family Coach, save my daughter? I knew what to do and what to say and how to act, but it wasn't working. I felt like I should be on the Dr. Phil show, or worse.

Then one day, when she was talking on the phone to a friend, I overheard their conversation. They were talking about saving the turtles on the other side of the world. Apparently they had seen something on the internet about these turtles who were facing extinction and they had decided that someone had to save them.

I thought back to when she was younger (actually, not that long ago) and I could still see that sweet, caring, loving little girl trying to help a frog get to safety or crying when her hamster was sick...Had she really changed that much or was it possible that she was still in there somewhere?

Was it possible that it was just teenage hormones, social pressure, school stress and the burden of growing up in a time when drugs and alcohol were readily available as early as 5th or 6th grade that was holding her hostage?

I started to pay attention to our conversations, both the good and the bad. The majority were still strained and angry, but every now and then, I noticed we were actually communicating. And the topic was more often than not related to helping someone or

something. Hmmmmm. She WAS still in there. But how could I get her back?

I thought back to my early parent/teen coach training. Something kept coming back to me. As I was thinking about my daughter, the thing that I kept going back to in my mind was one particular teenager in the study used to write the poem...

This girl thought long and hard about Diana's question "what do you need from the adults in your life?" Finally, with tears in her eyes, she said "nobody has ever asked me that question before. Nobody has ever asked me what I want for my life". Some of these teens could not even comprehend the simple notion that they could actually find purpose in their lives and that they could "self design" a life that has both joy and meaning.

But when asked if they thought that adults could help them in this endeavor, the answer was no. The group as a whole felt a complete lack of respect from their parents and teachers and wondered how they could plan the rest of their lives if no one respected who they were at that moment.

Could it actually be that easy? Could it be that I was spending all of our time together arguing, scolding and nagging instead of engaging this struggling teenager in a conversation that had the possibility of changing her life? Was it possible to find that perfect moment, when neither of us was on edge, to begin a conversation that asked the right questions to get her thinking about more than her next high or her next drink?

I had always justified my actions by reminding myself that this was a life and death situation and I had every right to demand that she adhere to my rules, but was it working? Not at all! We were barely talking!!! She wasn't listening to me and I certainly wasn't listening to her.

And yes. I know that drugs today are more lethal than ever. Even the so called harmless marijuana is causing unexpected fatalities when it is laced with some unknown substance. And it seems like it's no longer enough for kids to drink a beer or two at a concert or a party. Now they are binge drinking and dying of alcohol poisoning. Aids, STD's, teenage pregnancies, cyber bullying, suicides.... It is certainly no picnic to be a teenager these days.

Yet it's also no picnic to be a parent these days, either. Out of control kids are being hauled away in the middle of the night, families are in shreds, teachers are scared and exhausted, school shootings are almost routine, juvenile prisons are overflowing....

But even if you raise your kids to reject all of the temptations facing them on a daily basis, they really are only human. I never ever in a million years thought I would be in this situation. We talked about drugs and alcohol since they were in grade school. They knew how I felt about all this. I was a parent coach!! And still, there I was. Barely recognizing my precious child.

So I tried something different. I went back to the basics. I asked her what she needed from the adult(s) in her life (ME). I asked her what made her want to get out of bed in the morning. What kind of difference did she want to make in the world? What did she think her purpose was in life?

So here's the thing. It got us talking. I mean, really talking. Not just superficial "how was your day" talking, but deep, meaningful, life purpose talking. And it was wonderful. We talked about turtles and rain forests and monarch butterflies, but we also talked about careers and colleges and High School grades and yes, drinking and drugs.... And it turns out she had heard what I had been saying all of those years, but for all the wrong reasons she did her own thing.

One of our many "new" conversations involved her friends at school and she said that they would like to

talk about their purposes in life too. I then had a talk with a mother of one of her friends and she said she was having a rough time with her daughter too. She didn't know what to do to change their downward spiral. And so Parent Changemakers was born!

My daughter and I are in a much better place now and have written this program together, to be sure that we are speaking a language that makes sense to teens (and pre-teens). The many pages throughout the website are designed to get you talking to your kids about some pretty important stuff.

If all teens knew how easy it was for them to make a difference in the world, they may not spend as much time smoking and drinking and playing violent video games. But someone needs to let them know how it can be done.

My daughter and I were driving to an appointment recently and as we got off the highway, there was a homeless man standing at the top of the ramp, holding up a sign that said he was cold and hungry. She instantly went into her Changemaker role and wanted to get some kids together to help the homeless. This is how I want teenagers and young adults to be. I want them to see a problem and get together to solve it. We as parents can start the conversation with our own teens and then offer whatever assistance is required to fulfill their purpose.

This program is designed to introduce you to the concept of being a Parent to a Changemaker. It will take you from wherever you are in your parent/child relationship and start you on your journey to guiding him or her toward a purpose filled, meaningful life. Please note that this system works whether your children are still young and nearly perfect or older and unrecognizable with their behavior and anger issues. You can custom design the way you proceed to fit your individual situation.

The outcome of the program is also individualized. While it would be amazing if everyone felt a purpose to save their little corner of the world so that future generations could survive and even thrive, it's not going to turn out that way. And that's ok, because the world needs all kinds of people to make humanity prosper. Help your child find out what makes him or her tick and then go from there! You will not only save your relationship, but you may just save the world at the same time!