

Words that are Left Unsaid (August 2011)

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”

The phrase, “words can never hurt me,” is simply not true. It is a mythical childhood rhyme. Words, cruel name calling and labels, can hurt and do so dreadfully. At a critical moment, words from a significant person spoken to a vulnerable, receptive individual can build or break a life. Perhaps the rhyme should read, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can break my heart.”

The most powerful thing you will ever do is say words!

We must choose the words that we say with great care because of the life-long impact they have. A wise man once said, “When I wish to speak, let me think first. Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? If not, let it be left unsaid.”

Words can draw us into the best of friendships or they can create feelings of terror deep inside. That sensitive, bright and quiet lad or that bubbly, beautiful little redheaded girl seeks words of praise when they proudly reach their goal. A word of praise or encouragement brings them joy, pushing them higher to soar like an eagle in pursuit of their vision or dream. Ugly critical words that insult and belittle can cause deep wounds, forcing them down the mountain heights to emerge bruised and broken.

Over the past 40 years I have witnessed countless fallen eagles with their songs of joy taken out of their tender hearts, with words like: “You’re lazy, you’ll never amount to anything!”, “You can’t do anything right!”, “You’re just stupid!”, or “I wish you had never been born!” Words can kill, and they do. They assault your self-esteem, curse your identity or stamp a lethal label on your life. Cold words freeze people, hot words scorch them and bitter words poison you. Words can be like barbed arrows that are let loose which cannot be recaptured, no matter how much you wish to take them back. It is as if someone threw a match into your soul.

No one deserves to sit in screaming silence because of thoughtless, uncaring words. No one is ever bad enough to merit harsh words that leave such deep wounds in one’s heart. I find it sad – painful might be a better word – that so many have to submit to the “verbal knife” out of fear. They simply learn to sit in screaming silence, the only way they know how to curtail the flow of those painfully abusive words.

The most difficult task I face in trying to help heal those wounded hearts and hidden hurts of the past is to draw out those barbed arrows. It is painful to drudge up agonizing emotions from very difficult memories. With heartfelt prayer, a word of encouragement, and time perhaps the wounds will heal and joy will return to the little boy or girl within.

Before you utter a word to one you love, may you be ever mindful that some of the most important words are the **words that are left unsaid.**