

YOUR HEART SONG?

Catherine Nelson, Ph.D.



One cold night in January, I was driving home and listening to the last part of a radio interview of a mother and her son. The mother has muscular dystrophy, which is a degenerative disease of the voluntary muscles that control movement in the body. She talked about making “choices” in life. She said that everything we do or don’t do is a “choice” and has a consequence.

This mother is in physical pain much of her day. She makes a conscious choice every morning to get up, to make a cup of coffee, and to go through her day in physical pain. She said she is very aware of each choice she makes. Her muscular dystrophy is slowly worsening, but she appreciates all the medical help and medications she receives.

Her eleven-year-old son, who was born with muscular dystrophy, was also interviewed. His health and ability to live is more precarious. He struggled to breathe and talk during the interview. He had two siblings who were also born with muscular dystrophy, and they had died. The doctors told his mother that he would not make it past one year. He did. They then predicted he would die by age two. He didn’t. The doctors are amazed he has made it to age eleven.

In the interview the boy talked with joy in his voice about listening to his heart’s song. His mom had taught him how to meditate to help him find relief from his physical pain. He said he learned how to become very quiet, to go inside, and he discovered his heart’s song. He said it gives him much pleasure and comfort to be able to connect with the song he hears in his heart.

He was eager to tell the interviewer that all of us have a unique

heart song. He wanted everyone who was listening to the interview to hear about his discovery because it is so helpful in quiet moments. He said he knows his health is not good and his life is uncertain. He is okay with dying because then he will be with his siblings once again. He misses them.

Needless to say, I was in tears listening to the interview. Most of us would feel empathy, compassion, even sadness for a mother and son with muscular dystrophy. Instead, I felt admiration for the mother’s grit and determination to help herself and her son, given their life circumstances. Her son has learned to be with his physical pain in positive ways. They were each bringing forth remarkable qualities in their personalities and life values in the interview.

Who among us knows that we each have a unique heart song? And who among us has learned how to accept and work with chronic physical pain and accept our own mortality? This mother and son have each mastered some of the most challenging issues in life. I remember someone who once said, “It is not the event itself that matters but our relationship

to it.” These two individuals exemplify the meaning of this statement.

Many of us who are physically healthy and living “normal” lives are often disconnected from our inner awareness, our inner sense of self, and our heart’s song. Many of our lives are busy and driven by external stimuli and events. Our children are introduced at an early age and attracted to many “things,” including entertaining technology. In our culture, we adults have lots of expensive “toys” and “gadgets” that absorb hours of each day. Are we setting good examples for our children of how to be in life? How are they going to learn how to cope with big life issues that will inevitably occur?

That night, listening to the last part of that radio interview, I received a gift. It has sharpened my awareness of my need to have more quiet time, meditation, and more introspection. I want to open to and listen to my heart song and make more thoughtful choices in my life. ■

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