

Parenting Matters – Volume 14

Well, it is officially summer, and many of us have been busy through the spring planting seeds and combing through “summer fun” brochures, to make sure our kids are happy and that there are flowers or vegetables to enjoy on the hot summer nights. My father passed away last month, so this spring just wasn’t the same. It has been a sad time – and a tender time for my children and I to experience our first family death together. It’s all still surreal. Feelings and memories about my Dad float in and out of consciousness.

The story I want to share is about a family who is working really hard to lead a happier life by leaving the past behind.

This young woman who I’ll call Sue, grew up in a small town with her mother. After two unsuccessful relationships and two children later, her mother moved to Vancouver, leaving family and familiarity behind to find work. Life quickly went sideways at the age of 8 and 10 for the two children, when their mom started shift work. Teen years were spent engaging in high-risk behaviours and the eventually dropped out of school and lost their connectedness to their mother.

Fast forward 10 years. Sue, now has a child of her own. The father of her child suddenly died when her son Lucas was two years old. Sue’s wounds of abandonment and rejection were triggered by her loss and she became clinically depressed. Over time she has physically and emotionally abandoned her child, her depression taking over her ability to parent effectively.

Sue’s journey to health really began when Lucas started school. His absences and erratic behaviour called attention to a concern, signaling to Sue that she must get her life on the right track to help her son thrive. Eventually, Sue agreed to seek professional help at a mental health team. Her treatment included:

- An assessment and on-going psychiatric support for her depression.
- 1 to 1 counselling to heal her “family of origin” wounds.
- Lots of education around parent/child relationships and the merits of consistent parenting.
- Joining a parent support group to safely share her parenting frustrations.
- Support in finding community activities or programs to emphasize a healthy life style, along with meeting new people.

On bad days, Sue fights not falling back into old patterns of avoiding people, or shutting her son out by letting him watch too much TV. She reaches out more to friends and neighbours and has been tapping into more of her spiritual side, particularly attending ceremonies connected with the First Nations style of healing. Sue is also talking about moving out of the city to “get back to basics” and have the opportunity to work more with her hands. In many ways, she feels she has been living someone else’s life.

We all heal and grieve differently. Some of us get a wake up call in the face of danger or death or when we see our loved ones suffering. Some of us know that we are not

following our passion and feel trapped by convention or financial security that ultimately has costs to our inner and outer happiness. However we have come to our place of “knowing,” it can never be wrong if it feels right to our soul.