

~ Neither Saint Nor Sinner Makes a Life ~

The truth is in there...

"There are many truths of which the full meaning cannot be realized until personal experience has brought it home."

John Stuart Mill

"As no roads are so rough as those that have just been mended, so no sinners are so intolerant as those that have just turned saints"

Charles Caleb Colton

"Truth does not need argument, agreement, theories or beliefs. There is only one test for it and that is to ask yourself 'Is the statement true or false in my experience?'"

Barry Long

"I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extravagant enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limit of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced."

Henry David Thoreau

Reflection is something that I think can be a healthy endeavor. Sometimes it can keep us from seeing the immediate tasks we must meet on a daily basis. But other times it is absolutely essential to have "down time" to reflect. I have had the occasion, of late, for a bit of reflection on my nature and the idea of my family's perpetuating mythology.

I've always wanted to see myself as a flawed hero... heroine! ☺ That in some way I am a fractured and humble saint on a cause to prove that I am a good, a really good person.

This unceasing desire, and never-ending curse, of wanting to be a "really good person" has driven me my entire life. Whether it be in providing for my family, taking care of those less fortunate, making as much money as possible (that's no longer a problem!), being the "best" in a field of endeavor, winning the approval of family and friends, being admired, or simply saving the world, I would be

maniacal in my devotion and efforts to the point that I ceased to be a human being with all it entails; my desire to be "good enough" obscured and wiped out all other avenues to see who I truly am inside. That is the power of the myth in my life. The truth of the myth meant truly that I was ashamed of myself and who I was inside. And certainly ashamed to let anyone know it. And then add the huge gender secret and POW! The perfect storm.

It has come to my attention that this desire to be good enough, and the shame it impies, as ingrained as it is in my upbringing, ***might have a lot more to do with perpetuating the myth than perpetuating a truth.***

I have come to realize that this myth *did not begin with me*. It began in my family, perhaps countless generations ago. And it has been perpetuated for countless generations forward. ***Who or what gains from such a myth? What needs are being met? What power is harnessed by this myth? And what is the truth that the myth somehow obscures?***

The myth is this: That I must tirelessly and ceaselessly work to show that I am doing well with my life, and that I am good enough. If I do not tirelessly and ceaselessly work to prove such, then the opposite must be true; that I am ***NOT*** good enough; for you, for those I care about, and most of all, for me.

What truth is being obscured? Is it that tireless efforts do not make one "good enough?" Is it that not exhausting myself does not make me a selfish, inconsiderate, and careless soul? Could it be that a life devoted to being "good enough" in the view of those who are important to you may really be a

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violation of the soul? Could it be that the myth is used to meet someone else's needs without concern for my wellbeing? Is this the truth?

But life is not so black and white. And as much as I would like the myth to be a falsehood, it probably did not start that way. And as much as I might be like the truth to point to the ultimate selfishness in others, that is probably not the complete story either.

I believe that myths exist to do one of two things: to illuminate a truth, or to obscure truths. In my case (and my family) I think the myth exists to keep me from stopping to take a good hard look at myself; to pause and see who I truly am; to feel my real feelings; to think my real thoughts; and to know I am human and have needs like anyone else, including love, desire, joy, contentment, and many others too numerous to detail.

All human beings have needs. As I have been learning this year from someone very wise and dear, to have needs is not evil or wrong. It is part of being alive. But how we express our needs and seek to meet those needs is when we can get into trouble; when we can inadvertently or unknowingly or even sometimes willfully hurt others by manipulating them to meet OUR needs at their own expense! That's the rub.

Growing up in a rural community, in a family with a Puritan cultural history and a penchant that pleasure and leisure is sin, my family's penchant for working hard to be "good enough" dates back, perhaps, hundreds of years, to Victorian times when revivals were sweeping the land.

Working hard was required to survive. A family needed all available hands to make sure food and shelter could be provided. But then, the aspect of "being good enough" was the idea of work being the only way of proving you were worthy of your family, community,

and religion. At a point in time, I could imagine it becoming a twisted idea that "service to others" became bastardized to meet someone's unspoken and *even unconscious* unknown needs.

It's easy to perpetuate such a myth. Shame is a very strong motivator to action. And it is also very destructive of one's idea of self as being good and worthy; and the desire for love and acceptance the other strong motivator. Once such an idea is implanted in a person, say a mother or a father or both, it is then easy to pass on to the children. Yes, in such times even the culture can unknowingly yet willingly pass on such values. "I am not good enough. Therefore I must work hard to be good enough." For all have sinned...

What can happen with such perpetuation of a myth? Perhaps personal narratives become altered. Perhaps family's needs for worth and love causes a detour to be taken destructive to present and future souls. Perhaps the idea of "working to be good enough" becomes so engrained that no one even understands where it originally came from? And thus a family's true history and experiences, the truths to learn from and reflect upon, built in lifetimes of living, are lost to one small but enduring myth, "working to be good enough."

I do not have the one truth to undo this myth. I do not even believe there is one truth to undo the myth, or to undo the damage done to those in my family (both near and extended) whose lives have been affected.

It's just not that easy. Never is.

But what I do have is the ability to pause and ask myself, "Ok, so now I know. What do I do with myself now that I know?" I've been asking myself that question for many months now, trying to figure out what it means to be aware, to *be becoming* aware, of the myths in which I have lived, and the truths, falsehoods,

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and lessons that I can learn from knowing the myth.

I can gain more insight about myself. And I'm a bit scared. Do I really want to know? Do I want to know that I am neither saint nor sinner? Do I want to know that I do not need to strive to be "good enough?"

Without the myth, which has been ingrained in me 'since god knows when', how do I live? What do I do with me? And can I be with myself knowing that there is nothing to do to be "good enough?" Can I be still and accepting of such a thought?

And can you?

This is the question I seek to answer in 2008. Not the truth to counter the myth, for there is not any one truth. The myth covered up and obscured many truths. And yet the myth conveyed a truth as well; about my family, my history, my culture, and myself.

Am I ready? No. Will I do it anyway? Yes. It's time. It is time to discover, uncover and navigate without the myth. Who knows where it will lead? My hope is for a greater understanding and awareness of what it means to be human... and to know that, truly, I have been, and you have been, always good enough.

Now it's time to look under the covers...

Happy New Year.

- Helen

"That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar,' every 'supreme leader,' every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there - on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam."

Carl Sagan

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My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming;
I love not less, though less the show appear;
That love is merchandized, whose rich esteeming,
The owner's tongue doth publish every where.
Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops his pipe in growth of riper days:
Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burthens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
Therefore like her, I sometime hold my tongue:
Because I would not dull you with my song.

Shakespeare Sonnet 102