

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Aging

My daughter Helen is now in third grade and my son Hank is in the sixth. It amazes me that my daughter is now eligible for Girls on the Run. When I started the program she was yet to be born and Hank was nine months old.

We were late getting to Helen's school one morning last spring. To cheer her up and to relieve some "mother guilt", I started doing the "washing machine" dance as we walked down the school hallway to her classroom. She joined in and by the time we reached her classroom, both of our attitudes had shifted from frustration and inadequacy to joyfulness with a hint of the sillies.

As I leaned down to kiss her goodbye, she pulled my face toward hers and placed her hands delicately on my cheeks. "Mommy," she whispered. "You're not like the other Mommies."

My heart soared. "Helen, what a nice thing to say" I replied.

She smiled and continued her commentary, "No, you're not like the other mommies," she paused and smiled sweetly "you're a lot older."

I smiled, kissed her again and danced out the door.

Helen was correct. I am older than the other Moms. In examining her perception of me, I realized that it does not carry the stigma that our culture places on the aging. Wrinkles are non-existent to her. Calloused feet or grey hair don't mean a thing. To Helen, age meant wisdom. Her comment was sweet, beautiful and genuine.

When you are seven, being "old" is cool. You know more stuff. You can run fast, drive a car and eat whatever you want, whenever you want it. You have your own money and can spend it on toys you don't need. You stay up late watching television if you feel like it.

Lately, I have found myself stepping into the aging "Girl Box". I am now forty-six and cognizant that fifty is just around the corner. I am more aware of the youthful images I see in advertising, and feel a longing of sorts for skin that is as smooth as the computer-generated images that rest on magazine pages. The "beautiful girl" images seductively pull me into the "not pretty enough" or "past your prime" internal messages, as I stand in line at the grocery store.

However, in the quiet hours of the morning, before my children wake, I am peaceful in knowing that what I offer is not distracted by my body, the clothes I choose to wear or the things that surround me. I am genuine, pure and authentic. I can engage others with my eyes and my words and my passion for what I do. I am becoming the wise woman I have always wanted to be. I have discovered that as my body ages, so too does my

wisdom. Like a fine wine, my “knowing” becomes richer, more descriptive and full-bodied.

Girls on the Run is a wonderful teacher. Her ever-present message to accept myself and others has been a stronghold for me over the years. I realize now how much I rely on her to affirm the value that I bring to the table. It is now, with the wisdom of age, that I fully appreciate what she offers to me and recognize how she accepts me as I am. Just as I am.

I know that Girls on the Run has provided a stronghold for many women during times of stress – the start of a family, children leaving for college, divorce, the death of family members. Girls on the Run is a sanctuary where being authentic, vulnerable and true to ourselves is seen as strong, powerful and beautiful.

Helen’s message to me was just right - I am not like the other mommies. I am joyfully a lot older.

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