

## Mother and child

What a relationship that is!

I will recount a story that I experienced some time ago now. I was in my early twenties my brother was a crayfisherman who worked in the northern part of Australia. He was a skipper with his own boat.



I worked for him as a deck hand for a time. A deck hand is a 'dogsbody' who does whatever the skipper wants. We worked out of a place that was very isolated - can't even remember the name of the place now. We lived in a community of caravans in a very isolated beach side crayfishing community. For about 4 months one eats, sleeps and works. Not much else to do really. All electricity was generated there and the toilet was a bench over a big hole in the ground, downwind. The community was 95 percent male with the very occasional 'Tom boy' female, who was generally treated quite well. She had to be more male than the males to survive.

### Going fishing.

Overall a great experience that I have remembered for a long time. I always remember one day when I wanted to make a phone call. Now the nearest public phone box was a 45 minute drive south. This was before mobile phones existed and even if they did exist they could not be used because they would have been out of range anyway. The roads were not real roads but gravel tracks really. So off I trekked to make my phone call. Can't remember to whom but it was probably more of just being able to do something a bit different than sitting in a caravan not doing much at all.

The phone box was at the intersection of two gravel tracks that was 100 miles from the nearest building. It was very isolated. Low and behold when I get there

there is someone using the phone!!!! So I had to wait in a queue (of one)!!! A woman was on the phone (so you can imagine how long I had to wait).

So I get out of my car and just stand nearby waiting for her to finish. As there was not much else to do, so I started eaves dropping in on her conversation. Not that that was very hard to do as she was speaking quite loudly. It seems that she was having an argument with her mother. I remember comments to the effect of:

"Oh Mum don't say that"

"I can't come home yet Mum as I have to work"

"I do love you Mum"

The comments were of that vein. Here I was in the middle of bloody nowhere. The nearest building was a 100 miles away, waiting in a queue of one, to use a public phone and listening to a 30 year old woman argue with mother about about how much she loved her!!!! I remember thinking at the time - well that about sums up life doesn't it. Anywhere you go you can't get away from the relationship between the mother and child. The most important relationship in all our lives and yet one that is so fraught with potential difficulties. Finally she finished, somewhat embarrassed, and I got to make my phone call.



### Kangaroos.

There is actually a second part to this story. On the way home from the phone call one drives at about 110 Km/h along the tracks. I was in the ute which had a big roo bar (that is Kangaroo bar) on the front of it to protect the car against hitting kangaroos. Well that's what happened.

I was cruising along and then out from behind a bush right beside the road jumped a kangaroo right in front of the ute. It all happened in a millisecond. I saw the kangaroo and hit it with the roo bar. It went under the car, the right side of the car probably jumped two foot off the ground as it ran over the kangaroo, and I just kept on driving. All in a days work as they say. The car was fine.

Besides that here is the story of my mother and I.

My mother and I.

I spend most of my working day asking others how they related to their mother in childhood, so I only thought it fair that I tell of my relationship with my mother. Well that's my excuse for just talking about myself again!!



Me on the right

I am a middle child.

I have an older brother and a younger sister. My mother was a psychologist and she always went into fight for the under dog. She knew that often the middle child gets forgotten along the way. The eldest child gets acknowledgement for being the responsible one and the youngest gets acknowledged for being the cute or youngest one (generally speaking). As the middle one is neither it can be forgotten sometimes.

Of the three children I was the closest to my mother, and I think at least part of this was due to the birth position of myself. She wasn't going to let the forgotten one (middle) be forgotten.

I was the apple of my mother's eye. With her I could do no wrong. I was emotionally indulged in the sense that she told me in many ways that there was no limit to what I could do.

However there were other factors as well. I think (no I know) she had difficulty in accepting her own successes. She lived more through the success of my father and myself. And she was successful in her own career. She obtained a PhD and was a world authority on specific learning disabilities in children - primarily dyslexia. She would lecture around the world on the topic. But she always discounted it as being of any real importance.

As I grew up I did well academically and in particular I did well on the sporting field. I went to a school that was very success oriented. I was quite successful in such sports as swimming, rowing and in particular rugby union. I remember her never missing a game that I played, and often she would take me to training and stay and watch me train. I began to learn in early high school that my achievements on the sporting field meant something to her. She to some extent lived through them.

She was also a very strong woman. She would take on fights and almost fight to the death. These were usually work oriented arguments. She felt she was unfairly treated by her PhD supervisor at university so she tackled the university with great vigour. I think this has had a significant impact on me. Over the years any woman that I have had a relationship of some significance with, has been of a strong character. Whether that be partner, friend, therapist or whatever.

However ultimately my mother battled with depression her entire life. And that has also impacted on me. In the end she took her own life in her 60s. However as I look back now, because of her determination and wilfulness, when she was going to die, she was going to die on her own terms. Death was not going to take her. She would die in her way and on her terms. And that is precisely what she did. So that's my story of my mother and I.

### **Listening with my eyes**

This was written by me in a previous posting

"I was the apple of my mother's eye. With her I could do no wrong. I was emotionally indulged in the sense that she told me in many ways that there was no limit to what I could do.

However there were other factors as well. I think (no I know) she had difficulty in accepting her own successes. She lived more through the success of my father and myself. And she was successful in her own career. She obtained a PhD and was

a world authority on specific learning disabilities in children - primarily dyslexia. She would lecture around the world on the topic. But she always discounted it as being of any real importance.

As I grew up I did well academically and in particular I did well on the sporting field. I went to a school that was very success oriented. I was quite successful in such sports as swimming, rowing and in particular rugby union. I remember her never missing a game that I played, and often she would take me to training and stay and watch me train. I began to learn in early high school that my achievements on the sporting field meant something to her. She to some extent lived through them." (end quote)

Here is a picture of my mother and myself at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, California. USA (early 1980s).



It is just so typical the way she is looking at me. It kind of sums up our relationship at least in the way I have mentioned above. I like the picture. It reminds me of good times and what more could one want then the love and approval of a mother.

I use photographs a lot in psychotherapy. Usually early on in treatment I will request a client to bring in some photographs of their family and early life. I then will spend a good deal of time going through the pictures with them and gaining information and discussing the pictures. By far the most productive way of taking a psychological history, in my view. I often then refer back to a particular picture when the relevant circumstances arise in therapy.

It always surprises me how revealing such family photographs can be about the psychology of the person and the psychological dynamics of the different family members. Hey! Being an auditory dyslexic myself, I listen with my eyes much more than most others do.

Tony White  
Tuesday, 10 April 2007