

Life's Longing for Itself

I married at eighteen. It was 1963. The populace had discovered Kahlil Gibran and people went about quoting from The Prophet, "Your children are not your children but life's longing for itself." I bought a black clothbound edition with gold print. I had my first baby not long after that. It was not an ideal start to a new life and did not get any better. We struggled with marital friction, economic deprivation, racial prejudice and parenthood – largely because we were both immature and ignorant in a society that was largely immature and ignorant.

In 1966, we moved from Culver City, California to Jackson, Michigan. I was hoping the move would help cement our relationship and assuage any jealousy Larry had. In 1968, we built a prefab home and took up permanent residence. By then we had three children.

We saw the times change with the assassination of President Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. Roe vs. Wade was passed and ushered in a different type of women's rights movement; women should decide the fate of their own bodies over the fate of the unborn. People argued over prayer in public schools.

At some point, Kahlil Gibran's book was put away in the basement of our house where it accumulated a musty odor and was finally sold at a garage sale – cheap. The ensuing years in our country were dark years. There was a marked rise in abortions and child abuse, a burgeoning child pornography industry, and an increase in divorces and single parent homes and there were the latch-key kids – new words for a new age.

In 1971 I had my fourth child. A few years later, tantalized by women's rights and a family home that lacked adult companionship, I felt the need to do something more.

"I think I should go back to work or maybe school," I said to Larry.

"No. Stay home and find something to do. Why would you want to anyway?"

Larry's reaction stunned me. There was no real discussion. His decision came before the question. How could I say that I wasn't happy with him and the way my life was going? But I did pour it out to God and let God know that if He wanted me to stay married, He had better change my attitude because I was ready to call it quits.

One month and half later, I found I was a month and a half pregnant. That always seemed to be the case when I started to talk to Larry about doing something more than just taking care of his house and cooking meals. The nesting syndrome took over and I no longer felt the need to look outside the home for satisfaction. It was 1976 and that was not an ideal year to be pregnant. The sentiment across the nation was that each couple was only "entitled" to have 2.5 children. The .5 extra I chalked up to the miscarriage I had earlier. I was getting pressure from close family members to not have this baby.

"Mom feels it would be an economic burden."

"I have never asked either of you for money. God has always taken care of me and with or without your help, we will be fine."

I received statistics in the mail about abortions and vasectomies. Even though I am certain Larry deliberately got me pregnant, he too hinted that the baby was an inconvenience. But my faith in God had grown considerably over the years and I just told God he would have to provide for us if I was faithful to care for this baby He was loaning me.

Larry softened just a tad over the years and in 1988 I found myself back in school. I loved classes at the community college. One of the textbooks was an anthology of world

masterpieces. It covered well known writing from the Ancient world through the Twentieth century. I read Aeschylus and Euripides, Moliere, Pushkin, Ibsen and writers such as Kafka. What startled me was a recurrent theme in many of the works. It was subtle and unemphasized but it was there because it was a reflection of the culture. I don't believe the authors intended it to be so blatant but there it was – children were possessions of their parents.

Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to the gods in Oresteia. Euripides' Medea used her children to gain revenge upon her faithless husband and afterward murdered her children. Machiavelli wrote, "So long as you benefit them they are all yours; as I said above, they offer you their blood, their property, their lives, their children, when the need for such things is remote."

In 1534, Francois Rabelais' character Gargantua said to a son Pantagrue, "we can achieve a sort of immortality...what a man loses his children revive and, where they fail, their children prevail...for in you my visible image will continue to live on Earth...Ay, I have longed to leave you after my death as a mirror of your father's personality..." How aptly Rabelais wrote that "we are still in the dark ages."

Gargantua spent money for the finest education for his son, not because he loved his son but for the sake of immortalizing himself. Michel de Montaigne wrote very wisely, "virtue will not be wooed but for her own sake, and if we borrow her mask for some other purpose, she will very soon snatch it from our face."

Henrik Ibsen wrote Hedda Gabler. Hedda is a woman of distinction because of her father, a respected general. She reflected a modern trend by saying of parenting, "I've no leanings in that direction, Judge. I don't want any responsibilities." Ibsen used an analogy of a child to a literary work. Hedda gained possession of the work and destroyed it.

"I'm burning it!" she says. "I'm burning your child!"

In the end, pregnant, she committed suicide.

In Metamorphosis by Kafka, Gregor took pride in working to support his parents and his sister. He mysteriously changed into a bug. The family developed repulsion for him and eventually Gregor died and was swept out with the trash.

It should not be a surprise that legalizing abortion did not lessen child abuse. Societies that look upon children as possessions giving parents the right to decide what child will even be born, is a culture that denies its own survival. What happened to the culture that once welcomed Kahlil Gibran's words? Children are not possessions but "life's longing for itself."

Gibran spoke too softly in a world of loud and angry voices, selfish voices. How ironic it is that "responsible" people are not having "responsible" children but many ignorant and indigent proliferate! In contrast, St. Paul, a Hebrew prophet said in his letter to the Corinthians, "...children ought not to lay up treasures for the parents, but parents for the children."

Having children isn't easy. The difficulty of it literally drove me to my knees. In my children I saw all my flaws. It was a humiliating experience yet with each revelation I matured. I learned. In all of the literary works, characters wrestled with the flow of life. Those that tried to control only succeeded in perverting themselves. God created us for challenges and when we deny ourselves the experience, we deny ourselves.

Somewhere, someone has my old black musty book by Gibran. God bless them.