

## **Being Responsible for What's Working**

By Nancy Dorrier

I have just finished a remarkable weekend trip to Charlottesville, VA to visit my 92 year old mother. My daughter, Alice-Lyle, who is also a mother herself, came with me, without her three children. She left Davis, age 6, Julia, age 4, and William, age 1-1/2 with her husband Stan and his mother Agnes.

Alice-Lyle has never been without all three of her children at once for this long. She got a fabulous haircut, we went to see the movie *Juno*, and we ordered room service – lobster bisque and cranberry and walnut salad – when we weren't even hungry, but wanted a treat. And she got to read her book for longer than two pages at a time.

My mother, called Danny by the grans, usually cannot remember recent history or carry on a conversation for long without losing her place. Plus, she has a little hearing problem.

However, on the subject of William (Alice-Lyle's 1-1/2 year old with major developmental issues) and how is he? she held her own.

Mother asked hard questions, the questions a child would be free to ask, the questions of an inquiring mind:

What is wrong with him?  
How come he has that problem?  
What is going to happen to him?  
Will he get better?  
Why did this happen to you, Alice-Lyle?

Alice-Lyle calmly and confidently answered all of the questions and sometimes repeated herself and spoke loudly for Mother's hearing, ultimately claiming and proudly announcing that William is a huge blessing just as he is, that they all love and adore him beyond anything she could have imagined, and that she has learned not to take anything for granted, including her husband and other two children. That she loves every minute with all of them, as well as every minute sitting here talking to us.

Alice-Lyle said, of course, she too wished it wasn't this way and that William could toddle around and begin to talk and start to get into stuff, and really play peep-eye and pick up a toy, and that of course it is sad, but given that he can't and that is that, she is and they are very, very happy with him just as he is.

And she and Stan are excited about how to design and build a handicap accessible house (elevator, wide doors, wheel-in shower, etc.) and have begun talking to builders and architects who are also excited about the project. Her dad, a former construction project manager, has already built a ramp from the garage to the back door.

Meanwhile, they both (Stan over the phone) asked for coaching from me about how to support a friend in one case and a cousin in another, both in some trouble in their lives (more attitudinal than anything), and relationships, and how to open their eyes up to gratitude and joy and perseverance and possibility. What perfect coaches their friend and cousin have! I am grateful they are asking me for ideas about how to support them.

Over the weekend, I had a couple of brief conversations with two executive clients that Alice-Lyle overheard. She used what she heard to create her life inside the distinctions “Network of conversations,” “who you are is community,” “team,” “who you are is what you talk about,” and “what you talk about becomes and is who you are.” That wouldn’t have come up without those calls coming in while we were traveling.

I don’t always walk around in this empowering context of making a difference. That context is part of being independently responsible for living a grand life, being responsible for what is being accomplished.

All the effort, failure, struggle, hard work and concentration that is present at any given time is only present 1) because I say it is, and 2) because I have invented an incredible future to live inside of. Inside the gap between my invented future and the present, I experience effort as empowering, like the poet, Marge Piercy’s ox.

## **TO BE OF USE**

By Marge Piercy

The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shadows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bounding like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy  
cart,  
who pull like the water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and muck to move things  
forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the first be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
But you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.