

TALK TO THE MIRROR



FLORINE MARK

Inspire others by telling your personal stories

When was the last time you called up a friend and shared a story with them? How often have you told stories to your children, not read them a story—but told them one of your own?

Stories are gifts from our hearts can move and inspire others while enlightening the storyteller.

I read a quote by Ruth Stotter who said, "A story may illuminate our relationship to others, encourage compassion, create a sense of wonder, or sanction the concept. 'We are all in this together.' A story can make us ponder why we are here...A story may shock us into recognizing a new truth, provide a new perspective, a new way to perceive the universe."

After I read that, I sat down and thought about when and to whom I last told a story. It was a few weeks ago. I was talking to a group of about 25 people at a Weight Watchers meeting. The group consisted of women and men from 16 to 86 years old. I remembered, at the time, thinking that my story may not be as meaningful to some of the attendees as to others because of their different life stages and varied backgrounds. But I shared a very personal story anyway. I thought that, if I could touch just one person, it would be worth it.

After the meeting, an elderly man came up to me to thank me for sharing my experience—it gave him hope where there had been a void before, he said.

I was thrilled that my story affected him so positively. It made telling my tale worthwhile.

Another attendee, a woman, approached me with tears in her eyes. She told me that my story had made her sad. I began to apologize, but she stopped me, saying that her sadness was only a small part of what she took from the story. Actually, she said, it was like I was holding up a mirror in front of her, helping her look deep within herself to gain new insight into her life. She gave me a hug and was on her way.

A couple of hours later, the phone rang in my office. It was another woman who had heard my story that day. She was also touched by my words and said that she identified with my feelings and actions in every story. Prior to hearing my story, she thought her emotions were unique, she said. It made me so happy to know that she had found comfort and felt less isolated because I had taken 15 minutes to share a story.

In subsequent days, I received a few more calls and letters about how my words motivated, encouraged, and enlightened these individuals.

My story was not that extraordinary. It was just a story—a story of one experience. But my listeners took so much from my words. They each gleaned some benefit from my experience.

One felt hope and encouragement, while another felt sadness. One gained insight and another felt less alone.

Knowing that I touched these people in such contrasting ways made me feel so warm inside. And I didn't have a special message by moral in mind when I told the story. I just wanted to share a bit of myself with others in hopes of helping just one person. Well, I believe I reached my goal and then some!

There are so many things that happen to each and every one of us every day. If you can find humor or motivation from a personal experience, why not share it with others? You may be thinking, "My life is too boring. I have no stories to tell." Well, why not make up a story or tell one you heard from someone else. You'd be surprised how much you can touch or empower another person with your tale.

I'm afraid that in the hustle and bustle of today's world, the fine art of storytelling is disappearing. What a shame to let these anecdotes go to waste. We need to rebuild this lost art.

Stories give us permission to be a kid again—to dream and to reflect. They help us find new meaning in our lives. They inspire and open doors we used to hide behind. Stories give us hope, make us laugh and help us forgive. Most importantly, stories nourish our souls.

Everyone deserves to hear a story and everyone has a story to tell, so start sharing! You never know when you could touch a person so deep in the heart that it changes his or her life forever.

Help me hear some stories from you. I would love to share them with other readers.

I need every one of your letters and love your comments! Please write your questions, suggestions and stories for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9072, Farmington Hills, Mich. 48333-9072, or fax: (248) 553-7106.

Hospitals take on domestic violence

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
STAFF WRITER

Taking on domestic violence and making it a health matter, and not just a public issue, Oakland County's local medical providers are participating in a campaign to raise awareness about such abuse.

"Child abuse was not a health care issue before. But the public made it an issue," said Dr. Eliezer Basse, M.D., chair of North Oakland Medical Centers' Emergency Medicine Department and co-chair of a medical committee for the Oakland County Coordinating Council Against Domestic Violence.

The council, along with HAVEN, Oakland County's center for the treatment and prevention of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse, spearheaded the campaign.

The effort currently involves getting health care providers to pin buttons to their uniforms that read "It's OK to TALK to me about FAMILY VIOLENCE."

"The idea is that the buttons might trigger them to say I need help," said Basse. But they will also serve to remind physicians and nurses to ask, "How are you?"

The buttons are being worn by health workers at 10 local hospitals, including Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills, Providence Hospital in Southfield, William Beaumont Hospitals in Troy and Royal Oak, Oakland Hospital in Rochester and Huron Valley-Sinai Hospital in Commerce Township.

Campaign organizers are also encouraging health care providers to incorporate questions about domestic violence in their patient protocols. Many opportunities to intervene in abusive cases are lost because physicians don't routinely ask patients if they've been a victim of family violence, Basse said.



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE R. MCKEE

Reaching out: At left, Dr. Eliezer Basse, M.D., chair of North Oakland Medical Centers' Department of Emergency Medicine and chair of a medical committee that is working to raise awareness about domestic violence in the health care community, works with Susan Saunders, R.N.

The council also plans to sponsor abuse training workshops for local health workers, and is currently working with the Oakland County Medical Society to encourage private practice physicians to also participate in the button campaign, he said.

Another tenet of the lobby is changing the perception that domestic violence doesn't fall under the domain of the medical community.

It's as much of a health issue as smoking and substance abuse, said Carol Hackett-Garagiola, co-chair of the domestic violence council and chief prosecutor for the Domestic Violence Section of the Oakland County Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

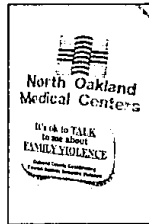
Another compelling reason to squarely place the issue of family violence at the door of health care workers is a statistic: one in five victims report to the emergency room after

their abuse.

At other times, victims will present less obvious symptoms of abuse—medical afflictions that have been at least partly brought on by domestic violence. Depression, insomnia, abdominal pain, headaches, chronic fatigue, chemical dependency and suicide are just a few health problems that may mask incidents of domestic abuse, Basse said.

Council members are also currently working with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care, a Washington, D.C.-based accrediting organization, to develop a model protocol and educational manual for Oakland County's hospitals. The materials are expected to be complete by next Spring.

"Putting out a model that's clear and accurate, provides consistency in dealing with domestic violence in the



Effort: Some 10 Hospitals in Oakland County are participating in the button campaign.

health care setting," said Hackett-Garagiola, adding that domestic violence cannot be effectively handled without the involvement of medical professionals.

It can't just be judges, just prosecutors, just police officers," she said. "This effort also requires medical care providers and educators."

Medical charts and a health worker's documentation of injuries, for example, can be crucial in court proceedings involving an abuser, she said.

More importantly, health care providers are legally required to report signs of domestic violence, she said. And many physicians, nurses and other health workers need guidance and support in doing so, she said.

Training helps members of the medical community better identify less dramatic cases of abuse and makes them aware of the resources available to them, Hackett-Garagiola said.

"There really needs to be an internal protocol in medical departments."

"There seems to be a hesitancy when something appears to be a family or private matter," she said. That's what we're trying to dispel. It is a public health matter."

Social negativism at root of abuse, atrocities

Friday morning began as usual, enjoying breakfast and reading the newspaper. As I scanned the headlines and lead stories, my eyes began to swell with tears. "Sixteen Year Old Found Floating in River," "Mother Drops Infant From 14th Floor," "Father Convicted In Poisoning Son."

These and other tragic stories have captured my attention the past few months. It left me shaking my head, asking, "What is this world coming to?"

It seems like every other day we are reading or hearing about atrocities perpetrated upon our children. In struggling to understand why violence of this type has become common, I realized I did not have an answer. Certainly child abuse and family violence are not new to our society. Perhaps the amount of media exposure makes it appear more widespread than it is.



DR. KEITH LEVICK

It is also possible that incidents of child abuse are increasing and the public is developing a greater awareness.

As a practicing psychologist for over 20 years, I have worked with many violent families. Why children are victimized in this way still escapes me. I could offer an array of psychological theories, but this is not the time or place. Perhaps the answers are more obvious than we think.

Our society is conditioned to be negative. And negativity is accentuated almost everywhere. It permeates families, children, schools, businesses and media.

As negativity increases, more people, unhappy and angry, unleash their pent up aggression toward others. Unfortunately, children are easy targets.

Parents yell and tell children, "no," "don't," "you can't," "you shouldn't," ten times more often than they find or focus on the positive things, saying, "Nice job" or "I'm proud of you."

Many parents also still believe that physical punishment is the only way to discipline. Children are

slapped, kicked and punched as ways to teach responsibility.

How often does a teacher praise a class for working quietly? Rather, many teachers wait for children to act up. The child is then bombarded with "spit out your gum," "tuck in your shirt," "stop talking." By school's day end, the child has experienced a barrage of criticism and negative feedback.

The media is no different in the way they contribute this dynamic. It's a half-hour of killings, robberies and other violent crimes, and then, for a short break from reality, we turn on our favorite television programs—"Cops," "The Simpsons" and "Beavis & Butthead." Think about the messages these programs convey—violence, sarcasm and vulgarity.

Many Saturday evenings are spent watching Sylvester Stallone and Steven Segal, massacre, mutilate and torture others. And their movies are rated PG so the entire family can view fun and wholesome entertainment!

I find it interesting that we are approaching double digit numbers in

the sequels of "Friday the 13th" and "Halloween." How many sequels are there to "ET" or "Mary Poppins"?

We are, indeed, conditioned to be negative. The accepted norm is to say negative things to and about people. In fact, when nice things are expressed they're often misperceived as having an ulterior motive.

These messages have been powerful and taken their toll upon our culture. We can continue to blame parents, teachers, media and government, and not accept responsibility.

But maybe the time has come for examining ourselves a little closer. This process can be reversed by becoming more aware of and sensitive to other people.

I challenge every reader not to be critical of another person for 24 hours. Let me know how you do.

By making a commitment to say nice things to others, we can make a difference.

(Dr. Keith Levick is a health psychologist and the director of The Center for Childhood Weight Management in Farmington Hills. You can reach him at (248) 855-5771 or send him an e-mail at klevick@aol.com.)

HEALTHY LIVING

Healthy Living spotlights Oakland County-related health and medical news and information. To submit information, write: Healthy Living, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Or fax: (810) 644-1314.

TRANSPORT CONFERENCE
A networking and resource opportunity for professionals responsible for establishing and administering non-emergency medical transportation services will be held from 8:15 a.m. to 2 p.m., Nov. 20 at Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills. A number of health care and transportation professionals will speak, including Jim McGuire, director of Planning and Advocacy, Area Agency on Aging 1-B. For information, call (248) 262-9216.

SMOKEOUT
The 21st Annual American Cancer Society's Great American Smokeout, the nation's largest single smoking cessation event, will be held Nov. 20. Don't forget to quit and keep quitting. For more information about this event, call 800-925-2271.

MEDMAX FOR SENIORS
MedMax, the new health-care superstore chain, has developed a health awareness program for senior citizens. The program includes use of a free computerized blood pressure, pulse

rate and weight monitor machine with audio capability.

These machines, which offer useful health tips and stock informational brochures about various health care resources, are located near the pharmacy department in all MedMax stores.

This program also includes periodic Health 'N' Fun Aramas, featuring speakers and health screenings for vision, hearing, cholesterol levels and bone-density measurement. Health care professionals, including pharmacists, physicians, nurses, podiatrists, chiropractors, physical therapists, and a representative from health organizations such as the Michigan Diabetes Association, will be in attendance to answer questions.

For information, call your local MedMax store.

HEADACHE SUPPORT
In cooperation with Providence Hospital in Southfield, the National Headache Foundation holds a free monthly support group, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. the second Tuesday of each month at the Providence Medical Center, 30055 Northwestern Highway at Inster. For information, call (248) 647-0614.

ADD MEETINGS
Children and Adults With Attention

Deficit Disorders (CHADD) of eastern Oakland County regularly holds drop-in, support group meetings for adults who have been or are in the process of being evaluated for the disorder. Meetings occur from 7:30 to 9 p.m. on select Thursdays at the Quarten Elementary School library, on the corner of Chesterfield and Oak in Birmingham. Register at 7 p.m. For additional information, call (248) 652-6165.

ARTHRITIS SELF-HELP

The Southfield-based Arthritis Foundation, Michigan Chapter, Southeastern Michigan Region, offers six-week courses to give people with arthritis the knowledge and skills needed to take a more active role in their arthritis care. Classes will begin soon. They will be held at various sites. The course fee is \$20, which covers the textbook and printed materials. Key subjects will include exercise, relaxation, joint protection, medications, coping with depression and pain management. To preregister, call the Foundation: (810) 424-9001.

ALZHEIMER'S MONTH
The Alzheimer's Association, Detroit Area Chapter, based in Southfield, recently kicked off November, National Alzheimer's Disease Month, by announcing a calendar of special events. The Annual Chocolate Jubilee

event is slated for 2:30 p.m., Nov. 23 at the Ritz-Carlton in Dearborn. Other events are educational. For information about any of the Alzheimer's Association's events, call (248) 557-8277.

PRESSURE POINT THERAPY

Free Pressure Point Therapy Workshops will be conducted in upcoming weeks. Space is limited. Please call ahead to secure a spot. The workshops will be conducted by Dr. Ross Winn. To register, call Health Steps at (248) 828-7774.

Location: MedMax of Troy, 6843 Rochester Road, southwest corner of Rochester Road and South Boulevard. When: 10 a.m. Nov. 11 and Dec. 2 and 7 p.m. Dec. 16.

MedMax of Troy, 740 John R Road near 14 Mile Road. When: 7 p.m. Nov. 18 and Dec. 9.

HMO SHOPPING

In his latest consumer guidebook, "The ABCs of HMOs: How to Get the Best From Managed Care," Dr. John Connolly, former president of New York Medical College, focuses on the basic steps that the 14,000 consumers who choose an HMO in the United States every day can follow to select the best plan for their specific needs. "The ABCs of HMOs," is published by Castle Connolly Medical, Ltd. \$11.95, and is available in bookstores.