

parentingourselves

A column that addresses our own inner growth as parents

By Lela Iselin

'Magnifying Glass' monsters

My husband and I have a loving relationship. He is very good with my three children from a former marriage. But a strange dynamic develops that seems to come in waves. It rises, freaks me out, and then subsides. My husband's attitude towards my son Joel can suddenly, out of the blue, become very critical and harsh. He basically ignores him, and when he does engage with him, it is unyielding and tough.

Now — to make it more interesting — both he and I had stepparents. My stepdad treated me OK but treated my little brother with much hostility. My mother was always defending my brother, and I see I am doing the same thing with Joel. My husband was raised by the quintessential wicked stepmother. I am aware that I have something to do with this whole thing. Meanwhile Joel seems totally cool with his relationship with my husband and loves him. When he is abrupt or aloof — Joel just lets it slide off like water off a duck's feathers. When the chips are down, my husband supports Joel and cares very much for his wellbeing. Most of the time, all is very easy. But when this cycle rises, I spin. I go into overcompensation with my son — being overtly kind and overtly flexible etc. This is starting to become very painful.

AIn order to give birth we have to have contractions; otherwise nothing will move. There is no such thing as a pain-free contraction. I suggest you look at this situation in that light, and stay vulnerable and open to finding out what wants to come to life.

You would probably agree that when you and your husband are doing well together the whole family is well. Knowing that, you might want to become more aware as to when these problem waves appear. If you find that to be true, you know that nurturing your relationship with your husband might be part of the solution (see *Peace Between the Sheets* on p 52).

As children both you and your husband had to harden inside because the emotional messages you got from your stepparents were confusing. Even though you were not treated badly by your stepdad, home was still not a safe place, because if your brother got treated badly, so could you. So you had to behave 'correctly', which in most cases probably meant hide your real feelings and become nice instead. Your husband's situation was worse but in a sense similar. Who he was, what he felt, was not important or wanted by the wicked stepmother.

Now since both of you have a good ground of love between you, these more tender unloved spots are showing up to be healed. A positive way of looking at this is that you don't HAVE TO but you GET TO integrate more of yourself into the relationship. This does not make the storms less painful, but it does put them in a different context.

In calm weather talk with your husband about your wanting to stay more aware of the default reactions you have when he is unjust with your son. Even though during one of these waves every fibre of yours probably feels like pulling away from him and freezing your heart, see if you can remain just a little bit open. See if you can let yourself feel the pain instead of becoming cold towards your husband on one side and overtly nice towards your son on the other. It will feel counter intuitive but will activate a frequency of healing.

It is probably true that the harshness and toughness of your husband towards Joel is unjust. Yet because of your own inner stepfather wounds you are most likely blowing, let's say,

30% disconnected toughness up into 70%. Instead of vulnerably feeling, you become self-righteous. You're putting the rays of rightly observed injustice through a magnifying glass and then you burn the people you love as well as yourself. Your husband feels made wrong, not worthy to be himself (just like he did as a child) and Joel senses that your overt kindness towards him does not really have anything to do with him.

Even though he probably likes it on one level, on another level it is painful for him because he does not feel felt by you when you do that. To him it probably feels like everything is a little out of whack and emotionally confusing.

Whenever you are directing extra love towards one person while coldly cutting it off from another, an unhealed pattern is at work. It feels as if an inner monster is acting out. If you are not fussing with it but instead fully hearing it, taking it seriously, and at the same time also reminding it of the fact that it is blowing things out of proportion, it usually breathes out enough to be its actual size and then holds accurate information. Once felt in its depth, it becomes clear discernment, helping you to move creatively.

In the stormy moments your son seems to be able to stay more connected with reality and does not forget that he loves his stepdad. The finer you react, the easier it will be for Joel. The more you cover up your pain, the more confusing the situation, and before you know it, Joel has patterns in place that will attract similar situations in his adult life.

If as parents we heal pain-body distortions, some of them passed down through generations, by vulnerably feeling these painful contractions, by opening instead of hardening, we give birth to a more reality-based, authentic way of being. What we integrate in that way, our children won't have to. Instead they'll have more heart intelligence available to them.