

“Shiela’s Story”

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Here is Sheila’s story! Read on. It takes less time than changing the Ring tone of a cell phone!

There was once a teenaged girl Sunita who was sometimes very miserable. She found her parents –like many other parents –getting annoyed with her for small things like not studying, not being disciplined and focused and not working on her own self for her progress in life. She found it odd that such educated parents would nit pick on such small mundane things. It interfered with her fun in life! “ Why worry about future and progress”? Most of her friends lived in the present “After all here is only one life to live and enjoy!!!!” Sunita and her friends were sure that their parents were overbearing and behind time in their thinking. They gave the young ones no space. So they dreamt of being free of them and be on their own. Relationships with some boys also figured in their imagination as it was great fun to have them as friends. Besides they saw it as an exit from this problematic life.

One day their school – staffed with boring and horrid teachers - took this bunch of good girls and boys to a juvenile home. (They groaned -Juvenile home is no outing! These adults have strange notions!) The journey was however – thanks to their spirit – great "fun" - singing songs, laughter, chips and cola, teasing and bullying - the usual! They reached the juvenile home in a short while. It was a mess – cramped rooms, no fans, small and smelly bathrooms! They were asked to interview some girls and boys who were lodged there. Some were there because they had committed some crimes and some because they had no place to go to. Some had run away from home. And some seemed to be a strange mix of all of the above.

Sunita and her few friends were assigned to speak to Shiela- the brightest and most attractive of the girls - who was here on a robbery charge. They, after preliminary introductions, asked how she, a bright, well groomed, attractive girl could do such a thing?

"I blame my parents for this! It is entirely their fault." She had a faraway and sad look in her eyes. Sunita and her friends exchanged knowing looks - "these parents again!" -they seemed to say to each other! Of course they ARE to be blamed. Poor girl! Then Anjali- who was more sensitive and patient asked gently "What Happened? Were they very difficult and tough with you? Did they give you a bad time?"

Shiela laughed and said sarcastically - "What bad time! What tough Parents are you talking about! My parents were most docile and loving!" There were surprised looks all around. Shiela noticed the looks and said – “ Yes I know what you are thinking!. You see they were unable to provide me direction. At times I would shout and throw temper tantrums and they would relent to what ever I was saying - whether staying out late, movies, expenses -whatever! (Sunita and her friends do not know how to react – they just listen and gape!) I wish they could foresee how all this would create my downfall one day. I could do whatever I wanted and they never corrected me – they were almost scared of me and seemed to have given up providing me with direction and skills. They were friendly – yes very friendly but I wish they were more “parent like” rather than being friendly. You see I had a horde of friends but these were the only set of parents that I

had! And they were now not parent like at all! (she wailed!). So it is entirely their fault for not correcting me, not providing me the necessary skills to remain away from trouble, and thus for my punishment in the juvenile home!"

Sunita and her friends were now gaping at her and at each other. What a strange story! How could "loving friendly parents" - the dream of any teenager - be the cause of this misery, this punishment? Something was not accounted for. So they asked Shiela to provide more details.

Shiela simply and wistfully told them how she landed in the juvenile home. It turned out that since Shiela (according to her own account) had few skills, no direction, no focus, no goal, no spiritual anchor, no tangible achievement - she fell in company that was "fun loving" and party going. Her studies suffered, her extra curricular activities stopped, her behaviour towards all - including her teachers and friends - became obnoxious. She even stopped caring for her sister, cousins and her close friends who did not share the "fun" view point. She had learnt to "tackle" her parents and at times would tell blatant lies to them about her whereabouts. She said "Had they stood firm on knowing and ferreting out the truth and had they protected me and prevented me from escaping from reality and my subsequent activities, I too would be doing my MBA like my friends!". Her path was clear for "having fun" all the time - all the way. She had "escaped" the drudgery of routine and uninteresting life- so she thought at that time. And now came in Raj in her life - the witty, the "cool", the handsome, the rich, the cynic and the know all RAJ! How fortunate she is - she had thought to herself at that time- to have him as her beau! (and here she let out a sound --- seemed like a soft sob and laughter combined).

It was Raj -since she was incapable of taking control - who took "control" of her life. He would dictate her timetable, her activities, her thoughts - and then a time came - her emotions too. She felt she had started thinking like Raj, doing like him - including "doing drugs", and also became a cynic. Gradually her other friends left her -or she left them -she wasn't sure. Now she had no one as a counter weight or as an "anchor".

She continued - "Anyway -to make the long story short - Raj asked me and we both eloped from home. But Raj took me for a ride. He used me, my body and my spirit and then left me stranded in Delhi. I had no money, no skills, no parental support and worst of all the "drug habit" to feed. The hunger was overpowering and so was the despondence - the need to get my "fix". And then I saw this lady with huge diamonds and a thick purse. The purse - I thought! And one thing led to the other. I had no compunction in lifting her purse - Raj had disdain for morals and values - though my parents had talked about them often. I "needed" the money, lifted the purse - and got caught! And here I am - in a distant place, in something like a jail house - away from all my loved ones. I am scared and unhappy and sad -very sad."

"I had already "erased" my parents from my life". I wish they had demonstrated their love by being tougher with me and had resisted my attempts to erase them from my life. I wish they could have "stayed" in my life and guided me when I needed them the most. I didn't know -and was blinded - but they were my PARENTS! They ARE supposed to know better! Please help me! You seem to be well groomed, well connected people -doing these good things like coming to the juvenile home to help us. You must have good parents. Lucky you all! I envy you!"

There was silence all around. And then a few splutters. Sunita was bowled over. And so were her friends! How could Shiela blame her parents for NOT guiding her? Strange creature! They had tried to guide her, correct her, but SHE didn't LISTEN - and now she blames them! ("But hey - am I too not traveling on the same path??!" -a small inner voice piped up) Thank God we have parents - who love us, guide us, correct us, discipline us (again because they love us so much!) And we call them HITLERS! We think they are "oldies" and old fashioned! Oh how wrong could we be! We have missed out on so much. What do we do now? How can we regain and cherish their love? And how do we remain in control?

Sunita -as usual- was the first to act. She took out her cell phone and quickly dialed her papa's number. She heard her papa's loving "Hello, darling daughter!" (How could she ever think it to be "stern, dry voice" - she wondered!) and quickly said "Papa I love you and mom very- very much" - and hung up. She was smiling to her self and was -suddenly- feeling much better. She was also thinking about joining the German classes that her mom was pestering –oh no - suggesting her to take for a long time.

And then Anuj borrowed her phone and muttered "I have something important to talk to my parents!" Suddenly the group scattered. It seems each one wanted to be with himself or herself. They were "rediscovering" their parents. And they wanted to be with themselves at this momentous time. This was important discovery! And they had the juvenile home to thank it for! How interesting!

The journey back to school was quieter! Everyone seemed to be thinking about home, love, security and warmth! And how near they were to the brink and how thankful were they to Shiela for the new realization! They would remember Shiela's story for a long long time to come.

For all the young people out there! - WE adults do love you!

And love has many manifestations - Some may seem very strange to you!

But THAT is WHAT and HOW real love is! Strange but TRUE!

(Dr. Patanjali Dev Nayar)