

On Parenting
 Reading and reflection offered by Reverend Carolyn Patierno
 July 30, 2017

From *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran

Your children are not your children.
 They are the [children] of life's longing for itself.
 They come through you but not from you
 and though they are with you ... they belong not to you.
 You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
 for they have their own thoughts.
 You may house their bodies but not their souls,
 for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
 which you cannot visit,
 not even in your dreams.
 You may strive to be like them,
 but seek not to make them like you
 for life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
 You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
 The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
 and bends you with might that the arrows may go swift and far. Let your
 bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness.

.....

In 2015 my daughter becomes a college graduate. She is as prepared as any 22 year-old could be which is mother-speak for, "Well, we did the best we could."

A few months earlier, in the dark of winter, graduation looms large. Lillian mentions – and I'm not exaggerating when I say - "She mentions" – that she's applying for a job in Japan teaching English.

I laugh it off.

She has a Skype interview.

It's becoming a little more real.

She's invited to an in-person interview. She gets on the train and heads down to the city. A trip we've done a dozens of times together this time, she's traveling solo.

The next day, on her way to Grand Central Station, she calls: "I got the job!"

I will tell you that in that moment I have the most bewildering physical sensation. It is a simultaneous feeling of joy and dread that drills into my core.

Together, we celebrate. Privately, we weep.

"When should I start?" she asks. "July or September?" (She's given the choice.)

"It's up to you," we say.

Because now, *everything* is up to her.

She decides to leave in July.

True to her nature, she's packed and ready to go two weeks before her departure date.

And day by day the day draws near and then the day has come.

We drive to the airport.

We unload the car at the curb.

I look into that face and have the most bewildering physical sensation. In that moment – and I have only a moment - I want my daughter to feel the complete trust I have in her intuition and abilities. I want to signal my confidence that she has all she needs.

There before me I see a grown woman.

But like a Russian nesting doll, inside that grown woman I see the 17 year-old who first set this adventure in motion. I see the 13 year-old who by necessity changes course with grace. I see the 7 year-old who insists it is

time she walk home from the school bus stop by herself. I see the spirited three year-old who says in no uncertain terms: "I do myself".

She has always been exactly who she is and who she is – all these stages of Lillian – is about to get on a plane and fly to the other side of the world and quite literally live, in the words of the wise man, in the house of tomorrow for she will live 13 hours ahead of us.

She is life's longing for itself.

And we drive back and I begin what will be the long wondering,

How does one parent a young adult?

What is my role now that I have no authority and limited influence?

Five months later, Kate and I travel to Japan to visit. We are so excited for this family adventure. To witness Lillian's life. To see her apartment!

Her apartment! Her home!

And I cannot help myself:

Maybe you need a rug in the bathroom?

Maybe you need another pan?

Maybe you should call the landlord and ask about the
lack of heat?

You'll notice: all posed as non-obtrusive questions.

But I'm nothing if not a quick and accurate observer of human dynamics. Especially when those dynamics are flying right at me.

You are all no doubt accurately imagining the scenes that ensue.

In four weeks' time, Lillian will be returning from another adventure. This one took her to Australia with her partner, a truly lovely young man. She returns ahead of the original plan as she was not able to find work and to build a life she imagined for however briefly she had planned to be in the land down under.

We witness her making choices and changing course now as an adult.
We have questions that we hold tenderly until we observe an opening.

What next?

And what about the truly lovely young man and the truly lovely
relationship?

We walk gently around her heart.

She will land at home: safe harbor where the next steps will be imagined
and plotted.

And Kate and I will see this young woman before us. We, the archers from
whose bow she flew and flies and returns and is ever present.

We with no authority and limited influence and limitless love and concern
and hope.

To my surprise, this stage of parenting is the most confounding. The most
complicated dance.

This is my prayer: May my bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness.

May your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness.

Amen.