

Our Community

Cultivate peace in midst of Cromwell chaos

Scary things happened in and around Cromwell last month and Halloween was not one of them. In the first 10 days of October, I received two phone calls from Cromwell Police. Two pre-teen girls had gone missing. I have two daughters. I wanted details! It was disturbing to me that one of these calls was left on my voice mail. I had questions! Where did this happen? Were the children taken from their homes? Were they outside playing when they disappeared? Was this a stranger abduction or did family members take these girls? (Does that even matter?) Most importantly, I wanted to know how to protect my children. My husband pointed out, after taking one of the “live” calls from a police officer, that the police probably couldn’t release any other details except the description of the children and the approximate location of the disappearance. Still, it’s not nice to scare parents like this. I hope, next time, some reassurance about these situations will be offered to parents (and other residents) receiving these calls.

Next up in the “scare you out of your mind” category was an event that happened just as Halloween approached, and I was writing an article on deadly food allergies: A friend’s child had been chased by costumed peers wielding a dangerous weapon: peanut brittle. That is not a typo. Peanuts could have killed this child. And let’s not forget a bank was robbed. At the time of the robbery, I was standing in line in my bank, across the road. My children were with me. For once, I was in the right place at the right time. (I hope bank



*Life in
Cromwell*
Karen M. Rider

patrons and employees who witnessed the event are recovering from this ordeal). It’s enough to make anyone, especially parents, a little neurotic and a lot paranoid. Not exactly how we want to go into the holiday shopping season, is it?

Panic and paranoia, fed by fear, are not the responses needed in these times, especially in a small town where most everyone knows everyone else — if not directly then, at the least, through six degrees of separation. So, what do we do in these crazy times? Since we *Homo sapiens* are hard wired to respond with either fear or aggression, we have to learn new ways of responding. Any neuroscientist will tell you, unlike our pets, we have cognitive control over these animal instincts leftover from our caveman days. We can cultivate peace in the midst of chaos. We can become mindful in the “heat of the moment” and turn things around. Think about it this way: In an emergency, who gets peo-

ple to safety? The mild-mannered first-responders cultivate calm in the chaos. All of us, adults and children, can learn how to do this and apply this skill in any situation: parenting our children, managing agitated co-workers or dealing with aggressive shoppers at Wal-Mart on Black Friday.

There are many ways to train your brain for a mindful response to these and myriad other situations. (In the Side Bar, some ideas and resources). But I’m also reminded of a Native American teaching story about how to choose calm over chaos. It goes something like this:

The granddaughter of the tribe’s Elder asked him, “What is it like being you?”

He answered that it was sometimes like having two wolves in his head. “One growls and bites and fights. It is angry at people’s foolishness. It wants to drive them away. It is only concerned about itself — it’s own hungers, having the best den, the most food. The other wolf wants to teach cooperation. It knows every wolf has something to offer and every wolf needs to be a valued member of the pack. The other wolf understands that together the pack is stronger than if we all fend for ourselves. Always these two wolves are fighting in my head.”

The little girl, wise beyond her years, asked, “Grandfather, which wolf wins?”

Grandfather responded, “The wolf I feed is the wolf that wins.”

Which brings me to the question I leave with you with this month: Which wolf do you feed?

Take a class or rent a video to learn yoga, tai chi or mindfulness meditation.

Start your day in silence, before the rest of the family awakens, sit quietly.

Spend time in nature.

Release yourself from the grip of the digital world. Turn off everything with a screen for a full day — including e-readers. Try an actual book (see below).

Play games you enjoyed as a child. Play with your children. Let them lead you in a game they create. It’s very liberating to not be the one “in charge” for a while.

Grab your camera and walk. You’ll be amazed at how good it feels to be out, and at what you see when you view the world through a different lens.

I’ve also come across some great books that you might find helpful when the rest of the world seems to be losing it. Cromwell Library has plenty to choose from — and with real pages to turn!

How to Make Yourself Happy and Remarkably Less Disturbable by Albert Ellis, PhD is full of simple, practical wisdom on creating a happier, more trouble-free life, from one of the most highly respected psychologists of our time.

Wherever You Go, There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD is a beautifully written book that shows you how to cultivate mindfulness in daily life.

Seven Spiritual Laws for Parents by Deepak Chopra, MD shows you the things you can do to empower your children to live their best lives, and bring out their greatest potential.

The Seven Spiritual Laws of Superheroes From Buddha to Batman, lessons on awakening your “superpowers” and for thriving, not just surviving in the world.

Peaceful Parents, Peaceful Kids: Practical Ways to Build a Happy Home by Naomi Drew is one of my favorite books for its straightforward, meaningful examples and easy to implement guidance for developing compassion, calm and a healthy sense of self in every every family member.