

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Not everything can be fixed. I have a friend whose mother is forever disappointing her. Although she concluded, years ago, that her mother can never give her what she needs in a mother, still, she finds herself holding on to the fragile hope that one day things will change.

However, with her mother approaching eighty, what are the chances she’s going to wake up one day a changed person. Nonetheless, disappointment-in-mom continues to weigh heavily in my friend’s spirit.

On one level, we can certainly commiserate. Don’t we all want parents we feel good about—a mother and father who make us proud and who love us unconditionally at the same time? Sometimes it’s hard to accept the harsh reality that a parent—one whose seed has given us life—falls so sadly short of expectations.

However, while our disappointment in mom or dad is understandable, after a while, it doesn’t do us much good to *keep going there*. Sometimes, the best thing we can do is forgive and move on in the realization that *not everything can be fixed*.

The regrettable truth is: some parent-daughter/son relationships are toxic. No matter how hard we try or how much we want things to change, it’s not in the cards; too many bad tapes and too much history, to the point where they’ve become a poison in our spirit.

It’s not your fault! So, what are we to do? To begin with, don’t blame yourself. *It’s not your fault*. Again, not everything in our lives can be fixed.

As often happens, it may take time to come to this realization. In my friend’s case, she’s tried a host of well-conceived strategies in dealing with her mother over the years. At the end of the day, it may be that her mother simply doesn’t have the capacity (at least, not any more) to change. And, again, words of reassurance: *It’s not your fault*.

At the same time, as human beings, we’re *not* powerless. The way we control toxic or unhealthy relationships—relationships that are not good for us—is by setting boundaries and sticking to them.

For example, over time, my friend has learned to set the terms for any contact she has with her mother. When we set boundaries and stick to them, we’re able to control many of the variables in the relationship.

Boundaries are not set in concrete; they can be changed as needed. They do, however, give us a sense of sanity and control over how the relationship plays out. The key is to be clear about what the boundaries are and be consistent in adhering to them.

Letting go. Understandably, it's not easy giving up on a relationship—admitting that it *is what it is* and moving on with our lives. This is particularly the case if we have a compulsive impulse tugging away in our spirit. We want to find a way to *make it work*. We don't like the idea of giving up and leaving it unresolved. Our compulsive impulses try to convince us that there ought to be a way, if we can only uncover it.

Compulsivity isn't all bad, particularly when it translates into a spirit of determination. However, determination can take us only so far in a relationship. At some point, there has to be a *sorting out* leading to a mutuality of understanding and acceptance. And when the mutuality is lacking, sometimes all that's left is for us to get on with our life. Again, not every relationship can be fixed.

The problem with toxic people is that they're incapable of growing to a new level of relationship. They're stuck and unable to move to a new place where the toxicity subsides.

Sadly, when it's our mother or some other family member who is toxic, we're left with an emptiness in our heart and spirit. We're left, too, with a disheartening awareness of what might have been.

To have a parent who is unable to give us what we need as an adult son or daughter is a huge disappointment. And it's natural to want to *hang on to hope*. Still, there comes a point when reality needs to settle in and—guilt free—we're able to turn the page in our lives.