



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



September 24, 2015

Choosing Well for a Better Future

Recently, I saw a heartbreaking short film by photojournalist Stephanie Sinclair about the lives of girls in rural Guatemala who were forced to marry early to older men. The film depicted what happens to girls who marry by age 14 or younger and have their first or second child before many teens go to their junior prom.



Girls Not Brides, an organization that seeks to end child brides around the world, says that more than 30 percent of women in the world today were forced into marriage before age 18. Sinclair quotes from an editorial on the subject written by Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel, the first education minister of Mozambique: "Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential."

Child marriage means girls can't get the skills and education they need to lift their families out of poverty. They're stuck. In the film, it was heartbreaking to watch a 14-year-old with a baby talking about her dreams for the future. She wanted nothing for herself. She only wanted her baby to study and to somehow escape a fate like hers.

Teens can dream of becoming doctors or rap stars, running small businesses or climbing the corporate ladder, working in politics, teaching or finding a cure for cancer — but only if they have a choice. Any choice is like a hallway with two doors. When one opens, the other one stays closed for good, and if you've made a good choice, you'll be rewarded with a new hallway full of doors to consider.

But what if that choice is denied? What if teens deny themselves that choice, not by their circumstance, but by their actions? While saving yourself for marriage or staying clean and sober sounds outdated and uncool, teens who choose to have premarital sex and take risks with drugs and alcohol may be denying themselves that choice.

Having a baby while you're still in school, dealing with having to pay child support, experiencing debilitating addictions — those take away your choices as much as child marriage.

You can do something for yourself, and that's to give yourself the chances you deserve. Stay away from making risky choices. Don't grow up too fast. Make the choice to be a teenager, to study, to hang out with your friends, to work hard. And make sure to pray for girls who may never be able to do the same.

— Karen Osborne
(This is a CNS column.)

Turning Off the Noise and Listening to God

On many levels, we are all the same. We all have hopes and dreams, aspirations. We all have a mental picture of the person we want to become.



But none of us feel handsome enough or pretty enough. None of us think we're smart enough. We all want to lose weight, and we all wish we had more friends. We all have insecurities.

But imagine the most popular people you know, the ones who fit your definition of cool. At some point, far more recent than you think, they probably stared in the mirror and questioned themselves. They'd never share it with anyone else, but they probably had similar insecurities as the ones we all face.

There's nothing wrong with this feeling. It's normal. Often though, we get defensive when we fear others will realize we have these thoughts. Our response mechanisms vary.

Some people get defensive, others get aggressive; some keep their feelings secret, while others hide them in full view. It's not a question of whether we'll react, but how.

We're told we get better at dealing with these voices in our head as we grow and mature. We're told we'll learn to control the feeling that we should be better. Most adults will tell you they successfully dealt with these insecurities.

But at some level, regardless of age, we're all waiting to be found out. We live with the fear in the back of our mind that there's someone out there

who is better, waiting to take our spot, waiting to point out the insecurities we most want to keep hidden.

The challenge isn't to be more secure but to find the confidence to not look over our shoulder to see if someone is pointing a finger at us. How can we do that? One key step is to be mindful that others have the same thoughts. They fear we'll be the one to point our finger back in their direction.

We should never forget this secret and we can always use it to our advantage. We can match their confidence. We can look them in the eye and smile when we do. No one can look down on us unless we let them. We don't have to give people the power to call us weak.

That's advice not just for those who are young, but for those who are young at heart. The most amazing people I know are those who refuse to leave fun in their past. They're the parents with more excitement for vacation than their children. They're the grandparents you see going on rides at the amusement park.

Those who grow to become fun-loving adults are better at embracing this. They still have the fear that someone will point them out, but they couldn't care less because they know those fears are unfounded. They accept that there's someone more handsome or pretty. They know there's someone smarter. They admit they could lose weight and they value the quality of friendships rather than their quantity.

We will never be truly confident, but we can learn to be comfortable. When we achieve that feeling, the thoughts of those around us matter much less.

— Erick Rommel
(This is a CNS column.)



CNS/BOB ROLLER

POPE ON THE MOVE: Pope Francis arrives Sept. 23 for Mass and the canonization of Junipero Serra at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

It's the Little Things

As a mom, I tend to get emotional at the oddest times. For example, tonight I heard my son singing in the shower and as much as it makes me giggle to hear him try and hit the high notes, it also makes me sad thinking about how I only have a few more years with my teenagers in the house.



With one child set to go to college in a year, I'm already in the ultra-mom sappy mode thinking about all of the "last moments" that accompany her senior year. Her last dance competition will be here before I know it, then graduation, then packing for college and then that moment where I have to tearfully say goodbye.

While discussing my emotional state about losing my children to adulthood with a colleague this week, I was surprised to learn that many parents face a variety of emotions. With three in college, my colleague said that when her first child chose to attend a college across the country, she was angry.

She was angry that her daughter was content with leaving the comforts of home; she was angry that she would not be able to quickly make a trip to her university when they were missing each other; and she was angry that she was losing her child. The anger passed, but she said it was a raw emotion that tested her faith and made her question why God would take her daughter so far away.

It was a conscious and educated choice her daughter made. She enrolled in a marine biology honors pro-

gram in Florida. She excelled academically her first two years, and she has found job opportunities already, even though she has two more years of her education to complete. It was the best choice for her daughter's future, my colleague told me.

We often question why our children make the choices they do. We wonder why they would choose to hang out with their friends instead of their parents; we wonder why they are in such a rush to run off to college; and we wonder if they will miss the precious moments of their childhood and teenage years.

I was relieved when my colleague told me that her daughter calls her at least three times a week and that their relationship has grown stronger since she moved away. She had to give it to God, she told me, and God knew what he was doing.

I pray that my children are guided by faith, that they make choices that are kind, compassionate and genuine and most of all, I hope that they call dear old mom to chat a few times each week.

Until then, I'm going to treasure the little moments I have with them and savor the high-pitched screeches I hear when my son takes a shower and the roaring of my daughter's car radio when she pulls into the driveway.

I know that I will miss every single bit of it when adulthood takes them away.

— Shannon Philpott

Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at www.shannonphilpott.com.

Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different perspective

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We want to give young adults something to "chew on," to think about when they're looking for something more than an on-line horoscope or the

latest star news.

This page offers columns we believe will interest our young adults. Let us know.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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