

## On Nurturing Nobility

*"I am so proud of my son!"* the young mother beamed. I wondered what prompted this mother's weighty esteem for her child: Is he smart? Handsome? A homerun hitter?

But the young woman continued to describe something else entirely. It seems this little fellow's second grade teacher was briefly called out of the classroom. In her absence, the class began to misbehave. When she came back and asked for an explanation, this young man alone offered a confession as to his part in the mischief.

So was this mother proud of her son's misbehavior? Of course not. All children misbehave at times, and parents rarely celebrate about it. Her pride was in her son's sense of personal responsibility. He knew he'd made a mistake, and was able to accept the consequences of it.

I believe that most of us long to instill in our children a sense of integrity and nobility. We give them music lessons and cheer them on sports teams and help them practice their math facts, but what we really want is something harder to define. An A+ on a spelling test is good news, but watching them secretly pick up the trash in an elderly neighbor's yard makes our hearts swell with joy.

Parents have more power in teaching nobility than they realize. Their daily examples of dealing with others in a magnanimous way, of assuming a responsibility they might have avoided, of extending themselves on behalf of the common good—these lessons are observed and internalized by even very young children.

Involvement in a faith community is another way that parents successfully work to help children develop character. The tenets of every major religion teach implications for personal discipline, altruism, and our obligation to others.

Parents help children develop nobility when we expose them to people we hope they will emulate. Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, founder of the Suzuki method of teaching music, wrote about this concept in his book, *"Nurtured by Love."* Dr. Suzuki encouraged parents that *"association with fine people helps develop nobility and beauty of character."*

Dr. Suzuki sought out such noble persons to introduce to his students. He wrote, *"I think it is important for their personality that young people come in contact with distinguished persons. They absorb something of the heart, feeling and deeds of such persons."*

This great violinist recognized that nobility—not a flawless sonata—is the goal.

Who do you admire? Is there a gentleman at your office who has overcome great odds to achieve success? A friend who brings to each experience an amazing sense of humor or creativity?

These people may be treasures to inspire your children to dream bigger about who they may become. Spending time with one of these "*distinguished persons*" may help your child discover his own nobility.