

Collecting Expertise

Last week, I listened as a man told me all about Asperger's Syndrome. Since his son's recent diagnosis, he has amassed a significant amount of knowledge in a very short time. He described his son's symptoms, the impact on his school work, behavior and relationships. And he told me about the therapies and accommodations already in place.

His son's diagnosis had been made five days prior.

Over the weekend, I ran into a friend who was planning her daughter's wedding. This professional woman had perhaps never seen the inside of a bridal studio before last month but this week she is talking about bridesmaid dresses, flowers and caterers as though she has earned a Ph.D. in Wedding Planning.

Monday morning at the office, a mother was telling me that her son has discovered dinosaurs and is fairly obsessed with them. He wants to learn everything he can, and she describes their shared research like a paleontologist. She uses words like "Prosauropods" and "Pterodactyl," and probably even spells them and pronounces them correctly. She told me that, before her son became interested, she knew next to nothing about dinosaurs.

As I think about these three parents, I am touched by the same attribute which they all represent. The task of parenting is nothing if not a Journey of Collecting Expertise.

When we have a baby, we learn quickly about feeding and diapering and bathing. We study the causes of colic and how to calm a fussy infant. Only weeks before we had no need for such information, but now we stay up half the night reading anything we can get our hands on.

The first time our child runs a temperature, we dive for baby care books and websites to look up potential causes. When the pediatrician pronounces a diagnosis (anything from an ear infection to leukemia) we learn everything we can in order to work for a cure.

Parents continue to learn about whatever needs or interests their children present to them. Their interests become our interests. Their challenges become opportunities for us to learn how to contribute support.

Parents live a cycle of recognizing that they are amateurs and then finding out what they need to know to bring some degree of mastery to their current situation. Whether it's an ear infection or All-Things-Bride, parents humble themselves to become learners about topics they might never have explored on their own. Parents are willing to start at the beginning in whatever task their family demands.

This vulnerability—as old as time and as universal as humankind—is what inspires me most about parents. Where there is great love, there is great interest. And where there is great interest, a Journey of Collecting Expertise will inevitably ensue.