

HEALTHY LIVING

When feud ends with silence, it takes patience to mend the rift

lindaLIPSHUTZ

llipshutz@floridaweekly.com



Although three years had passed, Sue remembered the argument as if it happened yesterday. Sue's daughter Kim had announced she was moving out of Sue's home to live with her father. Sue had been stunned. It felt like a knife had pierced her heart. There were several ugly scenes; then total silence. Sue had tried everything she could think of to reconcile, but Kim had refused to answer Sue's calls or emails. Those of us who have experienced family feuds firsthand know the enormous swell of conflicting emotions — all too well. Even if we're initially outraged or feel morally indignant, we often carry a heavy heart and an underlying feeling of sadness.

These estrangements are usually excruciatingly painful, often the culmination of years of festering hurts. Even when we've stopped speaking, it doesn't mean upset feelings have subsided. On the contrary, powerful, unresolved emotions are often bubbling under the surface.

In the fictionalized vignette above, Sue had called countless times, pleading with Kim to understand Sue's position. Invariably, the conversations deteriorated to a shouting match. Neither would change their entrenched positions. Sue tried to enjoy life as best as she could, but it didn't take much — watching a mother and daughter walking arm-in-arm, or a sappy movie — to reduce her to tears.

It was painful for Sue to admit to herself that, in fact, she had been overly preoccupied with her own life after the divorce, and hadn't given her children sufficient attention. Sue further realized that she'd been too threatened to allow Kim an opportunity to voice the pain of dividing her loyalty between two warring parents. Sue eventually understood that her efforts to convince Kim to apologize had only further polarized Kim into an angrier, more justified stance.

When Sue was able to let go of her position of feeling furious and sorry for herself, she freed up the emotional room to reach out to Kim in a less confrontational, more heartfelt way. She now understood that making changes in an upset, polarized relationship can often be a process requiring patience, critical self-awareness and the recognition there is no guaranteed outcome.

Because Sue knew phone conversations had been volatile, she elected instead to send Kim an email acknowledging Kim's pain. In it, she said: "I think of you often and feel sad so much time has passed. I've thought a lot about how tough it must have been for you to be caught in the middle of my conflict with Dad. I know I can be defensive when I'm upset. I wish I could undo the past, but all I can do is let you know how genuinely sorry I am that you went through so much. I look forward to a day when we can work this out."

Sue was hurt when Kim didn't write back. She felt angry she'd put herself on the line without any response, wondering if she should give up. Sue next sent Kim a birthday card: "Thinking of you on this special day. I hope your day is



filled with sunshine. I love you." Again, no word.

Sue worked hard to accept the fact Kim might never soften. But, she decided she would persevere in reaching out patiently and non-judgmentally, committed in her quest to reconcile.

Months later Sue finally got a response to an email, although not the response she had hoped for. Sue had written: "Dear Kim: I recently came across a program from the concert when you sang your amazing solo. I realize now I may not have told you how proud I was of you that night. Your voice brightens every room. We haven't spoken for so long, and I imagine you still have so many feelings to sort out. Please know I am here to

listen whenever you'd like to talk. Love, Mom."

Now, there was a time that Sue might have been infuriated by Kim's answer: "Thanks for the email. I'm still not ready to speak." However, Sue elected to view this as a step forward from Kim's stony silence. She replied simply: "Kim, I get that. Please take the time you need to sort this out." Sue continued to reach out periodically, without imposing any expectations or making any demands. She worked hard to fill the rest of her life with gratifying relationships and accomplishments.

When they finally did meet at a Starbucks a year later, it took tremendous restraint and maturity for Sue to adhere to her resolve to listen quietly until Kim was finished before she spoke. She squelched her natural impulse to jump in defensively when Kim became critical. She also promised herself she would not tolerate being spoken to disrespectfully or abusively. The two took important steps to approach each other differently.

The efforts of the women to navigate a very painful time mirrors the hard work of others facing serious conflicts in close relationships. There are occasions when individuals determine it could be emotionally damaging to resume ties. It may then be best to shut a door.

But, there are other circumstances, when individuals decide resuming the relationship will be important.

While the path to mend ruptured fences is usually far from smooth — and will certainly not happen overnight — there are thoughtful steps we can take that may be effective in easing the pain of estranged relationships. ■

FSW Collier to become first Blue Zones Project-recognized in Florida

The Florida SouthWestern State College Collier Campus will become the first Blue Zones Project-recognized college in Florida at an upcoming ceremony on Thursday, Sept. 20.

The Blue Zones Project is a community-wide, well-being improvement initiative to help make healthy choices easier for everyone in southwest Florida. It was inspired by the global Blue Zones Project, which began when National Geographic Fellow Dan Buettner researched locations throughout the world where people were living active lives into their hundreds with

lower rates of chronic diseases.

"FSW Collier Campus already has a history of using environmentally friendly practices, with our four newest buildings, campus-wide recycling efforts and our annual GreenFest Expo," said Gail Murphy, director, FSW Collier Campus. "These initiatives are about making healthy choices for our planet. Participating in the Blue Zones Project is a natural extension of that with the added focus of good health for people."

In order to become a Blue Zones Project-recognized college, at least 25 percent of students must pledge to



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enroll in the Blue Zones Project and do their best to incorporate the Blue Zones' Power 9 principles into their

lives, which incorporate healthy eating, natural movement and social principles to communities.

The FSW Collier Campus is also taking an active role in the Blue Zones Project by providing healthier food options at student events and making fruits and vegetables more prominent in its cafeteria. It has also installed three refillable water bottle stations around the campus.

For more information about the southwest Florida Blue Zones Project, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com. ■

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