

From Spark to Flame

When my now 19 year old daughter was in Grade 3, all of Mrs. Mathews' students were given a small pot with a bean seed to plant. Green string beans it seems are pretty hardy and the perfect seed to use when promoting green thumbs in young children. That same plant was also a most unexpected source of understanding and insight for me.

Once the bean plants had sprouted and flowered, their teacher allowed the kids to carefully transfer the precious cargo from school to home. Once home, Shanna scouted around for the perfect location and settled on a sunny south window sill and then proudly declared, "Soon I can feed the whole family!"

Shanna's sisters were envious and even our cat looked intrigued which should have been a warning to me because when I woke up the next morning, I saw that the bean plant had been maliciously knocked off the window sill and ripped from it's pot. Its' leaves were frayed and except for a limp thread of stem that still connected the roots to the flowering top, it was quite unrecognizable from the day before. The plant, it seemed, was a goner.

I dreaded what I had to tell Shanna but as I gently began to explain that the bean plant had to be put in the compost, her reaction was not what I expected. She said, "Everything will be ok Mom, the plant will get better." Without wasting a second in thought she secured the first aid kit from the bathroom returning with gauze, a tongue depressor, bandages and a deep belief that the pathetic looking, near-dead bean plant would live, thrive and even produce food!

I had mixed emotions knowing that she was postponing the plants inevitable trip to the compost bin but I went along with it and helped her wrap bandages. Days later, to my absolute surprise, the bean plant was standing tall and looking perky. We were able to remove the bandages and discover a protruding hump in the stem where its near-fatal stem break had been. It was also amazing to see that the one and only bean, had become plump almost completely masking the claw marks that had scarred it.

I don't know why I hadn't thought the cat might go for a second round because it surely did, and this time I ran for the first aid kit! I carefully applied a heavy blanket of everything from cotton and gauze to coloured band aids with "ouch" written on them and when the medic work was done, I whispered a little something to the heavens.

Just one week later we were able to take the bandages off and again we barely found evidence of an attack and there was even a new sliver of green where a second bean was forming. I was excited and amazed while Shanna had been expecting nothing less. Back to the window sill it went but this time we built a fortress of heavy books to keep it safe until our day of bounty.

I set the table beautifully with all the fanfare of a Thanksgiving dinner. The beans were carefully divided by 5, which awarded each person 2 small pieces, claw marks and all. They turned out to be the best green beans I had ever eaten!

My daughter never quite understood my exuberance over the significance of the beans. In my work as a youth motivator I am brought together with kids and teens that all desperately need people to believe in them. Now, more than ever, no matter what I have been told about a child or a teen and their behaviour, I see everyone, no exceptions, with the same eyes and heart that my daughter used on her broken, beaten up bean plant.

I wonder if it's a coincidence that later that same week, I stumbled upon a most appropriate quote by Italian Poet Dante (1265-1351): "From a little spark, may burst a mighty flame."

Especially if you believe...!