

My Mother

By Petra Gimbad

I shower and dress before running downstairs. Hot breakfast waits in the kitchen, specially prepared. A bowl of herbal soup sits on my right. Neither the clean clothes I wear nor the food on the table were prepared by my hands. They were prepared by my mother. Later, I leave for my job at a feminist organization.

People often ask: why am I a feminist? I explain: it is because of my mother.

Reflecting now, I think there is no sweeter reason. A few years ago, I first interned at this organization not because I realised I was a feminist. It was simply because at the age of twenty, my mother was the one person in the world I would unhesitantly give my life for.

She would do the same for me, and more. In so many ways, she already has.

My mother, mutual confidante of the last fifteen years. The woman who taught me to read and love art; who inspires much of my taste in books and how I walk this world; who taught me by example that human connection involves simplicity in communication, in a way that is devoid of ego.

She tries so hard, and perceives all too often she fails. Yet she accomplishes much because she chooses to love. How we love tends towards imperfection, but those who practice get better at imparting it.

It has been said that what we learn best, was learnt through parental example. My mother grows because she questions herself. This, she taught me.

She also bestowed a huge gift – the ability to apologise to her daughter when she is wrong. I do not think that she realises the value of this: I am less egoistical and have less hang-ups about admitting when I am wrong in both my personal and professional lives as a result.

So: there is this woman in my life, who is strong and vulnerable, quietly intelligent. However, she is a housewife and therefore, subject to humiliation even by those who claim to care for her most.

Oh, I know that she is sincere when she says she knows where her worth lies. But I also know that it must sting at least a bit, to give so much and receive little appreciation in return.

Feminism was the only area I knew of at the time that fully acknowledged the contribution of women who perform unpaid but valuable work daily. Immensely gifted women, but whose work apparently requires no recognition beyond lip service.

We pay chefs to cook, maids to perform housework, vets to delouse dogs, childcare services to care for the kids, nurses to care for patients during ungodly hours. Therapists calculate fees by the hour, religious leaders are honoured for giving wise counsel – my priest usually gets a bottle of wine, at least, during Christmas.

We say that the hand which rocks the cradle rules the world. Yet, the word of a woman who suffered abuse means little - compared to her male partner should he claim otherwise. As an intern, I understood better how being a housewife – which is synonymous with being a woman – could work against one who has suffered domestic violence or rape. It still shocks me to remember that many, including neighbours and the police, choose not to intervene when violence occurs within the domestic sphere because it is perceived to be a private matter, not a public one.

I have always wanted to save the world. First through medicine, then through the United Nations or the World Bank. As I learnt more about myself, my ambitions changed. This increased consciousness is reflected in a desire to work with people on a more individual basis - within female-ruled professions such as teaching and social work. Perhaps, even raise a family one day. Through the same way my mother taught me, by loving a person at a time.

We will continue, regardless of whether the world honours the work we do. However, I dream of being accorded eventually the respect our professions deserve.

This is why I am a feminist, born out of love.

Petra is hopeful that Fiesta Feminista, an event to unite all who believe in and are open to what feminism stands for, will give expression to the many concerns both women and men hesitate to express. Call 03-77844977 to participate or volunteer from June 15-17.