

Our Family Crisis

1 March 2010 | By Paul | paul@mindparts.org

The problem I have had with writing this blog recently is related to the "elephant in the room" phenomenon. In the last post, I alluded to the family crisis that has enveloped my family for the last few weeks. I feel as though I now have to write about it in order to move past it.

Here goes the drama:

We had a "family friend" who was continually pushing boundaries for a long time (10 or more years). I had always been incredibly uncomfortable with her, but she was my wife's "whacky" friend. For a while now, she has been trying to insert herself as an authority in our family and trying to control situations. She was overbearing. She thrived on creating conflicts or problems and being there to solve them. Many of these problems were lies or the facts were greatly twisted and exaggerated. I saw through most of them and questioned all of them. But my wife was not able to. This created a huge conflict between the two of us because she was convinced there were real problems, focused mainly on our children and on what I was *not* doing for the family due to my "problems".

A few weeks ago, my wife came home from her evening yoga class and said she got a phone call from our "friend" who said she got a call from one of our neighbors claiming we do not care well for our kids and one of the kids had said she is very sad and angry. The neighbor supposedly threatened to call child services on us.

I immediately confronted our "friend" through a phone call. I warned her that if this was a lie, that it would be the complete end of her relationship with my family. I am convinced she did not expect me to do this. My wife didn't want me to pursue it because she believed the "friend" might have been telling the truth and didn't want to irritate the neighbor or make waves. The "friend" said not to worry because she had someone on the inside of child services who could help us.

In the past, I may not have been strong enough to see through what she was doing. And may not have been strong enough to take action like I did. But over the past year or two, with my increased awareness, I had begun to question things. And this act was just over-the-top. She had done things like this. But this was well beyond everything in the past. I think my increased awareness pushed the "friend" to act in this way because she saw her control being taken away.

The next morning, I had a conversation with our neighbors, with whom we are fairly close. They said they had no idea what our "friend" was talking about. They claimed that no such conversation ever took place. My neighbor confronted our "friend", but through voicemail, calling her on the lie.

At 3PM that afternoon, I got a phone call from child services stating these allegations. This then required a letter from me to them, phone interviews with both me, my wife, and my neighbors. Child services also contacted my children's school to see if there was anything in their records that caused concern. I told them what I was certain had happened: that this "friend" called child services in order to keep intact her original lie.

For several days I was in "family protect" mode. The only problem was that I was not paying attention to a good deal of me.

After a couple days, the "friend" started to contact my wife, some friends, and relatives and act like she did not do anything and blamed it all on my mental status. In fact, when child services was called she said brought up my mental health issues.

By that time my wife and I agreed that my original warning of no more contact ever would be enforced. We told the girls a kid-acceptable story. I told many of our neighbors and relatives. I changed our house locks, security codes, and got blocks on Facebook. I told the school and talked to the principal. I told the kids that they are to treat this "friend" like a stranger and find help if she ever shows up. Luckily, she lives about 25 miles away, so there is no reason for her to be in our town.

Then I sent her a registered letter. The key paragraphs are these:

If you do not stay away completely, and this means not only zero contact with my immediate family, but also zero contact with our friends or our extended family, then both [my wife] and I will take that as a direct threat to the safety of our family and seek a restraining order.

I am extremely serious about this. So, heed my words. I will have a very low threshold for legal action because we all do consider you a safety threat right now. And in all the discussions I've had last week, this was echoed by others.

We will not entertain any kind of discussion whereby you defend yourself or your actions or blame them on someone else. Or pretend nothing happened. That's all over now.

The story is bizarre, at least bizarre for my standards, because as this all played out, certain things started to click for me. As one small example, the "friend" had often called my 8 year old "our daughter" referring to she and my wife. And over the past several months she had been pushing to get my daughter to stay over her apartment. I never agreed to that, causing friction.

One of the problems is that I was not completely stable throughout the entire crisis because of being in "family protect" mode. I had periods, especially at night, when younger parts of me thought I was indeed making it all up or at least blowing things out of proportion. Or they didn't know what was going on at all. I had other problems where younger parts felt it was a violation to stand up for ourselves. It was not, in their mind, consistent with how things were supposed to be. Needless to say, this caused a great deal of difficulty and required a good deal of support from therapists, family, and friends.

So far, we have not heard from our "friend" since the letter. And the conflicts and drama we got used to experiencing as a family (due to the constant influence of the "friend") have completely gone away. Family life and married life seems much simpler now!

Now I have said what has happened. And, hopefully, soon I can begin posting some of those 30 "articles" I have started.