

Update, July / August 2010

## Re-Viewing our Stories, Down to Our Very Cells: Mirror Neurons

*Following are the findings of one Tensegrity practitioner about her evolving view of her first “pack” of peers—her brothers and sister. We are sending it to the participants of our upcoming new workshop in Joshua Tree as an illustration for their preparation for this event. We found its content so relevant to how we ALL interact with members of our “packs” in life that we want to share it here with everyone—please read, reflect and enjoy!*

### Summer 2010

Subject: Preparation Assignment for Tensegrity Workshop in Joshua Tree, California, September 3, 4 & 5, 2010: Energetic Facts: What Do You Know For Sure? ...Tracking with our Star Sisters and Brothers, the Wolves ...

*Power rests on the kind of knowledge that one holds. What is the sense in knowing things that are useless? They will not prepare us for our unavoidable encounter with the unknown.*

- don Juan Matus

Dear Participant:

Welcome to this workshop!

In our time leading up to, during and after this event, we will all have the opportunity to explore: As we run with the various “packs” in our lives—our families, work groups, circle of friends, etc.—what kinds of “knowledge” are getting our focus and attention—are we focusing on weakening stories, centered around the seeming failings of others or ourselves? Or are we focused on strengthening stories—stories that open new possibilities for ourselves and others by looking at the essence of the other, the essence of ourselves?

Contemporary neuroscience speaks of “mirror neurons”:

*The discovery of mirror neurons in the frontal lobes of macaques and their implications for human brain evolution is one of the most important findings of neuroscience in the last decade. Mirror neurons are active when the monkeys perform certain tasks, but they also fire when the monkeys watch someone else perform the same specific task. There is evidence that a similar observation/action matching system exists in humans.*  
<http://www.interdisciplines.org/mirror>

And so the query is: Is it possible that when we repeat or listen to certain stories, our beings experience this as living those stories?—and do we shift to a lower, or higher energetic vibration as we tell or listen? Let’s find out for ourselves, by reviewing, in the weeks and days before the workshop, the stories we tell about our “packmates,” our brothers and sisters, or cousins,

classmates, peers, from childhood—and to see if we are telling—and energetically vibrating at the level of—similar stories about our peers now.

You can begin by taking a look at key moments in your relationships with siblings, and also, if you wish, cousins, playmates, friends, schoolmates, starting with your early years. Additionally, as an option, you can take a look at your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles and aunts and how they related to their siblings and peers. The following questions can serve as a guideline for your scan:

- *What current/past ‘stories’ do/did you hear or say about each of your brothers and sisters (friends, neighbors, peers) –*
- *And as you look at the stories, you can ask:*
  - *How old are you when you tell this story? (The age you were when this story started.)*
  - *How old is this story? Is it current?*
  - *Did you hear it from someone else? If so, who?*
  - *Is the story true? (Is there evidence that what it is said to have happened really happened? Is it the whole story?)*
- *And above all:*
  - *Is the story energizing, is it strengthening? Does it take you to a higher vibration as you hear or tell, or imagine it?*
  - *Is there a more complete and energizing, enhancing way to tell the story?*

Our teachers said: Culture has its impact—however—we ARE the culture. So by doing this exercise of tracking our interaction with our “pack,” we are changing the culture!

Please complete as much of this exploration as you can and **bring it to the first and all sessions** of the upcoming workshop! (Do your best, there is no “perfect” preparation.) As this is a broad exploration, you may decide to focus on a specific aspect of your interaction with siblings or peers (see an example below). **Be prepared to tell a summary of your findings, in about 20 minutes, in an organized form, to a Witness at the workshop.**

We look forward to seeing you at Joshua Tree!

With affection,

Cleargreen

*The following investigation of one Tensegrity practitioner may give you some guidance; this practitioner chose to focus on the topic of “achievement” in her family “pack.”*

## **Self**

Current patterns with “pack” in community group meetings:

Enter group feeling generally that I’m smarter than most everyone else, and have achieved more, and therefore should be listened to (raised left eyebrow, slight almost imperceptible sneer and flaring of nostrils); I also carry a defensive mood (shallow breath, tight chest, tense muscles in jaw, shoulders and upper back, gesticulating hands—further observation to be continued) with a strategy my witness calls “just-in-case”—meaning I’d better be ready to defend myself “just in

case” “they/he/she/it attacks me. This strategy stems from my childhood interactions with my brothers, who I felt were constantly teasing me and putting me down, and who I believed preferred my younger sister to me.

My early basis for thinking I am “smart”: I could read before attending schools and happily demonstrated this fact the first day of first grade, jumping ahead to read the first word of the class reading book before our teacher could get to it. Went on to be placed in “gifted” class in elementary school and to win academic and music achievement awards and prizes and scholarships in high school and college. Hold more liberal political views than the rest of my family.

Why I expect I should be listened to, yet quickly go on the defensive: I am expecting to be “attacked” or “harassed” the way my brothers attacked or teased me when we were children. I also wanted to seem “better than” these brothers, to show they can’t defeat me, and “smarter” than my sister since I ascribed to the family story that “she is the beauty,” not me, so if I want attention, I have to be “smart.” (See below) In short my view has been: “Someday, they will ALL apologize, and recognize and respect my obvious worth.”

### **Related History of stories with brothers and sisters**

I am the third born child of my family, and the first-born daughter. Like my mother, I am third of five children, like her, I distanced myself from the family for some years, and am closer to my younger sister than to my brothers—due to—I believed—my brothers’ constant teasing when I was young—finding inventive and elaborate variants of “cootie,” meant to imply I was somehow weird or contaminated for being a girl. My anger at not being able to retaliate by physically overpowering them led to my firm resolve that I would “show them,” whatever it took—if I could not overpower them physically, I could be smarter than them, and overpower them verbally. An early snapshot photo shows me at age 4 standing amongst my brothers, holding my toy musical iron, chin down, lower lip forward in a pout, brown eyes glowering at the camera.

That glowering view has changed with time and inquiry to a view of deep respect for all my siblings—a view which I am now making an effort to apply to my peers in community group meetings. Here are some details of the early stories I told myself about my brothers and sisters, and how those stories have transformed through a closer review:

### **My oldest brother Matthew**

First born, four years older than me.

As a young child, I looked up to him—my mother says he helped hold me and was very affectionate when I was a baby. So I was doubly chagrined when he teased me when I was 2 to 3 years old, “ganging up on me” with my other brothers. We became better friends later when I was 13 and he 17, listening to his favorite records, watching movies and swimming on the local swim team together. In high school my view was that he was smart, handsome, and didn’t have to work hard at studies. Won science awards in marine biology, good at math, played trumpet and good baseball player. Struggled a bit more in college with his actuarial science curriculum and more difficult licensing tests; I judged him at the time for choosing this course of study when his real passion seemed to be marine biology. However, life experience and a careful review of my own relatively limited contributions to the family pack brings a new perspective: I now

admire my brother's devotion as a husband of a woman who like my mother, is a strong, beautiful, organized and giving parent; and as a father of two bright, talented and amazing children (one an engineer, the other a college music student) with whom he gets along well; and I see his career choice as being influenced by many factors, none of which merit judgment. He is a socially gracious man and an adept and gifted conversationalist with a wide range of interests—also something that, my witness pointed out, I share. Like other family members, he has accomplished much: raising a family, and being a loyal husband and father, who has a loving and active relationship with his wife and both children.

### **My brother Patrick:**

Second born. Two years older than me. Unless he was teasing me, which made me angry, I more or less ignored my brother Patrick when we were children. He had a fascination for and eventually an extensive knowledge of whales; he and my brothers watched Jacques Cousteau religiously, so I watched too. So through them, I also became fascinated with marine life and still consider it the ecosystem I relate to the most readily.

I liked my brother but thought him a bit of a “square” in his religious strictness, as he got upset if he heard any of us curse or otherwise “break the rules.” He became an accomplished trombone player, practicing constantly at home. When I first started playing music, I was a bit arrogant about the amount of time he practiced, yet secretly tried (and failed) to keep up. He was nevertheless very generous with me as a musician, sitting down next to me after I played a concert solo with a high school awards band that we had both been selected for, saying how much he admired my musicianship. He won a college music scholarship, and graduated to become a private music teacher and professional player. My mother's dream was for him to become a professional symphony player. Before he could realize this dream, he was killed at age 27 in a car accident, his car struck head on by the car of a teenage drunk driver who crossed into my brother's lane. Came to be regarded as the family “saint”—like all my brothers, was an altar boy in his youth; my mother thought he might become a priest.

His trombone students told many stories of his kindness and dedication, as well as their sudden ability, playing in a trombone choir they organized for his funeral, to play sections of the music they had not been able to play before. The family also had many similar unexplainable experiences.

We discovered after his death that he kept a meticulous journal where he counted every minute of his day.

My brother's death shattered my sense of safety and security, and I began to “act out,” looking for that security in increasingly destructive relationships which led to a downward spiral where, by the time I met my Tensegrity teachers, I was more than ready for self-examination.

Reviewing my life, I started to see that my brother's early passing had given me the courage and the urgency for me to “jump” when I saw a chance to live with purpose—and that in his lifetime my brother had actually found what I had sought—that love of music itself, and of others, including family, students, friends, teachers, as well as whales and other marine life—were more important than external security through “impressive” accomplishments.

### **My brother Vincent**

Fourth-born child, third-born son. Born a year after me. As a child, I was very competitive with him. A typical scenario between us as children, when I was three years old and he was two: We

both toddle up to a neighbor who either does or doesn't ask how old we are. "I'm FIVE! my brother proudly exclaims. "No you're not," I quickly correct, "You're TWO."

My mother says that because he was born so soon after me, I "never got to be a baby." So began a pattern of both refusing my mother's help yet standing by her side as her helper—and trying to ignore my brother—yet tussling with him—until I left the house to go to college at 18. As an adult, this pattern has shown up in my relationships with "packs" at work and in other groups—being close to the leader, yet wanting to show my own strength, and to overpower "younger," "newer" or more gentle colleagues or peers.

Back to childhood and my brother Vincent: My early sense of being a "genius" was further inflated by the fact that in school, Vincent would often have the same teachers I did a year later—and I would "ace" the classes while he worked hard to earn B's and C's; this ability to work, however, paid off in his life—he learned good study habits and did well in high school; he went from having a turned in foot and being called a "shrimp" in grade school to becoming a champion wrestler in high school; he received commendation letters from customers for outstanding service as a department store delivery manager. After college graduation, married his college sweetheart (a very kind person, and an ER nurse) became a proud father of two bright and talented boys, and a territory salesman for a carpet company, known for his outstanding work ethic and ability to turn around slow-moving territories; he is currently a leader in marketing development and training for the company; considered by our father to be the hard-working achiever of the family.

Recapitulating with the help of teachers and witnesses, it's clear my "competitive story" is not the whole picture—some stories I left out that: From age 6 to 8, my brother had to wear a metal brace to correct a turned-in foot, and when others made fun of him for that, I proudly defended him. When he was bitten by a neighbor's dog—I was absolutely upset about that—it was as if the dog had somehow bitten part of me, and I was afraid of dogs for some years after. As college students visiting home one weekend, we stood together at the back of church one Sunday and he said I reminded him of his German teacher, whom he really liked and respected, jokingly saying that though like her, I was "from another planet," but nevertheless "all right."

Also in my investment in being "the smart one," I didn't see what I see now: that my brother is a very intelligent, driven, honorable and accomplished man with many skills I would like to have (one example: he is a first-rate business negotiator and isn't afraid to ask for what he wants).

### **My sister Linda**

Fifth born. (The youngest) Born five years after me. I remember when my mother was pregnant with her, I cheerfully and proudly told everyone we met: My Mom's gonna have a BABY! I was less enthusiastic after she was born and all my brothers thought she was so beautiful that they sold tickets to the neighbors to come and see her. A Snapshot Image: I am six years old, my sister is a year and a half; my sister is sitting on the couch gracefully posing with my mother's hat tilted on her head; it's a neat straw hat with a nearly flat brim and a yellow daisy adorning the band. She has her head turned sweetly to the side, her baby blond hair shining and her chin down smiling adorably at my father as he takes her picture. I think she's incredibly cute, but am also jealous of my father's attention to her.

I begin to formulate a couple of (unconscious) strategies—if I can't be cuter than my sister, I can be "smarter." So: Soon after is one of my favorite moments with my father: sitting in his lap reading a child's dictionary with him. I can get his attention and approval by reading!!!

Also, at this same age, I start to "forget" how to do certain things I've learned, such as tying my shoe; it seems my unconscious strategy is: my mother will have to put the baby down for a moment to come and help me and pay attention to me. I have carried this pattern into adult life, where rewarding work as an editor has been accompanied by difficulty managing basic tasks like cooking, organizing schedule, etc. (If I am a bit helpless, then someone will come to help me—and I won't be alone!)

More about expanding my view of my sister:

In high school she was a cheerleader, track and field athlete, dated a football player, and became homecoming queen. (It dawned on me during this review that though I was secretly proud of my sister at the time for becoming homecoming queen, I was away at college and did not even call her to congratulate her for her award! This is a pattern that my father had as well, also "ignoring" or just not paying much attention to his sister when they were growing up.) My sister was a sorority member in college and dated an award-winning athlete. She studied communications, which at the time I assumed was just the easiest major she could take to graduate. Now I know that she is a gifted and articulate writer and communicator. Further, my shaky claim to fame at being the most gifted and precocious reader of the family (and therefore the "smartest") recently crumbled when I learned from my mother that my sister actually started to read at the youngest age. My mother also recently said the strong-willed award goes to my sister (not to me, as I was expecting); my sister said her secret was, rather than try to confront my mother in a disagreement, (which I would do) she would stay "below the radar" and not create scenes—then no one noticed her and she could do what she wanted. (And though I think I could learn from her strategy, I now am also beginning to see that neither confrontation nor avoidance are really effective as exclusive strategies for healthy relationships with groups or individuals.)

More: Reviewing the belief that my brothers and father liked my sister more, I see now that this is a six-year-old's view, and that they were all doing what any family would do with a wonderful new baby—adoring her, cuddling her, photographing her, etc. I can be more aware of and release the "envy" I still feel for "little sisters" in my community group—they are not my little sister, and it's okay, and even wonderful, for them to be well-liked by the others! It is not a reflection on me!

My sister now: Like my mother, she has a decorating and design talent; she worked for a name designer in New York; she married a successful telecommunications entrepreneur and is the mother of three young bright, beautiful, confident and lively children; she is on the board of several charities for women and children and like my mother, is a very giving person.

#### **After making this review:**

I see that my stories of my brothers and sister and their achievements have now changed to more enhancing stories. Not needing to be "better than them," I feel stronger—I have more room to breathe, my body and my being are more relaxed. I feel closer to them—and to myself. A sparkle of curiosity returns to my eye for them—and for myself.

If I make the effort to imagine how they might describe our childhood together I would say: My older brother might have seen a sweet younger sister. My second brother might have seen a rival, whom he nevertheless liked. They might have both realized that as boys they could never be close to my mother the way I was, and at the same time, they are curious about my difference. My younger brother might have been puzzled why I would push him away sometimes, and also try to keep up with his two big brothers. And coming to the same teachers after my brothers and me, who all did well in school, he would try extra hard to do well himself. My sister might look up to all of us; our oldest brother might be like a second father; and seeing that we all like to read so much, she likes it too, but she's happy that we're happy and not interested in "taking over" our enjoyment of it. Regarding who is the "beauty": She told me she thought I was beautiful when we were growing up. So she just wanted to be like me! And so she found her own beauty!

I am blessed to be part of such an amazing "pack"! And if they are such strong, intelligent, resourceful, diverse and loving people—I must have those qualities too! Like my sister, I too am a giving person, and a talented artist. Like my brother Matthew, I love variety and conversing and working with all kinds of people. Like my brother Patrick, I love the earth and her creatures, especially marine life. And from him I am learning that the most important thing in our lives is giving love to what we do, and who we are with. Like my brother Vincent, I am relentless—I will not give up on something I really care about—I will persevere until I find the opening!!!

Meanwhile that sparkle of curiosity tells me that even though these new stories and perspectives are more energizing, they are still my stories, not really my brothers' and sister's. So I would like to thank my brothers and sister for their grace and generosity, and for the many things I've learned and continue to learn from them, and I would like to ask them:

What was childhood like for you?

What is life like for you now?

And like my first "pack" of my brothers and sisters, this "pack" is full of really strong, intelligent, resourceful and daring beings! What a privilege to be with them! I look forward to asking them questions, listening to them and learning more about them and what we can dream and do together!