



June 19, 2007

*Parental Wisdom – Emails
The Real Secret*

On February 8, 2007 Oprah Winfrey presented 'The Secret' on her show. Email responses were so overwhelming her website nearly crashed.

In case you haven't heard about it, The Secret is a DVD based on the law of attraction which says like attracts like; we attract into our lives the things we want and create our own reality which is fueled by our thoughts.

That might explain why we have such problems with young people and destructive behaviors. We are focusing on, and giving too much attention to the wrong young people.

Their lives are filled with rehab, DUI, and drugs. Their celebrity status gets them into clubs, creates media frenzy, and introduced words like paparazzi to our regular vocabulary. Does our interest in these stories cause legitimate news networks to run them as lead stories, or is it that we simply can't escape the news about these women? I will mention their names just once; Paris, Lindsay and Britney, and that's all I'll say.

Instead, let's turn our attention to some positive adolescents. Perhaps the real secret is as simple as focusing on, and talking about good influences. That is, if you want to see more of this behavior....

Mattie Stepanek was a young man who had every reason to be angry. He was born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy and had lost three older siblings to the same illness. He began writing poetry as a toddler and published five uplifting books with messages of hope before he died in 2004, shortly before his 14th birthday. Former President Jimmy Carter delivered a eulogy at Mattie's funeral and said that although he has known kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers, Mattie was the most extraordinary person he has ever known. I met Mattie when publishing a parenting newsletter for Toys "R" Us, and he wrote how important it was to remember how to play after a storm.

In January 2006, **Kari Janisse** was a young woman busy working and planning a wedding. But she put herself second when she heard that a former high school teacher was very ill. In her senior year of high school, 'Mr. B' as she liked to call him taught a class that was supposed to be about communication. In reality the class of 22 learned a lot about life. The effect of that class had such a positive impact on her that when she heard her teacher was gravely ill, the student became the teacher. Every Tuesday evening for the year and a half he struggled with brain cancer, Kari would drive to Mr. B's house after work and read to him. She started with Tuesdays with Morrie, and when done, went onto to The Five People You Meet in Heaven, both by Mitch Albom. He died before she could read For One More Day. As she told me, when people thought he was so lucky to

have her constant dedication, her answer was simple, "No, I'm the lucky one to have this special time with him, to thank him for what he has done for me."

Jason McElwain informally nicknamed **J-Mac**, is an autistic American teenager who graduated from Greece Athena High School , a suburb of Rochester , NY in 2006. You may have heard about his amazing feat of scoring twenty points in four minutes during a high school basketball game on February 16, 2006; the last home game of the 2005-2006 season for Greece Athena. Jason wasn't supposed to play that game, and in fact Jason had never played any game, but the coach grateful for Jason's constant support and encouragement for the team, told him he could suit up and sit on the bench. When the team was ahead, the coach signaled Jason to play. Everyone was thrilled for Jason's incredible accomplishment, but I was also overwhelmed by the students in the stands. They didn't know if Jason would actually get to play, but they were prepared waving his picture for every basket he scored. When he threw his last three-pointer with no time left on the clock the crowd went crazy. These were kids who totally supported this autistic boy. Too often we hear about bullying and teasing, but perhaps the support of his classmates is why Jason was able to accomplish the impossible.

Perhaps we all need to hear more about good kids. It also be might be why CBS is introducing a show in their fall lineup called Kid Nation - 40 kids, 40 days, no adults. The question is - can they build a better world than adults?

One can only hope.