

## Appendix 1 Section Three (Father) Research on a drive to a rugby match

3.10.99

I have just driven Ife to Rugby. Yesterday he was quite stropky, He answered me in short half formed sentences and gave me the feeling he sometimes does that my job is to give him things. It feels at times like these that that is the sole basis of the relationship. I get hurt when he behaves like that and sometimes I lash out at him more abrasively than I would normally about his failure to complete some task or the other or to be up in time to make his science lesson. Looking back at what I've captured in writing over the last 2 years I know that this happens more when I am tired than at other times. So obviously my behaviour triggers or has an affect on him.

I cannot always be fresh and attentive. I cannot always have creative ways to respond to his moods and behaviour. I know that so I don't beat myself up about it for too long. I'm just really pleased by the conversation that we've just had during our drive to rugby this morning. It's at times like these that I'm glad that it's nearly half an hours drive.

It is a beautiful bright autumn morning. Maybe that had an affect on us both. We spoke about his teachers. I asked him if he felt that Tom would get him through his GCSC Math's. He spoke of the fact that Tom could teach him a lot about the subject because he knew it inside out but he didn't have such a clear sense of matching what he taught with what the exams might require. I know what he means. Tom is a brilliant mathematician but he is an artistic scientist first. He has always been a rebel. He has his own business and brings a broad richness to the children that he works with. However exam passing is an art. Knowing your subject is not the same as passing an exam in it. I need to give some thought to how I approach this. Still I'm glad that Ife has the ability to make such an assessment.

Maybe my feeling better about Ife his morning started when I asked him if he gets embarrassed by me being at the touchline when he's playing rugby. "Not really", he said "I feel 'Dad is watching so I got to do well'". I'd never had a sense that my presence pressured him and he certainly rarely looks pressurised on the pitch (or anywhere else in his life for that matter). "I like to be there" I said. "If anybody was to hurt you deliberately or unfairly I'd kill them". I realised as I said it that I should not have. I would not actually kill somebody. "I know you would Dad" Ife said "that feels good. I feel safe". Well, what can I say? My son knows that his old dad would kill for him and likes the feeling?!!

"Last week son. I'm glad I never saw that boy knee you in the face a couple of times because I don't know what I would have done" (Message, I hope = "I would not automatically come on to the pitch and actually slay somebody, but I am there for you and will intervene if necessary").

Yesterday I had been feeling a bit surplus to requirements. Relegated. My job was to provide economically and that's all. Today I was a valued defender. My life as father friend was not over, yet!

I was reminded of the boys' summer camp and the conversation we had had with Roy when we had spoken about the need to just spend time with your son. I had talked of the great conversations that Ife and I have had on our drives to and from Rugby matches all over southern England. Carl had talked about using his drives with his daughter to her

dance classes for the same purpose. Roy seemed to think that his son should listen to him just because he was his father. "That's not enough" we had argued with him. "You need to create a relationship in which you can just be in a space together and just let stuff come out. Even if you think it's crap its a conversation. It's a relationship, or it helps build one that might allow him to hear the sort of things you want him to hear from you".

I think we got through to Roy in those conversations but at the same time I know that his behaviour will take more than that one, albeit powerful, conversation to change. I feel confirmed by this mornings conversation in the rightness of what we said to Roy and what it suggests to and for other parents.

I am sitting in my car now feeling that this mornings events have borne that out. I hope the rest of the day goes well.

### **Appendix 1 Section Three: The story of Doogs**

When he was 16 my son moved in with me on a full-time basis. He loves animals. He has always kept pets. At any one time there has been a combination of animals in my house from hens, piranha fish, rats, gerbils, doves, a variety of snakes, large and small lizards and, more recently a dog called Doogs.

In the Caribbean, at least among the social class that I come from, animals stay outside the house. They exist for a purpose; they guard you and maybe provide companionship, but at a distance. They do not come into the house. My allowing all of these animals into my home has been really difficult for me. I hate the fact that every now and then a snake escapes and I am unable to sleep for nights until it reappears. I allow it because it is Ifetayo's love and I want him to feel loved and accepted and free to follow his interests.

One day he bought home a dog. I was angry and disgusted. It was a big Black Staffordshire bull terrier, a real macho dog. To me, it looked like the kind that insecure men put collars on that are laced with shiny studs. I was disappointed that he wanted this kind of dog, even though the truth is I did not want any kind of dog. I told him that he could not keep the animal. He said that he could not take it back and eventually I agreed that he could keep it in the outside boiler room that butts on to the outside of our kitchen until he found a home for it. After a while he went out leaving the dog outside. Pretty soon afterwards the dog started moaning and howling. I was unmoved by this until my neighbours knocked on my door.

“Did you know that your dog is outside crying”

“I know that he's making noise outside. I'm sorry if its disturbing you”.

“Well. It's not me so much as the children. His crying is upsetting them”.

She had two young children and I did not want to upset them though I was a bit confused at the thought that a dogs' moans could affect human children emotionally.

“They can't sleep. It's making them cry”.

I opened the door and let the dog in. It trotted in and I pointed it to its basket which it duly curled up in. I returned to my office and my writing. After a while I realised that the dog had followed me into the office and was curled up alongside my chair wagging his tail and expressing emotion on his face. I could tell that he was happy! This animal had emotions and he was happy because he was next to another living creature. I was amazed.

Over the next few days I became aware that this animal had feelings, it had moods, and it loved being with me! I tried several times to get Ifetayo to get rid of it but he always found a good reason for him to stay. Gradually and grudgingly I had to accept that I was quite taken by the animal and he has been with us now for over three years!

I use this as an example of my expression of love of my son and to show how, by being there and being engaged with my son's world, my own education and understanding of the world was expanded. The more time I spent with the dog the more I questioned my belief that animals and humans were just fundamentally different. I saw so much similarity that it frightened me. Ife said to me that if I wanted to understand him think about the dog.