

30th Anniversary Benefit Luncheon

Anna Quindlen: Insights on Parenting

BY PAMELA AWAD

Having chronicled “Life in the Thirties,” Anna Quindlen tackled the issue of parenting in the millennium, after a fashion, before an audience gathered to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of Parents in Action. Speaking extemporaneously to the almost three hundred assembled guests at the University Club on Wednesday October 21st, Ms. Quindlen reflected on feminism and motherhood, our changing expectations of the world, and our children, a generational force on the edge of adulthood.

Barely taller than the podium, Ms. Quindlen, mother to three children in their early twenties, told many truths with a mix of humor and insight. The audience responded with laughter when she described the difficulty of trying to keep up with the Joneses, or in this case their children, whose mothers, “by the way, all lied. OK, I no longer believe in nine month olds who speak in full sentences.”

More poignantly, she ruminated on how “in the face of the enormous feminist revolution that has really transformed America during our lifetime we have experienced the phenomenon of manic motherhood.” A smile flickered across her face as she described Uber-mom’s exhaustion at the end of the day, “her life somewhere between the stations of the cross and a decathlon.” Motherhood became “professionalized,” she noted, and the quest for perfection resulted in frustration, a nagging fear of failure and a noticeable lack of humor. It’s hard “Being Perfect” (Random

Anna Quindlen is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and bestselling author. She has written novels, non-fiction books and two children’s books. She won the Pulitzer Prize for her nationally syndicated New York Times column, “Public and Private” and currently writes a column entitled, “The Last Word” every other week in Newsweek.

House 2005), particularly when many members of the opposite sex are perfectly happy “being adequate.”

What is the impact of this on our children? Well, both parent and child seem to be engaged in a quest for “a moment’s peace.” Ms. Quindlen and her family decided to forgo competitive sports on the weekends since their hearts weren’t really in it. She quipped, “in my religion, martyrs die.”

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And, according to Ms. Quindlen, perhaps the greatest generation is yet to be. Our children may have inherited a world vastly different from the one we did, but their expectations are different too. They are a savvy group, perhaps more aware than we that our “priorities need to be recalibrated and that ‘stuff’ is not salvation.” “Doing better” than the previous generation may in fact mean just that. By truly embracing ethnic and racial parity, gender equality and a genuine partnership between men and women, this group may become “the first generation in which young women no longer agonize over how to balance work and family, and young men stop thinking they will balance work and family by getting married.” It is possible our children will “assess themselves not in terms of their income but in terms of their spirit.”

This generation, which Ms. Quindlen describes as more tolerant, creative, relaxed and community service minded than their parents, might also be the most qualified to create the “next big thing.” Having long been bombarded with mixed messages, they may have figured out what really matters. They have avoided the pitfalls and may realize the promise of the women’s movement by avoiding stereotypes of masculinity and traditional femininity. “If the stiletto heel is an instrument of torture, and it is, a tie is nothing more

ANNA QUINDLEN CONTINUED

than a noose with a nice pattern,” she noted. Breaking with tradition may better allow our children the “courage to be themselves.” Ms. Quindlen makes the case that feminism has grown up along with our children, recognizing that “men are not the enemy,” and that boys and girls are equally valuable and vulnerable.

Although Ms. Quindlen spoke on behalf of Parents in Action, not mothers in action, a mother’s impact cannot be underestimated. And it is mothers who need to be forgiven their transgressions, which may include strongly encouraging the 4th grader to rewrite a paper using 8th grade vocabulary; or unwittingly transferring parental anxieties about SATs, college applications or even art projects to their children. We need to avoid “turning ‘motherdom’ into a series of annoying tasks and making it martyrdom.” Children will be who they are.

Ms. Quindlen ended on a most eloquent note. “My most incandescent memories of my own childhood are of making my mother laugh. My kids did the same for me. I hope and I pray that the good times are what they remember.”

Nobody says it better. ●

To read Anna Quindlen’s speech in its entirety, please go to our Web site: www.parentsinaction.org

PRESIDENT'S Letter

New Year, 2010

I love “beginnings.” They are a time of great hopefulness. With each New Year, we ring in a fresh set of resolutions and goals.

As our organization celebrates its 30th year, there are “new beginnings” as well as exciting opportunities. When I began my tenure as the new President of NYC-Parents In Action this past September, I was excited by both PIA’s goals and the opportunity to collaborate with a team of talented and interested parents. Now that it is January, we can reflect on what we have accomplished and what goals remain as we enter the New Year. As PIA is now fully “green,” we must rely on getting our message out online and by word of mouth. We invite you to log onto our Web site at www.parentsinaction.org to find out about upcoming events and the various ways you

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can become involved. Please think about friends who might be interested and share our information with them.

Looking Back:

It has been a busy fall for NYC-PIA. We were honored to present Anna Quindlen as the keynote speaker at our 30th Anniversary Benefit Luncheon, where she inspired over 300 supporters with her talk. Our first School Rep luncheon featured Dr. Jennifer Havens and Dr. Robert Feiguine who presented a provocative discussion on teens’ emotional health, touching upon the tough realities of teen drug and alcohol use. We at NYC-PIA believe that parents are integral to helping teens make healthy decisions when it comes to drugs and alcohol. Parents can support teens by talking openly about the dangers of alcohol and drug use, being present in a meaningful way when teens are socializing, and answering questions honestly, while not providing too much information



about the decisions we made as teens. After all, the drug and alcohol landscape that our teens face is far riskier than the one we may have experienced.

Our seminar on Internet safety provided a wealth of new information. I fear many think they have “heard it all before,” but the electronic world is changing at a breakneck pace. Our four experts spoke candidly on the risks and rewards of communication via social networking sites, offering specific advice for parents. They emphasized that “privacy settings do not work,” and further noted that the danger for kids who reveal themselves online grows exponentially as they mature socially.

Looking Forward:

January: Calling all Fathers!!! Drs. Ralph Lopez and George Lazarus will address the specific challenges and opportunities for Dads today at a special fathers-only evening event on January 12th. Please join PIA to learn from the experts and to share thoughts on parenting. It is sure to be a great event—I only wish I could go.

January will mark the kick-off of our online Community Forum, and will provide parents with a venue to comment on topical and interesting parenting issues. We’ll launch the Forum with topics focused on developmental variances during puberty and the growing business of test preparation. The Forum will be monitored, will not function in “real time,” and will respect the privacy of all. No individual names or school specific information will be posted. We hope this interactive site will offer parents a useful tool with which to share ideas and learn from one another. Watch our Web site for details.

February: Moms and Dads—please plan to join us for Teen Scene on February 8th. We are back at Trinity School with this year’s panel of New York City independent school teens, as they talk frankly about their academic and social lives.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER CONTINUED

This event is always a sellout, so RSVP now at seminars@parentsinaction.org.

April: We are often reminded that communication with our children begins when they are toddlers, so begin talking and listening early and often! Jeanette Friedman, Substance Abuse Educator/Consultant and a member of our advisory board, will speak about these issues at our next School Rep luncheon on April 28th. Please contact your School Rep if you are interested in attending.

All year: With over 250 ParentTalk facilitated discussion groups scheduled, our team of over 100 trained facilitators has been actively at work in your schools. These meetings are your chance to come together with other parents to learn, share and create a parent network. Thank you to those who have already participated, and thank you to the School Representatives in our 45 partner schools who are critical to maintaining an ongoing relationship with schools.

Thank you, also, to the many individuals and schools who contribute to our annual fund.

As always, we are very grateful for your gifts of support, as we rely on them to continue to bring to you our ParentTalks, publications and programs, all free of charge.

Finally, please let us know how NYC-PIA can support you as a New York City parent. Is there a speaker you'd like us to present or a particular topic you'd suggest for the Forum? If so, please tell us. We at PIA actively seek to foster a community of people who can share opportunities to listen and learn from one another. Your input will help us accomplish that goal.

Happy Beginnings to you and your children,

MARY BETH HARVEY

Introducing SCHOOLS UNITE NETWORK

Youth Safety Facts and Tips for Parents

By JILL LASHLEY GREENBAUM, Esq.

Picture yourself in the sandbox at your local playground with your not-quite-two-year-old daughter. It's a beautiful spring afternoon and there are several other small children with parents or caregivers, filling buckets and building castles. There is a gasp from the woman nearest you: her daughter has picked up a syringe! Suddenly an afternoon in the park is not so simple...

This happened to me, almost 18 years ago. I had already been uncomfortable seeing prostitutes on my lovely residential block late at night, as well as evidence of drug use on sidewalks in Riverside Park, but this was the proverbial "straw." From my first contact with our local police department, which supported my desire to rid my block and then my neighborhood of drug dealers and prostitutes, I had found my calling.

SUN disseminates current and timely information to subscribers, up to twice a week during the school year, and transmits "Special Alerts" when appropriate.

We incorporated the Police Liaison Group in 1993. Working with the police and community members, we found ways to improve the safety and quality of life of our neighborhood. Our most recent accomplishment has been the establishment of the Schools Unite Network, SUN, an interactive Internet-based network linking schools, parents, the police and community organizations to focus on safety for the children of our city.

In cooperation with the NYPD and other agencies, SUN disseminates current and timely information to subscribers, up to twice a week during the school year, and transmits "Special Alerts" when appropriate. We also provide "Confidential Alerts" to heads

Jill Lashley Greenbaum, Esq., is the founder and CEO of the Police Liaison Group, Inc., a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization, established in 1993.

The Schools Unite Network (SUN) is the major program developed and administered by the Police Liaison Group.

of schools upon request. There are thousands of parents from over 80 public and independent schools receiving alerts.

SUN receives reports from school administrators, parents, community members, non-profits and other organizations. Concerns submitted to SUN are rapidly relayed to the appropriate people in the NYPD for their action and assistance when applicable, on a confidential basis if desired.

Rumor: the "Bloods" are planning to slash 145 people near schools on Halloween.

This is an example of information we received in October 2009. But we had been pro-active: a few weeks earlier, SUN subscribers received a list of ten safety tips created by SUN and NYC Transit District 1 for parents to share with their teens when traveling around the city on Halloween.

In addition to this regular SUN Alert, heads of member schools received a confidential report with sensitive information to help protect their students and staff.

SUN's post-Halloween Alert answered the question on many parents' minds: what gang activity actually occurred in Manhattan on Halloween? The good news: according to the police, there were no gang incidents or any youth-related crimes reported in Manhattan that day.

The Alert went on to discuss strategies implemented by law enforcement, such as truancy sweeps, which help deter youth-related crime and yield unanticipated arrests, including those of a teenage girl wanted for a cell phone robbery, an unregistered sex offender who

YOUTH SAFETY CONTINUED

befriended a group of truants in Central Park, and an 18-year-old male with a loaded hand gun and 100 bags of marijuana in his backpack.

Rumor: a child was abducted at knife point on the Upper East Side on her way to school.

Concern reported by a subscriber: a man has been hanging around one of Manhattan's popular playgrounds, befriending children. Though no crime has been committed, could he be a pedophile or up to some other foul play?

Rumors and concerns such as these are quickly addressed by SUN in cooperation with law enforcement, and when necessary, through "Special Alert" to subscribers.

Because of our strict privacy policy, names of children and names of schools are never released in SUN Alerts or to the general public.

SUN is so effective in dispelling rumors and mobilizing the parent and school community when necessary, because all criminal activity and requests for information to help solve crimes are verified by the police before transmission.

SUN Alert: police are seeking information about a man wanted for the forcible touching of young boys on their way to or from school.

This Alert resulted in SUN's receipt of additional information reported by a victim's school, which was then provided to the police.

SUN also conducts safety conferences and workshops in cooperation with the NYPD; this fall we held one at Claremont Preparatory School and two at the 92nd Y, which were attended by more than 100 people representing over 50 public and private schools throughout Manhattan.



Schools Unite Network 'SUN'

by Police Liaison Group

5 Effective Ways to Protect Friends & Family

1. Report crime immediately to 911
2. To report to police anonymously through voice or text: 347-560-9110 or SUN's website SUNnyc.org
3. To help recover your cell/iPod if lost or stolen, register in NYPD's recovery program at SUNnyc.org
4. Don't talk/text in public. Go into a store or stand near a doorman.
5. Give up your property to a robber—it's not worth your safety.

Subscribe at SUNnyc.org for free safety alerts, maps and resources.

And, we are always available online. On our Web site, SUNnyc.org, you can report an incident or concern; read the latest alerts; register your cell phone and other electronics; find safety patrol maps with the locations and schedules of parent patrols, school crossing guards, and police-patrolled safe corridors; and get helpful suggestions and resources to help parents and schools in our goal of making New York as safe as it can possibly be for our children. ●

"Be Involved, Be Informed, Be Connected"
...with Schools Unite Network

Suicide: Facts for Parents

A Conversation with Dr. Igor Galynker

By SUSAN FISHER

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year olds, following accidents and violence. Statistically, more young people in this age group commit suicide than die of all illnesses combined.

Dr. Igor Galynker, Director for The Family Center for Bipolar Disorder and Director of the Division of Biological Psychiatry at Beth Israel Medical Center, has done extensive research on mood disorders and, in particular, suicide. “Suicide is not a thought. Many people think about suicide, it’s natural, but they don’t do it.” Rather, suicide is an impulsive act, a leap between thoughts and action. Dr. Galynker describes suicide as “illogical logic,” a “rational” approach to diminish pain.

Suicide happens in a “Trigger State,” which, according to Dr. Galynker, is an altered state of consciousness characterized by hopelessness, psychotic pain or a mental flooding that overtakes rational thought. Trigger states can occur anywhere from ten minutes to ten days before an actual suicide attempt. Dr. Galynker illustrates the impulsive and irrational behavior of potential suicides with the story of a young man, caught on the verge of jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. The young man parked his car, carefully crossed the highway to avoid being hit by oncoming traffic and proceeded to the bridge where he planned to jump to his death. The irony of trying to stay safe on his way to killing himself was lost to him, and illustrates the convoluted “logic” of suicides. This young man was not fixed on killing himself by jumping off a bridge; rather the story illustrates his impulsive and irrational behavior.

Suicide rarely occurs before adolescence and suicidal behavior manifests differently in boys than in girls.

Girls attempt suicide three times as often as boys yet boys are three times as likely to be successful. This results in a 3:1 boy to girl death rate. According to Dr. Galynker boys are more determined. They are generally set off by “narcissistic injuries”—pain caused by perceived failure that is exacerbated if the

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failure is public. “Failure” can include failing to measure up to parents’ expectations; getting expelled from school; being the victim of bullying, teasing, or being ostracized, or otherwise publicly humiliated. For girls, suicidal thoughts are often rooted in loneliness and isolation, leading to feelings of having no friends, having “friends” who reject them, being excluded from social activities, having empty weekends, and/or feeling needy with no one to turn to. Girls appear able to tolerate ambivalence to a greater degree than boys, simultaneously thinking suicidal thoughts while being aware of the pain they will cause their parents. In addition, girls are generally more changeable in their resolve; hence they exhibit three times more half-hearted attempts. Moreover, their methodology is different: girls tend to use pills and cutting while boys employ more violent methods, such as guns, car wrecks or jumping from windows. In simple terms, once boys are suicidal they are more determined and less likely to fail.

What do parents need to know?

- The biggest risk for suicide is a previous attempt.
- Suicide can happen in the presence of any serious mental illness, not just depression. Substance abuse; lack of social support; family history; family stress including divorce, emotional or physical abuse; even copycat behavior can contribute to suicidal actions.

SUICIDE: FACTS FOR PARENTS CONTINUED

"Children with serious suicidal ideation start withdrawing, they stop caring," says Dr. Galynker. This is a tremendous warning signal to parents.

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- Dropping grades, increasing social isolation, even flippant comments such as "I don't want to live anymore," are potentially serious warning signs that parents should investigate.
- Parents need to be mindful of their children at all stages of childhood. They should recognize that a happy child in middle school may become an unhappy adolescent in high school.

In conclusion, suicide can be considered a state of mind rather than solely a response to seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Working to change our perception of suicide bodes well for treatment of those with serious suicidal ideation. Therapies, including medications and cognitive behavioral therapy, can be very effective in reframing one's perspective on the present and future. Dr. Galynker tells the story of a man whose suicide attempt led to serious injury as well as the loss of his family and job; yet despite his more compromised life situation, he was no longer suicidal. It was always a state of mind. ●