

Chapter 2

They Cut Like a Knife

"Shelley, it looks like you are going to get the Mitchell (my maiden name) hips just like the rest of the girls in the family." That was my mother having a heart to heart with her ten-year-old daughter. She then proceeded to show me how to pound my hips up against the door frame to reduce them.

"Shelley, you were late to the campfire. Now you must go through the spanking line." This was my Girl Scout camp counselor, and I was thirteen years old. The girls made two lines, one on either side of me, and I had to crawl on my hands and knees between them while they spanked me.

The reason I was late? I had started my first period and made a mess of my clothing. I was feeling scared and alone being away from home as this rite of passage took place—and being spanked didn't help my uneasiness.

"Shelley, it looks like you are going to be the kind of girl who gets cellulite." That was my dance teacher speaking to me when I was fourteen years old. She had asked me to stay after class so she could fill me in on what she thought my body was going to do as I grew.

She then instructed me to scrub my legs really hard with my towel when I got out of the shower each day. She was confident that doing this would take care of the cellulite that she believed I would develop. I had no cellulite at the time.

"Shelley, I think you'll be much happier when you lose five more pounds." This was my mate of five years. I was thirty-four years old at the time and had a body fat percentage of eighteen. I stayed in this relationship for almost ten years before truly understanding just how toxic comments like these were to my well-being. I ended that relationship and moved on.

These are the four major conversations I can remember from my younger years that embedded themselves in my mind. I recall feeling quite insecure about my body in high school. I matured young. I was 5'7" in junior high. I started wearing a bra before my girlfriends (although they all surpassed me in that area!). In my mind, I was the big girl and I wanted to be the cute

little petite girl. After all, according to my dance teacher, I looked like the kind of girl who was going to get cellulite.

I look back now at my younger self and mourn the years that I wasted feeling this way. I should have been celebrating that fact that I had a healthy, strong body. Instead, I wasted time feeling unworthy because of words spoken to me that sunk deep into my soul, leaving me scarred.

Now that I'm sixty years old, I realize that those words were someone else's insecurities transferred over to a vibrant young lady. I didn't know better at the time not to take them on as my own insecurities.

Impressionable. That's what we are in our youth. *Impressionable*. Words spoken to us are taken to heart.

At forty-two, I met a man who celebrated my curves. So much so that when I lost a little weight, his comment to me was, "Not too much, babe. I love your curves." You can imagine my delight, but also my confusion.

All of my life, I've received opinions from others about how my body needed to look. Not from this man, though, so I took him off the market right away! We've been married eighteen years and during those years, I finally let myself off the body image hook. I've allowed myself the experience of feeling comfortable in my own skin.

Words. They can cut like a knife. "Speak without thinking, and your words can cut like a knife. Be wise, and your words can heal." (Proverbs 12:18)

I can hear her voice in my head just like it was yesterday. My mother was speaking with a friend she hadn't seen in quite some time. They were catching up with what had been going on with each other's families.

Let me give you a little background before I tell you what I overheard my mother say. I became a professional dancer at a very young age. When I was in high school, I traveled with a circus up the west coast of the United States and into Canada. I danced on Princess Cruises to Alaska and Mexico. I would travel for a while and then come back and get caught up with my schoolwork.

It was quite glamorous from the outside. A lot of work from my point of view, though, but I loved it. I loved being able to answer, "I'm a

professional dancer,” when someone asked me what my career aspirations were. My mother was so very proud of her young daughter being a professional dancer.

By the time my mother had that conversation with her long-lost friend, my dancing days were over (that’s another story!) and I had settled into work as a bank teller. Nothing glamorous about being a bank teller.

What I overheard my mother say to her friend as they were sharing about their kids was, “Oh, Shelley, she’s just a bank teller.” My heart sank. I was only twenty-one years old at the time, and that statement kicked me in my gut. My mom was so proud when I was a professional dancer, but now to her I was “just” a bank teller. In my mind, there was nothing good about being “just,” so I was no longer special.

Words. They can cut like a knife.

I’m not sharing these stories with you so you’ll feel sorry for me. Poor Shelley, she got all messed up by these people. No. I’m sharing these stories so that perhaps you’ll be thoughtful of the things you say, especially to a young person.

Words, good words or bad words, can mold who that young person becomes. As a mother and a father, it is your job to use your words to instill confidence in your children to help them become healthy adults.

In our relationships, it’s our job to speak kind, uplifting words to our mate, to our friends, to our siblings, to our coworkers. As an aware adult (I wasn’t always aware), I’ve become sensitive to my voice—what I say and how I say it. When I catch myself speaking with an edgy tone, I do an about-face and change my tone. If I don’t realize it until after I’ve spoken, I apologize.

I’m not saying everything is always going to be a bed of roses and you can’t speak your mind. I’m just saying to think before you speak. You’ve probably heard the saying, “You can catch more bees with honey than with vinegar.” It always pops into my mind when I have something difficult in front of me to deal with. As an adult, it has served me well. I tend to

approach issues with honey first. If I feel like I've fully used up the honey, only then does the vinegar come out!

In August 2019, I had surgery to have three goiters taken out of my throat. They were intertwined with my thyroid, so the doctor took half of my thyroid as well. I was informed ahead of the surgery that there was a possibility that my vocal cords could be damaged during surgery.

Those were scary words to hear. My passion is talking to my clients, as well as making videos for equipment training and for social media. Heck, just talking to my husband is a passion! I definitely did a lot of praying before that surgery.

The surgery went well, although it took two hours longer than anticipated. My poor husband was a bit frantic sitting (actually, pacing!) in the waiting room. It happened just like they said—they snipped one of my vocal cords.

I did not have a voice for seven weeks. It was exhausting to try and get my point across with nothing but a little squeak coming out. During that time, it came to me how much unimportant stuff we jabber about each day.

Because of it being so hard to say anything, I would really think before trying to speak. The words needed to be important before I expended the energy needed to get a sentence out. This was eye-opening. Perhaps we should all go a few days without being able to speak so we can make note of how much we jabber about nonsense.

One of my favorite books is *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. The first agreement is, "Be impeccable with your word." He states, "Your word is pure magic, and misuse of your word is black magic."

The spoken word is so powerful! I like the idea of being impeccable about each word coming out of our mouths—about giving some thought to what we are going to say before we blurt something out that we can't take back.

The second agreement in *The Four Agreements* is "Don't take anything personally," and the third agreement is, "Don't make assumptions." These two go hand in hand for me. How often do we assume the worst because

of our feelings? That motion picture going on in our head may not be even close to the truth. Because of our insecurities, we assume and we take things personally.

Back when I was a young professional dancer, I went to an audition for a show in Las Vegas (not a topless one!). The first thing they did was measure how tall I am. I'm 5'7." The height requirement was 5'9." I was booted out before I even got to show my dancing skills. As a young person, I didn't know better than to take that personally. It hurt. I was disappointed, and I'm sure I pouted about it for a few days!

I made the assumption that they didn't like me, and that started the motion picture of doubt to run wild in my head. But it wasn't the case at all. They had a requirement that I did not meet. Nothing personal. But I took it very personally!

It's not only the words that you speak to others that are important. The words that you tell yourself are equally important. In fact, maybe they are even more important, because the words you tell yourself can ultimately shape how you connect and/or react to others.

In your head you're saying, I could never do that thing, or I'm terrible at this thing, or I'm too old or too young for that thing. I'm not talented enough, or they would never choose me for that, or I'm not good enough for her/him, and on and on it goes in our head. Doubt. Insecurity. Feeling less than. We tend to conjure full-length motion pictures in our heads as to why we can't do something or why we are less than.

The bad part is that our brains cannot decipher what is real and not real. Our brains take our thoughts to heart. Our brains believe what we tell them. So, it's really quite simple. Start telling your brain how you prefer things to be instead of how you are feeling. Our feelings aren't always reality. They are emotions and as humans, we can get very caught up in our emotions.

When you begin to talk to yourself in a positive voice, keeping your inner dialogue focused on how you want things to be, you'll notice you begin to feel happier. When you are happy, you treat others differently. Then, in return, they treat you differently. Oh, my...it's fabulous!

We all know that being happy is not always easy, right? Remember that song by Bobby McFerrin, "Don't Worry, Be Happy"? I'm sure we all thought it was just a fun, peppy song, but I believe that Bobby was really onto something.

Happiness attracts happiness. Yet, people use so many excuses as to why they can't be happy today. They use excuses of debt, excuses of health, excuses of relationships, and excuses of all sorts of things as to why they can't use this simple formula.

I'll admit that I used to think that when my weight, my nails, my skin, and my hair all looked good at the same time, I would finally be happy. I can't recall one time in my life when all four of those things were perfect at the same time for more than a minute!

Staying happy and positive is the most important thing you can do for yourself. When you're feeling down or worried, don't get on the phone with a friend and *blah, blah, blah* about it. Don't even spend time telling yourself how bad it is!

Do whatever you have to do to feel better in that moment to get your mind off that negative movie in your head. Begin thinking more about how you want things to be than how they are at the moment. Speak words of encouragement to yourself just like you would speak to a friend.

I have a cute picture of my dogs on my computer's screensaver. Whenever I feel tension or I start to worry, I look at that picture. It makes me giggle every time I look at it. So, right then, I'm steering my thoughts toward the positive. Trust me, the more you do this, the less worry moments you will have.

Things will begin to change! No matter what the excuse, unless you begin to feel happy despite that excuse, you cannot attract happiness. Be happy now, and as long as you keep doing that, you will have more to be happy about.

Did your mom ever say this to you? "You had better watch your P's and Q's"? I didn't understand the power of that statement back then, but now I

realize what a very wise statement that truly is. So, let's all watch our P's and Q's and make this world a much better place.