**Reflective Journal**

**A Big Fall**

The first event I will describe is an accident that took place when I was about four years old. My friends Bridget and Linda, and I were playing “Ring Around the Roses” on the top of a derelict vehicle that was parked in Linda’s grandparents’ front yard. We held hands as we circled around the top of the car singing “ring around the roses…a-tish-a, a-tish-a, we all fall down”. As we parted hands to drop to the roof of the car, I was not aware of how close we all were to the edge, and I fell off the car roof and hit my forehead on a big rock that sat on the ground beside the car! I can remember the excitement as my grandmother came to my rescue and took me to her house nearby to apply a silverware knife (traditionally known as a case knife) to the spot on my forehead that I had hit. She of course was worried about what had happened to me, after having given me the freedom to jump around on the roof of a car, as soft-hearted grandparents sometimes do. I can remember the “guava” or bruise that mounted on my forehead in the minutes that followed, and being able to look up at the huge bump on my forehead by simply tilting my eyes upward. My mother took me to the hospital and I imagine that the doctor told her that I would be fine in a few weeks. That event was quite a scare for everyone involved, as the playtime was broken up and everyone in the vicinity rushed around to see what had happened to me!

I could have broken my neck or other bones in my body, but thankfully I hadn’t. It was quite a traumatic blow to my forehead, and my neck was likely affected as well. In the last twelve years or so I have experienced neck pain and tenderness in my forehead, which is probably due to the blow I experienced upon contact with the rock when I fell. I can live with the pain and the right posture helps. The situation could have most certainly been worse.

I sometimes think how my grandmother must have felt for having given me the freedom, and how it may have been through my own defiance that I remained playing on the car top and the thrill of jumping around up there, ended with such trauma.

The pain that I live with may not entirely be due to blow, it could also be due to changes in the neck area, and it entitles me to a massage every now and then, and that is nice!

I can say that I learned not to play on car tops anymore. It definitely gave me a lesson in caution. Now I also know that I can advise my children not to play on top of a car or anything of the sort, as I share the experience of my fall with them. I am also very thankful, as I could have been hurt much worse!

**My Friend Suzy**

For the sake of anonymity, I will use a fictitious name for my friend.

Suzy had arrived on the island to live with her grandmother a couple of months earlier. Suzy’s mother in Miami was a single mother who was struggling to raise her four children and she and Suzy’s grandmother had felt it would be best for Suzy to live in Grand Cayman with her grandmother for a few years. Suzy was about fourteen and I was around eleven years old. Suzy was a student at the Cayman Islands High School, which is now known as John Gray High School, and I attended school at the Cayman Islands Middle School but we rode on the same bus to school each morning as we lived in close proximity. Suzy was not unhappy with her grandmother but they lived in a small house with cramped surroundings. She had not asked me to stay at our house but I had felt a level of pity for her and asked my mother if she could come and stay with us. My mother approved, I told Suzy and she moved in with us!

Though my father tried to be there for the significant events in my life, my mother had always been there for me, and when Suzy came to live with us, I felt I had to share my mother’s affection with her. My mother’s attention was also diverted now, and instead of only having to share her with my then three year old brother, I now also had to share with another girl, who was older than me and was able to have conversations with my mother that I couldn’t. I felt that she enjoyed more of my mother’s attention. Once when my mother bought a dress for her, and I became jealous about the dress. Myself and another supportive, but mischievous friend, marked the dress with a highlighter marker, which was gladly washable.

Suzy was hurt but forgave my behavior because she understood how I must have felt to have to share my mother’s affection, attention and resources with another person. Instead of being angry at me, she is grateful to this day for my initial kindness in inviting her to live with us.

I had not given much consideration to the possible consequences or what might happen if a teenager came to live with us, but the experience taught me many valuable lessons. One lesson is that much responsibility comes along with having a teenager in the house, and my mother, who was probably aware of this, like me had felt pity on her and wanted to host her for a while. This experience also taught me something about myself in that when I was about six years old, I had also asked my mother if we could take a little girl who lived in similar circumstances. I had wanted her to enjoy a better living environment. We were not rich, but my mother always tried to give my brother and I a comfortable living environment. I must have a sharing, nurturing kind of personality that wants to see others comfortable, and this is manifested today in the way I would like to raise my own children.

I learned that it was not that Suzy enjoyed more of my mother’s attention than I did, but that my mother had had to give her a different kind of attention and that she could not ignore Suzy. I had to learn that I still enjoyed the majority of my mother’s energy and affection, but that jealousy and selfishness caused me to be blind to what my mother did for me and focus on what she did for Suzy. It was a difficult “pill to swallow” for an eleven year old whose main source of affection was being diverted. I had enjoyed being the only child for eight years and am my mother’s only daughter, so sharing her with an older child who could relate more at the time was quite a change in my life. Now I can look back at that particular time in my life and smile, but it was a difficult at the time.

It was a feeling of fulfillment to have helped Suzy to live in a more comfortable setting until she moved back to Miami to live with her mother. Learning from the experience as a daughter improves me as a person and mother myself because it showed me the feelings that can mount if given a similar situation. I can definitely advise my daughters and guide them in thinking over the consequences and responsibilities before they act, but that it’s great to be kind.

**My Trip to Costa Rica**

The next significant life event I will discuss is my trip to Costa Rica.

As I neared my undergraduate commencement exercises, I made arrangements for a trip to Costa Rica, in which I would live with a host family and take an intensive course in Spanish for one month, at the Intensa School. My host family was gladly the parents of one of my mother’s workmates and I somehow felt as though I was with family, because I could hardly understand a word they said and spoke to them even less.

The people in Costa Rica were very friendly, but my host family told me that one had to be careful when walking through the crowded streets of San Jose, because someone might want to steal from my backpack if it was on my back for example. Backpack in front, walking through San Jose I explored interesting buildings, street musicians, art, markets and culture. I had to take two buses to and from class each day, which necessitated going to bed by nine at night in order to wake up by 4:30 each morning. The people in Costa Rica as in most Latin countries traditionally go to bed early because they wake very early. One of my buses stopped in San Jose and I would catch the other to San Pedro, where Intensa was. Therefore, in the afternoons when I would take the bus back to San Jose I had time to explore the Capital for a while before catching the bus back to Pavas, where I stayed. I would stop and listen to the Incan musicians from Peru and browse the open-air markets for artifacts and little souvenirs.

In addition to the experience of travelling alone each day, my host family took me across the mountains to the pacific side of Costa Rica on a camping excursion. Everything, from the grill to the mosquitoes made it a great adventure.

I also went to a few shows at the theatres in San Jose that were beautiful. A friend took me across the mountains on the east side of Costa Rica to San Isidro Del General. The trip across the mountains was a breathtaking experience as I enjoyed picturesque views of the mountain side and the towns below. The journey back was very scary for me however. Night had fallen, and as we travelled through the clouds on which the headlights shone, I sat on the edge of my seat for almost the entire four hours until we started to descend from the clouds and San Jose was in sight. There were no guard rails and more than a few eighteen wheeler trucks with trailers had begged passage. It was a relief to say the least when we arrived back in Pavas that night. It had been a treacherous and very exciting journey. I also visited the Irazu volcano, which is still considered active today.

I had the opportunity to improve my ability to speak Spanish while exploring and learning about a very beautiful country, whose friendly people made it impeccable! I absolutely fell in love with Costa Rica and would probably go back some day. I almost wanted to live there or at least retire there! Of course I had my commitments at home in Cayman and it did not make sense to move to Costa Rica at the time. Thank goodness some of my adventurous spirit grew off of me! The trip to Costa Rica was very empowering as I did everything on my own and when I returned home I was able to speak Spanish fluently! I therefore learned about my ability to speak the language and that I really loved Spanish. Despite all that, I also learned that the world’s most beautiful beaches are in the Caribbean, and I can appreciate our white-sandy beaches even more. Costa Rica is beautiful but it’s still a difficult trade-off!

**The Birth of my First Child**

The next significant life event that I will discuss is the birth of my first child, and some of the events that followed. The birth, the feedings, the sleepless nights were all brand new experiences that came with this brand new “little bundle of joy” that I held my arms just minutes after she was born. The hours leading up to her arrival, though difficult, in retrospect, seemed to go by quickly. As the anxiety mounted, the moments before her arrival were as exciting as they were overwhelming! A new mother can read as many books as she would like, but nothing can really prepare her for the journey that lay ahead. She must now learn quickly. As she gets “hands-on experience”, she also formulates dreams that she would like to see fulfilled for this new little life that has been placed in her care.

Since I was an inexperienced feeder, I had not even realized that one could get a breast infection and the signs of one. So when I had to rush in to the emergency room at 4:00am with a fever so high that I could not stop shaking, it was only to find that I had also been losing blood over the prior five days since the birth and I needed blood! I was in the hospital for a couple of days and I continued to send milk home for the baby. I hardly had time to miss her as I was busy trying to keep her fed. The days and weeks that followed seem a blur, as I remained extremely busy trying to care for my baby daughter, I was taking antibiotics and the breast infection was not getting any better. I changed doctors and found out I would have to have a surgery to remove it. I still persevered to feed the baby, of course having learned that the milk was safe for her. Finally my new doctor said I should stop breastfeeding the baby and let myself get better. I would now have to put myself first for my own good and indirectly that of the baby, because only then could I get completely well to care for her.

The choice was difficult then, as I had hoped to breastfeed the baby for at least her first year and I was extremely disappointed that I would have to stop at six tender weeks! It was all part of the experience I was to have and I am now extremely grateful for it. The fever from the breast infection may have saved my life as my trip to the emergency room revealed that I was losing blood. I am glad that I was able to breastfeed her for six weeks almost exclusively, though painfully at times and it all served to make me stronger, aware and more cautious. The experience taught me the symptoms one should look out for when a breast infection could be coming on and I have been able to share that with others. Having had the experience I can empathize with a first time mother who is having a similar experience and now know that sometimes you have to stop and think about yourself, no matter how busy you are, as difficult and far-fetched as that may seem and be at the time. These events most certainly would not take place when the second child was born if I could help it, and she breastfed for sixteen months, along with her solid foods of course!

**Building Our First House**

The next big event in my life that I will talk about is building and moving in to our first house.

Building our first house was quite an experience. Of course we are unaware of all the intricacies that go in to building a house until we are faced with the monumental task ourselves. We learned as we went along, and fast, relying upon the guidance of those involved with the various aspects of building the house, from electrical and plumbing to tiling. We tried to associate ourselves with honest, reliable subcontractors, who had gained respect in their various areas of expertise for quality workmanship.

The experience I gained was priceless, as I was involved with every aspect of the building process, since we had chosen not to use a general contractor to build the house for us. We had heard one too many horror stories about people getting ripped-off by contractors who had spent all the available funds and were unable to finish the building. Much hard work went into making all the arrangements, as I arranged quotes from at least two of the best subcontractors for most major areas of the building. For some aspects the pricing process was not necessary as we had received recommendations that a particular subcontractor gave a good price, as well as having seen work that they had done, we knew we would receive superb value in terms of quality within a reasonable price. Then we dealt with the process of selecting which subcontractors would get the job. There was all the signing and explaining what we needed in terms of final product, from drawing the house plans and clearing the land, to selection of building materials, windows and doors, tiles, cabinetry and paint. Then I arranged to have the fence built and the yard landscaped. I actually carried materials like cement and many plants in my car for those two projects, courtesy of my faithful Ford Explorer.

After the initial eleven weeks that it took for the block-laying, I must say that I enjoyed the experience of building the house. Based upon the advice of someone who was more experienced than us, we had made the huge mistake of paying the workers who were laying the blocks, on a per diem basis. Whilst this may turn out best in some cases, the workers who the foreman had arranged on that job took advantage of the pay basis and were taking their time. The process began two weeks before we were scheduled to leave for a three week family vacation and the workers that had been “dragging their feet” during that initial two weeks, continued to do so after we left. So much so that the job that was expected to be just about complete by the time we got back from vacation, was not even half complete. Since we were inexperienced we did not know what to expect, and how slow they had really been. We probably were a bit naïve as to how dishonest these people that we trusted had really been. We also had tried to be understanding, giving them an extra week for four consecutive weeks, based upon the plea of the foreman. At that point we had to put our foot down and ask them how many more days they needed to complete the job. They replied that it would take three more days, and at that point I told them that that was as long as I would pay them for. I had to get serious or they would have probably taken another ten weeks. Fortunately we knew what a reasonable time frame for the block-laying to have been completed was. This had been a frustrating but growing experience.

I learned that I should have followed my mind in the first place and paid these workers by the number of blocks laid, that I have to trust my own intuition, even when someone else’s point seems more valid. I learned that I really enjoyed the building process as well as made some great relationships to draw upon if we should build again. I learned who we can trust and who we cannot. I also learned our preferences of materials and design. Therefore, if we should build again, I know much of what to expect, as I’m aware of many aspects of building, and the process should be at least, a little easier.