

Chapter One:
The Fine Art of Parenting



Meet Marley

Photo: Jennifer

DREAMSCAPE

Winds of Change

I was standing in a field of three foot high blue grass. A gentle breeze was making the tall, slender blades flow in wave-like patterns. Never in my wildest dreams had I seen grass that color of neon blue. The sound and sight of my surroundings took my breath away. I stood below the crystal clear pale blue sky, filled with a total sense of calm.

In an instant, clouds started forming in the distance, and before I knew what was happening, they began to rush toward me. The wind started blowing harder, creating a clearly defined path in the grass. The grass bent sideways like opposing waves, parting from the horizon to my feet. In the distance I saw a brilliant ball of light rolling down the path. It was coming at me with an incredible speed, but I couldn't move. I was frozen not only by the beauty of this ball of light, but by the growing intensity of my feelings. The closer it came, the more I was filled with a joy a thousand times more powerful than anything I knew.

I stretched my arms open wide as if to embrace the oncoming sphere, though it was far larger than I. When it was just a few feet away, I thought I was going to pop witnessing its indescribable beauty. I was overwhelmed with the most unusual feeling of being totally loved. As it engulfed me, it knocked me backward ever so gently, in a slow motion fall. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I was in a state of complete and unadulterated bliss. I was Home! And then it was dark.

A tear rolled from my right eye and landed in my ear. I awoke to find myself looking up at the rear dome light on the ceiling of my Suburban. I wiped the tear away and rolled my head to the left to see Rhys sleeping soundly next to me under a pile of down blankets. The dream came back to me and I wrapped my arms around myself and cried from the feeling of joy lost.

Why I was sleeping in the truck with Rhys? I sat up in a panic and looked out the window. My rig was parked in Drew's front yard. Drew was the father of my two children, Marley and Catie.

He and his wife Cindy had built the two-story white house I was blankly staring at. The dream was forgotten as reality hit me hard. Marley! My heart started beating fast, and it felt like I had been punched hard in the solar plexus.

Was this really real or was I in another dream? How could I go from feeling so undeniably full to so incredibly empty so fast? Marley? Why wasn't I with Marley? And then I remembered the night before. I was not by his side because my beautiful son had died six hours earlier. I slumped forward, sitting in my nest of blankets and put my head in my hands. Oh God! Was it really true?

I quietly slipped on my shorts and T-shirt. I didn't want to wake Rhys, but I needed to go be with Marley. I gently kicked the back door open and crawled out of the Suburban. It was 5 A.M. on a cool, clear summer morning. A slight breeze was blowing through the tall green grass of the hayfields surrounding the house. The silence was deafening. It was too early for the birds. The three cow dogs weren't even awake yet. In my bare feet, I quietly walked up the steps of the front porch and snuck in the front door. No one was stirring anywhere in the house.

I walked through the living room and past the kitchen. In the hall, a candle was still burning outside of Marley's bedroom. I slowly opened the door and saw his body. He was lying face up, looking as if he were just resting. I froze. I held my breath and watched his chest for any movement. The lace curtains, gently flapping in the breeze, were the only things moving. I wrapped my arms around myself for support and just stood there. My boy was dead.

Then the feeling of the dream came back and I started to cry, feeling the joy that must have been his when he died. He was free! He was now free to ride the world's largest ATV through the thickest mud ever. He could ride his horse again and soar over the highest jumps on his bike. He was free to ride anything he wanted for as long as he wanted without any pain or worries.

I wiped my tears away and looked around. I saw Drew through the lace-covered windows, wandering, as if lost, in the field just

outside Marley's room. Drew's guitar was propped against the wall next to Marley's bed. Laying on the floor next to it was the book he kept his sheet music in. I had made that book for Drew eighteen years before, and it still had the same black-and-white photo of Marley on the cover. I knew he must have been quietly singing to Marley in the pre-dawn hours. My heart melted for Drew's pain—our firstborn was gone.

It was my turn to sit with Marley. I went to the closet and retrieved my sketch pad and pencil. I spent the next hour looking at Marley—really looking at Marley—the way I do only when drawing things. I thought I knew every molecule of Marley—every curve, scar, and line—but I was to learn how every one of his eyebrow hairs touched the next, and I felt the curves of his lips through the tip of my pencil. During that precious time alone with my son's face, I was in a state of grace. His eyes were slightly open, and within them, I glimpsed another world.

I knew I was recording this special day in a way no photograph could capture. Because I was looking at him so intensely, I was able to notice the minute movements of his torso. Even six hours after death, the muscles were still relaxing, gases traveling up while gravity was pulling his blood down. They were the micro-movements of watching bamboo grow—but much slower, and more subtle than watching the moon slide over the crest of a mountain.

Drew started prowling closer. I knew he wanted more time with Marley's body. I tapped on the window to tell him I was ready. I stood next to the bed looking down at my 18-year-old son, lying naked under his favorite John Deere blanket, wearing the colorful necklace his Uncle Jay had made for him. His long arms were folded across his chest. He looked so peaceful.

Drew entered the room, looking hollow. I wished I could give him my dream to hold on to. He sat down and just stared at Marley's body. As I passed him to leave, I put my hand on his shoulder and remembered first meeting him and all the training we had done in preparation for this moment.

A GLINT IN MAMA'S EYE

Desert Songs

In 1981, Drew and I met in Marin County, California, while working together at Rites of Passage, Inc. Drew and I lived and worked together for four years, guiding monthly groups of youths and adults to the desert wilderness to mark various life transitions. These rite-of-passage experiences included a three-day solo while fasting. Watching hundreds of people face their fears was awesome work. We loved teaching people how to survive alone in the wilderness and witnessing what happened when people relied on their intuition, trusting the lessons that the natural world offered.

Drew and I learned how to let people face the consequences of their own choices. We also learned how important it is to listen to the guide within ourselves. Even though we loved what we did and had no intelligent reason to stop, we knew in our guts that it was time to focus on something new. Just what exactly, we didn't know. We just had to trust. So in the spring of 1984, we prepared to resigned.

*“We are driven toward a higher perfection as surely as
the sun pulls the life in the seed toward its light.”*

—Gloria Karpinski

One of our last trips was leading a group of high school seniors that were marking their passage from children to adults. It was a church group that wanted to do something important together, something dangerous and memorable as they prepared to go out into the world. It was evening when we arrived in a magical desert canyon and set up base camp. The following morning, each teenager picked a direction to explore in order to find their solo spot. They paired up with whoever was going in their direction while Drew and I stayed in base camp.

Hours after the six pairs of kids had left base camp and the hot desert sun warmed the surface of the earth, hordes of baby rattlesnakes started venturing out of their dens. They were every-

where! We knew this was very special—never before had we experienced this—tarantula migrations, yes, but not this. We could only hope the kids would remember what they had been taught: to walk in balance, and to be hyper-aware of the world around them. That evening we all agreed to continue the trip as planned, though many of them had encountered the snakes as well. The following morning, we said good-bye to the kids as they left us to start their three-day solos. We had taught them all we could. It was time to let them discover their inner teachers.

As dawn broke the next morning, Drew and I made love. Snuggling afterwards, we noticed a six-inch baby rattlesnake curled up very close to our sleeping bags, under a nearby bush. We weren't afraid—we knew enough about snakes to be able to lie there together and observe its miniature beauty. That was the morning Marley was conceived.

Watching the Grass Grow

Before the tests could be accurate, I knew I was pregnant. The timing was perfect to start spending more time at home. Thankfully, we had the means to survive without needing jobs. As an adult orphan, I had inherited some money, which allowed me to focus on the grass growing, flies buzzing, clouds changing, and my ever-growing belly. Drew was a luthier (a maker of stringed instruments), and worked at home.

I spent those nine months focusing on the changes within, meditating, and writing to our unborn baby, who we called “Cosmo.” It was a very sweet, calm time for Drew and me. It was an unforgettable rite of passage for one of the most monumental transitions of our lives—becoming parents.

*“Unless one says good-bye to what one loves,
and unless one travels to completely new territories,
one can expect merely a long wearing away of oneself
and an eventual extinction.”*

—Jean Dubuffet

Written by me, two weeks before Marley
(AKA “Cosmo”) was born
January 17, 1985

PARENTAL INTENTIONS

Dear Cosmo,

It is my intention to love you unconditionally throughout this life. There will inevitably be times of closeness and separateness, but always I will love you as I love myself.

It is my intention to be aware of your individual needs in order to manifest your total Self. This awareness will help me to be able to guide you toward the path you have chosen so *you* can acquire the knowledge you desire. I will not try to make you see the world through my purpose.

As your parent, it is my intention never to lie to you. I will do my best to be there for you when you need me to support you in the most helpful way.

It is my intention to be a good mother deserving of your choice, as one who will be able to provide you with many of the tools you will need to live a full and meaningful life.

I simply wish to love you and to be able to receive love from you.

Thank you, my little one, for choosing us; it has changed me considerably already.

Peace unto you, child,
Jennifer

***“The future belongs to those who
believe in the beauty of their dreams.”***

—Eleanor Roosevelt

IGNORANCE IS BLISS

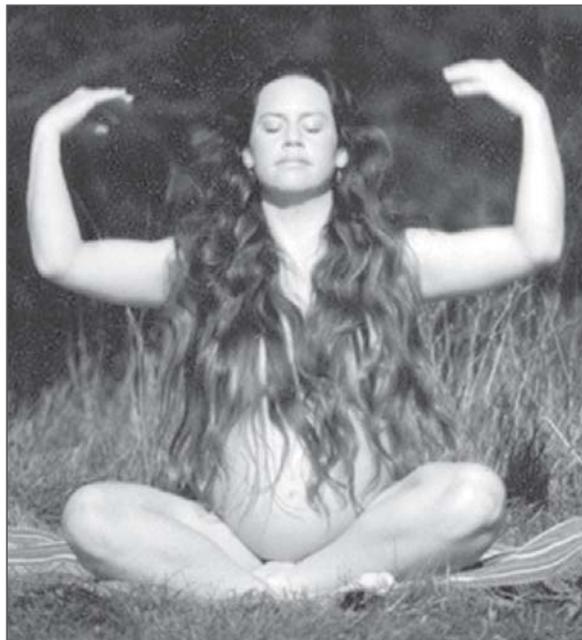
Cosmic Education

The way I figure it, babies begin as cosmic beings, ready for rebirth, that hover around connecting couples. They are busy scanning potential human parents that will provide them with the circumstances for their continued growth as a soul. I've felt them during times of lovemaking, some gently knocking on my door asking if I'm ready and willing, politely waiting for the answer, and some with the gentleness of a bulldozer, not caring what I had to say about anything. Marley was of the bulldozer variety.

“Grown-ups never understand anything for themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince*

When I got pregnant, it felt like this child had chosen Drew and me whether we were ready or not. We didn't feel prepared to enter the world of parenting but, Marley was right, we were ready. I spent those nine months of pregnancy devouring books about birthing and parenting. Marley was overdue, I was tired of being pregnant, and I was getting impatient. I was completely oblivious of what I would face. Ignorance can be bliss—without it, far fewer children would be born!



Yours truly, nine months pregnant.

Photo: Drew Pratt

THE BIRTH OF A STAR

Home Sweet Home

On February 6th, 1985, Marley Jacob Pratt was born at 11:15 P.M. Where Marley was to be born was never questioned. Home is where the heart is; besides, I had never been in a hospital. I had watched both of my parents die at home, and I had watched two of my nephews being birthed at home. To us, it didn't make sense to go to a hospital to do what people have been doing at home for centuries.

At two in the afternoon, a member of our birthing team (two midwives and a doctor) came to check on my dilation. She asked us if we had everything ready. "Yes, Ma'am! Triple checked and ready for action!" She examined me, rolled her eyes upward, said we had plenty of time, and left. Ugggh! We were bored of being excited, so we took a nap.

When we woke up, the wind was starting to howl; a storm was brewing. Our house was built halfway up a steep ravine, among towering ponderosa and redwood trees. Being in that house during a storm was something both Drew and I always liked. The view from our downstairs bedroom was of massive tree trunks, just feet from the windows, slowly swaying, which gave the eerie impression that the whole house was moving.

The Cosmo Cometh

We waited until the last minute to call the midwives again. We didn't want them to drive so far just to wave a hand and say, "You've got plenty of time!" Unfortunately, we didn't consider how the storm would slow them down.

The final labor stages lasted only a few minutes, and the doctor arrived just seconds before Marley burst forth. From my perspective, it seemed like Marley thought it would be really cool to see if he could fly to the opposite wall. After our slimy newborn was resting on my chest, the doctor made some comment about adding a catcher's mitt to his medical kit. This was the method of living that Marley would adhere to for the rest of his days; he

would take his sweet time until he knew he was sure of the situation, and then he'd forget the brakes and go full tilt boogy.

Transitions

As soon as Marley arrived, it occurred to me that nine and a half months wasn't enough time to prepare. Caring for a colicky newborn first child is, in my opinion, the most exhausting, selfless act a person can do (although caring for the dying is a very close second).

From the beginning, Marley had a voracious appetite that kept me busier than I had ever been in my life. He never did break the habit of gulping air when he drank—whether it was milk from my breast or Mountain Dew from a can. By the time he was eighteen, he had perfected belching and farting as an art form.

My favorite memory of Marley's first week: Him lying on my chest while soaking in our big claw foot bathtub, watching the trees sway in the February winds. It had been a long night and the bath was our relief; a warm, watery sanctuary that was salve for the war wounds of no sleep, clothes soaked with breast milk, and the frustration of not understanding my newborn's language.

Marley was relaxed and happy for the first time in hours. So relaxed, in fact, he finally released all of the milky food and gaseous glory that had been tormenting him. Unfortunately, it did not come in the form of a benign belch—this was the stuff nightmares are made of and plants thrive on. Once past the brief state of shock, I called for Drew's assistance. He entered the bathroom, made a face like one of those old ladies made from a dried apple, and said, "Jesus H. Christ! What happened?" I was surrounded by a thick film of yellow-orange oily curds—Marley had taken a crap. All we could do was laugh and start the bath over again. From the beginning, this child was my instructor in patience, humor, unconditional loving, and perseverance.

"A weed is no more than a flower in disguise."

—James Russell Lowell

MAKING THE MOVE

Retreating Home

When Marley was six months old, we moved to Ashland, Oregon. Within two days of our first visit to this town, we bought five acres of wild land, complete with a two-room rustic cabin, running water, but no electricity.

The morning after we arrived at our little cabin, Drew unloaded the moving van while I took a break to change Marley's wet diaper. It was a chilly June morning, so I was kneeling in front of the wood stove with Marley on the floor. In a whoosh of energy, a hot coal leapt out of the stove and landed right in Marley's belly button. I grabbed it within a quarter second and was lifting my screaming baby as I heard a car door slam and Drew exclaim, "You're the last person I expected to see!" Seconds later, my sister Constant found me amid stacks of boxes, soothing Marley.

One year earlier, Constant had begun a spiritual sabbatical to end old patterns. This included not associating with family. We were very close friends, as well as sisters, so this was difficult. She even missed the birth of her nephew. I wasn't aware that her retreat had ended—or that she had moved to Ashland just two days before we did.

Both of us had followed our intuition, guided by our meditations, and had landed in the same town just days apart. Constant had come to tell me that our 21-year-old nephew, Sean, had died in an auto accident. We hugged and cried and then hugged some more and laughed at the bizarre circumstances.

Both of my parents had already died, but this was the first accidental death I had experienced. I was not prepared for the shock of disbelief. I was stunned. I swayed in my rocking chair, holding my own boy-child as close as possible, unable to comprehend what my brother Ric, his wife Mollie, and their other son Charlie were feeling. All I could feel was the dark void of the space that Sean once consumed. I felt hollow.

For months, I felt guilty that I had a baby to cuddle and love while Ric and Mollie were suffering the loss of their youngest. As

cruel as it felt, I knew this kind of pain was nature's way. It was no use shaking my clenched fists angrily at the heavens for stealing Sean so quickly and so young. I knew there was absolutely nothing I could do to mend the hearts of those he left behind.

“Whom the gods love dies young.”

—Menander

Big Boy Toys

My way of healing was to share my memories of Sean with my towheaded son. I would poke Marley's belly button with my finger as I told him about Sean's love for fast cars, motorcycles, and snowmobiles. As Marley grew, I wondered how those stories influenced him.

From the minute Marley could manipulate his hands, his choice of toy had wheels on it. If it went fast, especially if it went fast loudly, it was sure to please the boy. Sometimes I thought Marley picked the wrong parent. My brothers, Tip and Ric, lived to win races and crash cars. I simply didn't inherit that go-fast gene. Marley had only met my brothers once, but he felt a kinship for their ways—their need for speed, their love of hunting, and their bountiful acquisition of all large toys.

Marley's dad liked snow skiing, surfing, and other water sports, but Drew was never into racing motorcycles or snowmobiles, demolition derbies, hunting, or monster trucks. Marley's desire for these things certainly didn't come from me or anyone Drew and I were hanging around with—a bunch of tree-hugging dirt worshippers.

By the time he was two years old, I knew moving to the country was one of the smartest things Drew and I had ever done. Marley was on a path of his own, one that had to be honored. I am thankful I had Ric and Tip as reference points for this diehard mentality, and always hoped the spirit of Sean would help keep Marley safe.

Written by me when Marley was almost three years old
December 12, 1987

NO WORRIES!

Dearest Marley,

My little one, do you have a fever still? You're so sick and cuddly. It's a shame when you are zapped of energy but I secretly adore the way you love me when you're feelin' bad. You cuddle so close and need me so much, it feels like we want to crawl so near that we swallow each other's love and become one. Thank you for letting me love you so completely. You are the only one I've known in my life brave enough to let me love you fully, the way I've dreamed of one soul melding with another. You actually allow me in.

I don't know, sometimes I feel I'm normal enough, but other times, I question my parenting skills and my ability to pretend to act like other people do. You never question me. I don't question you. You're still not talking. Everyone says it's because you don't have to. They say it's because I know what you're saying non-verbally and I don't MAKE you say it. Hogwash!

You're still nursing at dawn and at nap time, and I'm not gonna do diddly squat about it. You like the grounding and I like being close to you. So there! Drew seems to be fine with everything, so I'm not too worried. God, I hope you're "normal" when you're grown. I'm bucking the system, and I hope my instinctive courage pays off with a well adjusted, flexible, loving, self-assured, independent man.

I'll pray for you. Will you pray for me? We need all the help we can get.

I love you, child,
Mom

THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS

No Fear

Being cautious was not one of Marley's priorities. I don't think the concept existed in his reality. He seemed to have the impression that he could take care of any situation he got himself into. He could—most of the time—but it sure scared those of us responsible for him.

For instance, when he was almost two years old, he pulled a stunt I'll never forget. Drew and I were on the barn roof, nailing down the plywood. We looked over the edge of the roof to check on Marley, playing in his sand pile, but he was nowhere to be seen. Drew and I called for him just as he popped his little bleach-blond head up over the edge of the roof, making one of his classic "here I am" sounds. We froze and held our breath in fear: He was at the very top of a 22-foot ladder! Trying to remain calm, we slid down the roof towards him before he could make a move. He didn't think there was anything wrong—he was simply investigating what we were doing up on the roof! I could feel my grey hairs growing.

Marley was adventurous and competent...well, 95 percent of the time. He had gained our trust over the years and was given a long leash to explore our wild world. He was self-sufficient and incredibly creative. He lost a lot of tools and buried a lot of toys, but he entertained himself well and generally stayed out of trouble. I'm focusing on the five percent of mishaps, because they're notable times, and I learned what made Marley tick and how he handled adversity.

His first minor accident happened when he was two. Running while carrying a stick, he tripped and jammed one end of the stick up into the roof of his mouth. It was a clean U-shaped cut, but it bled profusely. As I picked him up to carry him to the house, I felt the warmth of his blood coat my back in wetness. The only thing I could think to do was slide a popsicle up into the hole left by the stick. This stopped the bleeding, numbed the pain, and held the flap of skin in its proper place while the blood clotted. He was

brave, very brave, faithfully following my instructions on how to stay calm.

His second accident happened when he fell off our slide while speed-sliding, dislocating his foot. This only slowed him down for a few frustrating days. He had an unusually high pain tolerance and healed remarkably fast. He mended with a speed that made us wonder what planet he hailed from.

Under Pressure

I spanked Marley twice in his life. Both times for the same crime: playing with fire. It's ironic that firefighting was the profession he later chose. His first experience was at three years old. It was in the wee hours of dawn, before Drew and I woke. He decided to while away the early morning hours building a small fire with twigs. The only problem was he chose to do this four feet away from the 500-gallon propane tank.

Drew and I woke up identifying the smell of wood smoke wafting in through the open windows. Fire is something we feared, living in the dry woods of southern Oregon. We levitated from our dreamy states and were dressed and ready for action in seconds flat.

His little fire had started to spread, igniting the very dry grass nearby. Marley knew the fire was out of control and was already at the scene, armed with the garden hose. To Marley's dismay, the hose was three feet shy of reaching the fire and our limited water pressure didn't help. (Urinating on the fire would have been more effective.) In the end, all was well—no explosions or forest fires.



Marley—instigating a water fight!

The Butterfly Effect

RICH MEMORIES OF MARLEY

by Llyn Peabody

I loved the summers I lived with Jennifer and Drew, helping them parent Marley. Who was actually parenting whom, I'll never know. In my mind's eye, I see his wide smile that seemed a size or two too large for his grinning face. He was always such a special and unusual being. I felt special just by being associated with him.

I loved watching Marley tackle learning to walk on the rough, uneven surface of the land they called Light Haven. And how, even before he was four years old, he could out-hike most city-adults. He navigated the land around Light Haven with an ease and confidence that belied his years. I have happy memories of water fights around and *IN* the house, and of Marley's mischievous delight in instigating these wild times. Even as a little kid, he was so good at reminding all of us "grown-ups" to have fun and not take life too seriously!

As he grew older, Marley gave me the gift of feeling loved by a teenager. I have always felt shy to reach out physically or emotionally to teenagers, figuring that they would reject my overtures. Marley took care of that by being the initiator. He brought me into his world—openly, lovingly, and with great confidence. Because of him, I've had more courage to connect with other teens in my life.

He was always a go-getter. Always pushing the boundaries. Always doing things his own way. And yet, he had this dear, dear sweetness that seemed otherworldly—dare I say, angelic? I guess we only got to borrow him for a short time. Perhaps he was on loan to us to remind us of the preciousness and brevity of our time here on Earth—to remind us to be clear in our priorities, because none of us ever know how much time we've got.