

Human Nature

“Honey can you please take the dish out the oven?” Paloma asked. I was delighted she had prepared my favorite dish. My mother told me that my great grandmother had actually taught her how to make it before they moved to this country.

Now my lovely wife knew how to make an exact replica. But then again, she is an excellent cook who has converted many of her colleagues to cooking her own national dishes. Yes, this is a wonderful country, so many nations leaving peacefully together. This morning when I was reading the wireless news projections on my kitchen wall, I came across an article that stated that the latest census revealed that 60% of people living in this country are the 6th and older generation of overseas immigrants. This is a wonderful peaceful multicultural country and I’m very proud the non violence revolution took place right here so many years ago.

“Dad look at this,” my 12-year-old son Alex interrupted my thoughts by shouting excitedly. “I have got an old age Compact Disc from the Leisure Centre today after school. Can you get me the old Personal Computer you inherited from great grandfather? I think you said that you still have it in the attic and you would show me how it works.”

“Please let me have a look at that,” I said.

Alex handed me the Compact Disc. It has been a while since I held one of these in my hand. The ones my great grandfather left me had digital images of family moments and were all filed neatly in a CD-bag. I felt very proud that I inherited those. But this compact disc came with a plastic case, which had a cover of the game description. I couldn’t believe my eyes. The picture had captivated me in a blink of a moment. It was an image of a person that looked a bit like a correction officer but he was holding an actual weapon that I remember from my great grandfather’s photo from the time he was a police officer, as that’s what they used to call them before. Those photos of my great grandfather were meant to be destroyed, but since my own father had still cherished all memories of his own grand father, he didn’t find the courage to burn the photos and wanted to keep all he had from him.

The furiously looking person on the cover was shooting at someone in front of him. I felt anguish just looking at the violent scene, my stomach was in stiches and I felt a sudden onset of weakness. I wasn’t sure how to react.

All kind of questions were racing through my mind as interconnecting electrical wires, one leading to the next. *Was someone playing a trick on Alex? Was Alex telling him the truth about how he got this Compact Disc? Alex should have known better than bringing this into their home, didn't he?* We have been educating the children on the importance of abstention from violence and aggression that will maintain the peace in life in a world that has been achieved after the revolution. I thought by the age of 12, my son would have realized that the responsible action would be to return this historical sample and ask for it to be destroyed. Yet he was there in front of me starring and awaiting a confirmative answer.

The books on teaching children abstention from violence that Paloma and I read when Alex was still in diapers, had warned us that there will be many encounters with aggression and violence and parenthood involves persistence in conveying the message of Dalai Lama to the next generation. It wouldn't be easy and it will test the belief of many parents but one had to persevere is what the author of *"Parenthood in the year New Century"* stated. I didn't even look at Alex as my gaze was focused on the object with the violent image, while I managed to ask "Where did you find this again?"

"I told you daddy, at the Leisure Centre in town. It was in the nostalgic sale section. There were other Compact Discs there too but those were movies and on this one it said it was a game. So can we play it together?"

"No Alex!" My voice must have reached the first alarming margin of aggressive tone as the ferocity alarm started beeping and just as I had learned from early age on the sound of the first alarm, I took 10 long breaths in and out to calm my voice and not enter into second stage of the alarming zone that could lead to higher ferocity, aggression and ultimately violence.

After my calming breathing exercises, I regained my composed voice and now being able to look Alex in the eye I proceeded to explain. "We can't play this or keep it in our possession Alex, it's a violent game and you know that's forbidden."

"But daddy," Alex whispered sadly, "They wouldn't have sold it to me if we are not allowed to have it."

"It must be some terrible mistake. I will return it first thing in the morning. I'm sure they will destroy it the moment they see it," I said and asked Alex to please finish his homework and go to bed on time.

The look in Alex's eyes changed from a child-pleading look to an angry look. I opened the palm of my hand so he can hand me the Compact Disc but he refused. "I will not return something I paid for with my allowance money for them to destroy it. I want to keep it."

I continued in the gentlest voice I could "This game is outlawed," and I gripped the item in his hand. Alex snatched it and exclaimed "It's mine!" The alarm started again. My wife came to intervene. "Alex it's time for you to go to our meditation room and after composing yourself, you are welcome to come and we can explain the situation further." You are now entering an alarming state in which you can't grasp your parents' educational messages. The ferocity alarm and his mothers talk had an immediate impact and Alex slowly waked away heading to our meditation room.

Paloma gave me a warm hug and reassured that it will be ok.

I placed the Compact Disc in my workbag and closed it, after which I helped her with the rest of the dishes.

Later in the evening I lay in bed thinking about the violent game and the picture of a policeman shooting with a weapon. I think that specific one was called a gun. We have been taught by parents and teacher to plainly not show any interest whatsoever in violence and aggression but I found myself entertaining the thought of wanting to see the kind of game that had been played by kids pre-revolution. *What is it that makes us crave to know more about something we know is terrible?* It's like when there is accident on the news one is intrigued to see all the gore details even though we don't even want to think about the possibility of something like that happening to us.

I just couldn't get the violent image out of my mind and started wandering if my great grandfather would have ever been in a position that he had to shoot a person. *What kind of person would choose a job where in order to sort problems you would need a device that could take someone's life?* I always felt grateful for living in this century. 60 years of non-violence has just been celebrated in the world. It's hard to imagine what life would have been before the great revolution lead by followers of the 15th Dalai Lama. I always pondered at the possibility that we might have gone overboard with regulations such as ferocity alarms and meditation rooms being part of building standards. *Was it really part of human nature to show aggression and use it towards our fellow humans? Do we have to be forced to calm down? Couldn't we just let some steam the way*

we liked to? My wife's grandfather used to teach kickboxing before the revolution and now none of that was possible even if he had only thought it for recreational and fitness purposes.

It was late. I needed to go to sleep so that I wouldn't feel tired and grumpy at work tomorrow. Based on Paloma's pattern of breathing I gathered she was already asleep. I turned off the bedside light and spooned next to her.

Questions and thoughts like *Did I explain myself clearly to Alex today?* and *I shouldn't forbid something without him realizing why it's forbidden* kept keeping me awake. We all know that prohibiting something without explanation can make it more attractive. That's not what I wanted. I needed to see the game and maybe even show to him why he would never like to play it.

I snuck out of bed carefully as not to wake her up, and then went to the attic. The old Personal Computer was still set up since the time I watched the old family images that granddad had saved. I pressed the eject button and it opened the large space for the memory tool. I placed the Compact Disc and waited. The image of an angry policeman appeared on screen. Only his face was shown but the viciousness in his eyes gave and insight in was to follow.

After going through the necessary steps of selecting a character and so on, there was an introduction to the storyline.

The game started off with a man waking up in an interrogation room, strapped to a chair that electrocutes him. As I progressed in the game, I witnessed such violent, bloody and gore scenes as never seen in my life.

It was definitely convincing me that my first plan to take the game back was the right thing to do. There is no need for Alex to see this. His developing mind will struggle with the scenes and might even give him nightmares.

I went back to bed and being so tired fell asleep quickly this time.

The next morning on my way to work I drove to the Council's Leisure Centre.

As I parked my car, I noticed that the surrounding looked different. I couldn't put my figure on exactly what had changed, as I hadn't been there in ages.

I walked out of the car and towards the building. I did at that point notice that the statue of Gandhi that I remember as being in the center of the oval plaza wasn't there. Instead it was just a grassed

area with flowers. *How could the statue have been removed and no trace of where it was could be seen?* I thought to myself.

I remembered writing an essay about Gandhi in school and on the cover I had a photo of that particular statue with the plaque in front of it and his memorable saying “*An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.*”

— *Mahatma Gandhi.*

It was definitely strange that it wasn't there anymore, as I hadn't even read in the news that Council intended to restore it, let alone remove it.

I walked towards the entrance and was quite perplexed to see an old sign on the door with the word “*Library*” on it. We hadn't had any libraries since granddad's time. It had been decided years ago that the service the center provided extended far more than the word “*library*” covered and they were re-named to “*Leisure Centre*”.

The automatic door opened and I walked in. Everything looked different than I remembered but I couldn't care less about these changes and proceeded in a hurry to return the item as I was going to be late for work.

I couldn't find Mrs. Wong behind the counter and all the customer service staff had unfamiliar faces.

I explained briefly to the lady who asked me how she could help me, that my son had found an old item with violent contents in the Centre and that I wanted to fill the ‘request to destroy form’.

“Excuse me” the lady frowned and moved the face closer as though she hadn't heard me correctly. “Which form?” she questioned.

“This item needs to be destroyed,” I explained and showed her the cover briefly. I wanted to make sure there were no children around to see what was on it, so after she glanced at it I covered it with my bag.

She frowned again at my deed and opened the palm of her hand so I could give her the item.

She looked at the cover and inspected the inside disc and said bluntly “If you give me your library card, I'll take it off your borrowings list.”

“But you don't understand, my son bought it but it needs to be destroyed. We can't have something like this in the open for children to buy. It must have been accidentally missed when all the others were destroyed.”

“Mister, I understand you don’t like the game. That’s fine, but we can’t destroy library items. This one is clearly marked MA and there is a note on it to say it includes strong violence. If you don’t want your son borrowing these items you can tell him to choose PG rated games only. We do not destroy items on request of customers.”

What’s wrong with this woman? I thought. I looked around to find anyone I knew but by now I had drawn attention of other staff who were staring at me and none of them looked familiar.

“Can I please speak to the Manger?”

“The Manager is at a meeting, but she would tell you the same thing as I just did as that is our policy. I’m happy to take the item off your son’s card and show you where our PG games are located,” she insisted.

I looked at my watch and I had only 10 minutes to arrive to work. I was going to be late. The traffic was horrible on the way here. I decided to come back in the evening after work, as it might be Mrs. Wong’s shift and she could help me.

All these new staff members were obviously inexperienced and rude not to say the least.

I put the item back in my bag and she came after me saying “Don’t you want to return it?” I ignored her and turned around. She raised her voice and said that if I destroy the item I would have to pay a fine to the amount of its replacement.

She must be totally out her mind. *How can she talk about replacement?* This item can’t be replaced. All violent games have been destroyed after the revolution and it was an accident this one was left out. It’s not the first time it’s happened. I didn’t have time to explain this or make sense of the whole situation. Young and inexperienced, that’s what she is.

As I walked out of the building and towards my car a woman crossed the street in front of me. She had a very young baby in the pram and while pushing it with one hand she held a hand of a young boy in the other one. The boy was throwing a small ball in the air and catching it while walking. She yelled at him “Stop that Jason! The ball will fall on the street.” The boy continued as though he didn’t hear her and the next time instead of catching the ball it fell and rolled under a car. The mother yelled again even louder this time “You see, I told you to stop that as it’s dangerous!” and she spanked him hard on his bottom.

I was astounded at the revelation in front of me. *What’s wrong today? Why is she spanking her kid? Why won’t the Leisure Centre destroy an old pre-revolution violent game?* All these questions pondering in my head, were making it hurt.

I sat on a bench a few meters away from my car and started relaxation breathing, as I needed to calm down before driving.

It worked. After 10 deep breaths I felt I could now go to work but as I came closer to my car, I noticed it was the only electrical car in the car park. The others were all petrol based and as people were driving away the fume of petrol was so obvious in the air that it made me feel a bit sick.

Ok, now something strange is going on. *Is "Candid camera" show still filmed?* It seems to me someone must be pulling a stunt or playing a bad joke.

I started noticing more and more objects around me that had a 'worn out' look and feel. Passing by my car I walked down the car park and into one of the main shopping streets. Most people had some kind of vintage fashion look. Their hairstyle and clothes reminded me of my grandparents. Now I felt out of place.

I stopped by a busy news agency as the headline caught my eye *"Facebook terror – 18 year old girl murdered by her Facebook boyfriend."*

Another headline said, *"Will the war in Korea be the start of World War III?"*

What was happening? My stomach felt in knots. *Was I in another dimension as all of this was too much for someone to set up just for me?*

Without being fully aware, I had walked out of the main street into the rear lane that led to my parents' house. I passed by the sign that indicated how far the Nobel Peace Walk trail is. I remember walking the trail at an excursion when the teacher told us that it was built 122 ago as a historical and educational project paying tribute to those people who's life work was to promote peace. At that time people who promoted peace could only dream of a world without violence.

My parents' place should be around the corner. I was definitely in a different time, as I couldn't recognize most of the houses. It was the sports oval that was most familiar as it was exactly the same except there was an old playground in the corner. My parents' house looked as though it was new. As my dad recently told me that he had to arrange fool roof renovation because the place was over 100 years old, I was shocked at the revelation my brain just made.

I have gone back 100 years into the past.

I sat on the bench close to my parents' house and felt exhausted. *What do I do know?*

How do I go back to my wife and child? The sunset was casting a warm orange glow over the street. It was the only calming image of my day.

Someone turned on the light in the living room of my parents' house. The curtains were see-through and I could see the old style furniture inside. It looked very out of place compared to my parents' furniture.

A man and a woman in their thirties were sitting on the couch and there appeared to be a small exchange of conversation between them.

By now, I had such a headache that I had to support my head with my hands but I kept my concentration focused on the events inside. The couple in the house started arguing. I couldn't hear anything but could clearly see based on their body language that it was a serious disagreement.

Then I witnessed the man slapping the woman hard across the cheek and walking out of the room. She started crying.

He soon walked out of the house and slammed the door on his way out.

I had enough. I started walking back to the library, as that was my only way out.

It was where all this started so I had to go back and find my way into my own world.

I started walking fast and then running. Before I knew it, I arrived at the front of the doors. It was very dark. The doors didn't open automatically when I stepped in front of them. The sign showed "*Opening hours 9am to 7pm.*" Was it already 7pm?

"Noooo!" I screamed. "Open the door!" There was no one to hear my plea.

I knocked on the glass door a couple of times. I felt drained and by now afraid and thus my knocking became harder and louder.

I felt angry as never before. *Who did this to me? Why? How do I go back?* I had to find a way. I saw a stone on the edge of the grassed area and without any thinking grabbed it and threw it against the door. The glass broke and an alarm started. The alarm had a familiar sound. With the familiar music I heard the recognizable sound "Danger, danger, intrusion of property. Please stay away from the building and try to calm down."

Yes I was back! These calming alarms didn't exist 100 years ago.

Two men in baby blue colored suits came out of nowhere.

Never in my life was I happier to see correction officers coming my way.

Firstly they reassured me everything will be all right and asked me to breath in 10 times calmly and explained that they would not need to use the calming pills, if I obeyed.

I conformed and told them how pleased I was to see them. One of the officers smiled at me and said “That’s good mister, come in the car with us and we will organize a session with a correction counselor so you can discuss today’s events.”

We drove to the correction station and as the relaxation music was playing, I dozed off in the car due to being emotionally depleted.

When we arrived, they woke me up and helped me out of the car.

Inside they offered me some tea and dinner, which I gladly accepted as I had eaten since breakfast. When I asked to call my wife a lady officer brought me the phone and I assured my wife I would explain everything tonight and she shouldn’t worry.

I had a long “correction talk” with the counselor. While I was having my dinner I thought long about telling the truth but deiced not to as I wasn’t sure of the consequences. If I told them I had entered a dimension where violence was a commonality they might draw a wrong conclusion and think I craved aggression. There were people out there who claimed aggression was part of human nature and rebelled against today’s society rules to maintain a non-violent world. Some of those persistent individuals have been known to be in correction centers for years before they start obeying our rules.

It was far better for me to apologize and assure it will not happen again. The only punishment I will get is the home monitoring bracelet to assure my future behavior stays within accepted limits over the next three months and I will not even have a criminal record.

So towards the end of the talk the correction counselor asked me if I had any creative pursuits and how often I practiced meditation, as these were important habits in making sure the aggressive incidents don’t get repeated. She was content with my answer on the meditation practice but said it didn’t seem I had enough creative pursuits.

“What do you think about writing?” she said. ‘Creative fiction writing has proven to calm busy peoples mind and divert from daily stress,’ she rationalized.

“Writing?” I have honestly never thought about it, but now I had a story to write. Fiction or non-fiction, it was unbelievable.