

Wild Parenting **by Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt**

I'm still working on unpacking, understanding, and integrating the information I received from Daniel Vitalis' talk in October. One bit in particular really struck me: his concept of the origin of domestication and our responsibility to become feral beings. As an example of this, he spoke about the importance of incorporating more wild edibles into our diet. That resonated with me. Jim and I have been doing a lot of research lately on foraging, especially for medicinal plants and edible mushrooms. The culmination of these activities is, ideally, the undoing of damage done by domestication.

Domestication is defined as “tameness; to overcome the wildness of.” Feral is defined as “is one that has escaped from domestication and returned, partly or wholly, to a wild state.” Most people understand these words in the context of animals, mainly pets, and Daniel expounded on this to include, among many others, our lawns, methods of Western food production, our system of government, and... each other. The idea of domestication was not new to me. I'd heard variances of it in my college philosophy courses – Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault. However, the idea of feral was new. And how these two come together in terms of parenting is profound.

I don't remember Daniel mentioning parenting, per se; but I remember listening to him and feeling something unlock in my head. It was audible, a resounding click, a turning, a creak of a door opening.

“Mom, I'm going to take a walk in the forest. I'm bringing Edgrrr with me.”

My immediate thought: AGH! No! Don't bring the damn dog! He'll get all muddy and I'll have to wash him and it'll be a big damn deal! And don't climb on anything! I don't want you covered in leaves and crap!

What I said was: “Cool. Don't wear those dress-up boots though. Wear your sneaks, please.”

As Mo was changing her shoes, our dog – a 13-pound miniature poodle – excitedly paced back and forth around her legs. His was wearing that dog smile, as we call it, and was looking up at her expectantly. Mo opened the door, and he busted through, leaping onto the porch. Mo ran out after him. I stood there staring at the door for a while, thinking about my reaction.

When I am parenting Mo, I am ideally trying to guide her on her path while not giving into my power-over desires. We chose to homeschool because it afforded something we knew she could never get in a public school setting: virtually unlimited exploration time. But I struggle with this. I struggle with the learned inclination of wanting to make another Good Citizen™. For example, she'll burst into a fit of giggles while working on her grammar and I'll find myself getting

irritated because it will seem she's lost her focus. Or she'll clean her room and do things at speeds that work for her and I'll find myself questioning her productivity. Or she'll work on a sewing project and I'll find myself getting frustrated because she's not completing the task in a way that I would deem efficient.

As an informed, enlightened parent, my responsibility should be, I believe, to refrain from my pull toward domestication. Almost more importantly, I have to work on undoing all the domestication I've been subjected to. So, I am having to find my inner wildness, to find those parts of me that want to burst out laughing, to do things ass backwards, to play in the mud without a thought to stain remover. This is challenging, to say the very least.

In my family, we're all doing this work together, communicating openly about the pitfalls, struggles, and accomplishments. We bash up against each other, each on our own course, our own path, living in our own authentic state. But we remind each other that we are operating from a place of love and always with each other's best intentions at heart.

I'm not sure where we're going to end up, but a feral family is on the horizon. Clad we may be in animal skins and eating mushrooms, but at least we'll be that much closer to the Divine.

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