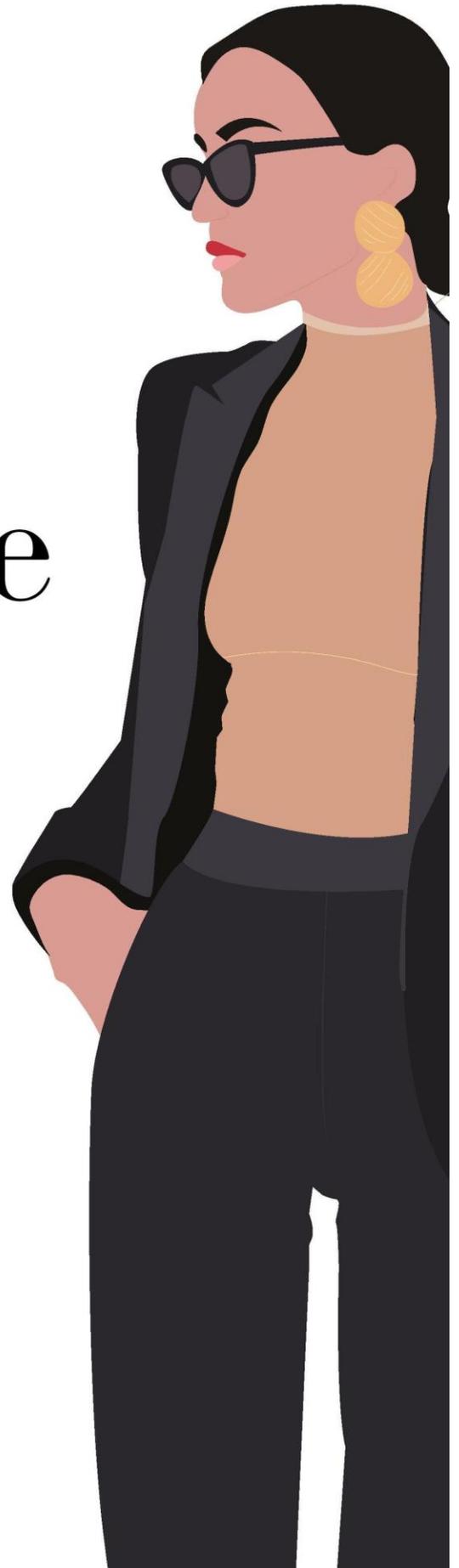


A MEMOIR : STORY ONE

Leave Me Alone

A DAUGHTER'S ARGUMENT
WITH HER MOTHER

R.K. URBAN



Copyright of this written work belongs to RK Urban.

Year of Copyright: 2018

Leave Me Alone

(A Daughter's Argument with Her Mother)

I feel uncomfortable when people try to fix me by telling me what to do. This is especially true about my religious beliefs, which includes my emotional, physical, and sexual boundaries. I was taught there is a difference between right and wrong. However, I was not taught how to make decisions for myself regarding what is right and wrong for me and my life; instead, I was taught to rely on the advice of my religious leaders. This made me uncomfortable because I did not want to rely on their advice. One of my greatest fears visited me during my early twenties while working as a nanny in France. What was that fear? I lacked the ability to make confident choices for me when I was alone and far from home.

My story:

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Liz. I am a Chinese girl in my mid-twenties. Internationally, the world doesn't use the word *girl* to describe me. I learned this while living in Europe during high school and university. More often, the world calls Chinese girls like me "young women." When I went to live in the UK for high school, I noticed how some people called me a young woman. It surprised me. Soon I was given advice by a few to tell myself "I am an intelligent and beautiful young Chinese woman who can do anything." I struggled with this. I didn't realize until a few years later how powerful this life-giving sentence is.

I am one of the fortunate Chinese students who was able to study overseas in the UK, but I rarely felt so fortunate during those years. My religious Chinese culture, which is Christian, had not prepared me for the small list of cultural differences which I was introduced to within my first year of high school. It only became more interesting (scary) as time passed.

After my second year of high school, I felt like a foreigner wherever I went. I first realized this when I visited my hometown in China for the summer, but I didn't understand was why I felt this way. Now I know. I learned two valuable lessons about this world.

First, the vast majority of parents are struggling to raise their children in this modern time. This is not a cultural concern of any country, it's global. It doesn't matter what your religious or political beliefs are. Raising children is hard work. However, our parents love us, but they show it how they are comfortable showing it. Examples of this is by spending a lot on our education and working eighty to one hundred hours a week at their jobs, which often they don't even like.

Second, most of us struggle to be understood and respected, however, learning to communicate effectively is not a natural skill most of us are born with. Instead, effective communicators are trained people. It is a learned skill. Very few people are good at it without training. We all do our best with the resources we have, but we know, intuitively, life should be so much better. When I first realized how unfair this world is, I got angry. Later, I learned how to get even. I will share with you how I get even at the end.

This story is about how I tried to confide in my mother, but how it backfired and led to an argument.

I am one of the lucky ones because I met a few people who had a profound influence on my life before I turned twenty. One of those individuals was R.K. He was first my teacher, and then my friend. He retired as a full-time teacher and works as a life-coach and author. It took me about two years to trust him. My life experience has taught me it's difficult to find people to trust, but I have learned the secrets to finding such people.

The story I will share happened a few years ago. We met about five years before my experience in France, so my relationship with R.K. had time to grow. I assumed coaching fees could get expensive, so I decided to use his invitation to “call when you need” for the right time—as a last resort.

I will never forget the moment when I called him from France. I felt threatened emotionally, physically, and sexually by the people who were supposed to be watching out for me. I was a mess. I wasn't sure what I was going to say when R.K. answered, but I knew memorizing a speech wouldn't work. When I feel emotionally connected to a specific event, giving a memorized speech has never worked well for me. Instead, I say whatever comes to my mind.

English had become my primary language in Europe, so when I heard the phone connect and R.K.'s greeting on the other line, my first sentence felt memorized, but my emotions took over and soon guided the rest of our conversation.

“I don't know how to begin, so—,” I said. He heard the panic in my voice and the fact that I was holding back tears.

“It sounds like you are calling because you are feeling distressed, perhaps frightened. Do you mind if I share a few things with you first? It might help,” he said.

“Yes. Go.”

He had tuned into my emotional state within seconds. His opening was predictable, but helpful. “I have been coaching people for over ten years, so there is nothing you can say that will surprise me. I've heard it all.” Then he gave me a brief list of common issues people ask him about. A few items on the list caught my attention: sexual pressure at school, the desire to rebel against my parents, and feeling uncomfortable in a particular place, such as a foreign country. I got the idea quickly and stopped him mid-sentence.

“Ok, you don't need to go through the list — I know it.” I felt a little rude for cutting him off, but he didn't seem to mind. “So, how much do your coaching or therapist services cost?”

He paused, then pretended to add some numbers, and answered. “For you, free.”

“Ok,” was the word I spoke, but what I wanted was to cry—in relief. I would have happily paid any amount he would have proposed. “As you know, I went to France. Well, I met up with a family that is really messed up. I mean, they are very open sexually, and they often yell at each other, especially the husband and wife. It’s very different from my Chinese culture. You know I am working in France as a nanny. Andrea, the host woman, is divorced, but her ex-husband is around a lot because he likes to visit his son. The kid acts a lot like his father. The father and son make all kinds of sexual comments at me. They say things like, ‘You have a nice butt’, and the boy even tried to sit on my face; that’s a long story, and it’s hard to describe. I know it sounds crazy, but I feel strange being here. I have never had someone talk to me this way. Now that I know what they are thinking, I sometimes feel it when they stare at me, although, sometimes, it might be my imagination. I’m too afraid to look over at them when I feel them staring at me. You know what I look like. I know guys look.”

I could have said so much more, but I stopped. Either R.K. would tell me I was overthinking it or he would tell me I wasn’t. I had made my case. I no longer felt afraid of his answer because I knew I could handle and accept whatever he said.

“Are you feeling a little better now?”

“Yes—a little,” I grunted.

“You’ve been through a lot recently. I have heard similar stories from others — they ended well. I am trying to imagine what you described, like the little boy trying to sit on your face and how uncomfortable you felt when the man said you had a ‘nice butt ’in front of his son and ex-wife. If these comments have made you feel uncomfortable, that is understandable. Good?”

“Sure.”

I wasn’t sure where he was going, but as he made comments and asked questions, my racing heart slowed. At least I had someone to talk to who seemed a little saner than me.

“Good. Allow me to gain a little more understanding of your setting. How does your mother feel about this? I am guessing you called her.”

“I did, but she told me I was overthinking it. She told me I should not be thinking such bad thoughts because as a Christian, I should see the good in people, or something like that.”

“So it was hard for you to understand her advice because you are feeling too much emotion right now. Correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Ok. Let me remind you of a rule or two I have that we discussed in the past. At any time, you can choose not to answer any question I ask. And sometimes, it’s better to just answer quietly to yourself.”

“I know.”

“Also, I do not need to know the details, especially if they are sexual. Good?”

I wanted to cry in relief. Both his tone of voice and the words he chose were calming my nerves as the seconds passed.

“Got it. I know I can stop the conversation or change the topic at any time. You are the only one who gives me that freedom. It’s weird, but it helps me be more honest with myself.”

“Ok. You are in a foreign country. If you need to, can you leave that place immediately? For example, call a friend or get a cab?”

I paused. “Umm—yes.”

“Ok. Have you recently, even in the past year or two, had an experience where you felt pressured emotionally, physically, or sexually by someone?”

I paused again. “I don’t know.” I am a beautiful young Chinese foreign student in western Europe, and I was surrounded by non-Chinese friends during high school and university, so the answer was a resounding “Yes!”

“Ok.”

Although my answer to R.K.’s question was a lie, he didn’t care. He had asked for my benefit, not his. The fact is, I had a European boyfriend while I was doing my undergraduate studies in the UK. He frequently tried to pressure me into having sex with him and became upset when I said no. The relationship shook me because he had acted as though I owed him sex. His insistence led me to break up with him. He had even told me that many of his friends were having sex, so it was expected. The day I ended our relationship, I felt better.

As the conversation continued, some of my responses were audible and some I kept to myself. I noticed how my breathing continued to slow and my scattered thoughts became more focused as the minutes passed. His questions and comments helped me to rethink the situation. However, I still wanted a straightforward answer to my earlier question regarding if I was overreacting or not, and if I could leave the place.

“So am I, overacting. Am I in danger?”

He laughed because he had expected me to ask this. Somehow, my question triggered an emotion and a thought in me, which answered the question. However, I wanted to hear him say it.

“First, I do not think you are overreacting or overthinking anything. You are a lonely young woman in France, and the host family is not aware of how their behavior is making you feel. Agree?”

“Yes.”

My confidence was growing.

“So what does that mean? Like, do you think I can just leave this crazy place?”

“You can make that choice for yourself soon.”

I exhaled, relieved again. I was rethinking who I was. He wasn't trying to fix me; he wasn't telling me what to do. Instead, he was guiding me to do it for myself. I remembered the magic sentence he had encouraged me to say years ago. "I am an intelligent, young woman who is able to make good choices." The others, like my mother, had treated me like a helpless little girl who should be told what to do.

More importantly, because he was now guiding the pace and tone of our conversation, I had just come down from my panic attack. I felt safe, so laughter mixed with tears flowed. A question I used to ask myself came back to me: "Shouldn't the world look out for girls like me and make us feel safe?" The sad answer is the world should, but it doesn't and never has. R.K. helped me to accept this.

As we continued our talk, he asked me to describe the French family in more detail. As I did, he laughed, and made comments that helped me rethink my interpretation. After this, he made a prediction regarding how Andrea, my host, would respond after I told her why I was uncomfortable.

Soon, my conversation with R.K. ended, and I was ready for my next challenge. My goal for the meeting with Andrea was to agree on how to change the tone at her house. I enjoyed the meeting with her because I learned we had both were overwhelmed. I avoided making suggestions which might make her feel guilty or angry. I avoided comments about her being a bad host or mother. Since I had judged her as being *blind* about her ex-husband's sexual comments toward me, I felt a tinge of guilt when she shared the inner battles she faces on a weekly basis on this issue. The problem was she didn't know how to change things. Somehow, because I was there to support her, she embraced it. One of the surprising outcomes was she trusted me more than her ex-husband.

I wasn't surprised R.K.'s predictions came true. We all want to be respected and safe. Because I focused on Andrea's needs, I was able to take a scary situation and change it into a positive growth experience for everyone. And yes, the sexual comments vanished from her ex-husband and son.

During my conversation with R.K., he told me I would look back and feel good about this situation. I wasn't surprised when he said this, so I'm not surprised it came true. Within months, my visit to France became a fond memory and a great learning experience.

I am sworn to secrecy on most of the details of our conversation, but even when my mom and my friends did not have the training to listen to my fears, R.K. was happy to help. He respects my parents and reminds me of how difficult their job is. I also believe our parents are jealous of us, their children. Many parents have lived through hellish times, however, their children are part of a generation which has the power to heal the past. Many parents are in much pain because they have not been taught how to heal themselves. Instead, they have lived with religious and philosophical beliefs which never brought them the healing they deserve.

When I returned to China, I had a significant argument with my mother about France. During this quarrel, she accused me of disrespecting her for not following her advice. It was painful to her because she had prayed to God about it, so when I was confused by her advice, she felt like

she had failed me. However, the yelling match ended when she admitted to me her real disappointment. She had prayed that God would make her the best mother ever, but when she realized she had missed her daughter's cry for help, it broke her heart and challenged her faith.

We both enjoyed how bonding the moment was and as a result our friendship blossomed in a way that I had only dreamt of. In the end, she gave me the biggest hug ever. She has always been and always will be my mom, but now she is a trusted friend.

"Leave Me Alone." What does this mean to me? We live in a world where people want to tell us what to do. The problem is when they are wrong, we must suffer the outcome after we accepted their advice.

I don't tell people "leave me alone" anymore. They kind of get the idea by my response to their behavior. I may say, "thank you for your advice," and walk away, or I may ask them questions about how to apply their advise. Most of the time, they begin to question their advice after I ask them more question.

Believe it or not, I had all of these experiences before I turned twenty-two.