

My Story

My perception of myself as a teacher shifted in 1997 when my husband and I were on vacation in Oregon. It was August and we had another couple of weeks before I had to be home to start getting my classroom ready for the new school year. We were on the coast only about six miles north of the California border when my husband got a call from his assistant's wife. Jeff had been taken to the hospital and my husband had to fly home immediately. I took him to the airport and prepared to start the long drive home alone.

Even though the circumstances were unfortunate, I didn't mind. I have always loved long trips alone in the car because it gives me a chance to listen to books that I never get a chance to read when I'm working. As I headed inland to catch Interstate 5, I stopped at a bookstore in Ashland, Oregon. Two tapes immediately caught my eye – for two different reasons. The first one was Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence

. It had recently become a best-seller and everyone was talking about it, but my busy schedule as a 5th grade teacher, wife, and mother left little time for reading. Then I picked up Joseph Jaworski's Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership.

I didn't even read the whole title before deciding to buy it; I just saw the word "synchronicity." I had never been particularly interested in the topic of "leadership," but I had recently become fascinated with synchronicity, those timely coincidences that seem to happen when we're least expecting them. This seemed to be one of them – so I bought the tape.

I finished listening to the two tapes somewhere below Sacramento and was absentmindedly thinking about returning to teach 5th grade. I began wondering when the 10-year-olds I would be teaching that year would become leaders in the world. It seemed to me that, in general, in our 20's we are usually in the process of "becoming" and are still finding our own direction in life. It's in the third decade of life that true leaders emerge. I thought I remembered that you have to be 35 to run for President of the United States. So then I did a little mental math. When would my kids turn 30? I suddenly realized that sometime around the

year 2020 the 5th graders I was returning home to teach would be making the decisions that could affect the future of the world. An awesome and frightening thought!

In that instant the phrase “Leadership 2020” flashed across my mind and my imagination began running wild. During the rest of the trip home my mind was active planning a program that would begin to prepare my elementary school children to be the leaders that we will all depend upon in the future. I would call it “Leadership 2020.”

When I got home I typed up an 11-page pilot program I would ask my principal about implementing in our school.

It wasn't a “leadership training” program – but rather a way to structure situations within which kids could practice true leadership skills – or as Goleman suggested, experiences where their “EQ” would serve them better than their “IQ.”

There's more to that story, but, as synchronicity would have it, my a job opened up for my husband in that same little town on the coast, and by May I had decided to retire early and move to Oregon. I was still committed to the ideas I had that day driving home, but felt that leaving the classroom would give me the opportunity to pursue my dream by starting a consulting business. I would call it “Leadership 2020: Learning Environments for the 21st Century.” I've had some marginal success with that over the years, but I've come to believe that lasting positive change must come “from the inside out.”

This book is about the sort of change that takes place slowly. It's about change that begins when a seed is planted in an environment conducive to growth, and then nurtured over time. It isn't easy at first – but somewhere in this book I hope you'll find some seeds – and perhaps some tools that you can use.