

2005 Weeklong Clinic Report by Kara Stewart, Colorado

This year, looking back at what I learned, my theme was “What I thought I knew I didn’t really know.” It’s a bit mind-blowing to realize that what you thought you truly understood you really didn’t, and that at the same time, you couldn’t know that you didn’t understand it.

Maybe it gets to Mark’s statement that we all are where we need to be right now. Looking back, I see that Eddie and I were where we needed to be. But we were ready to reach another level.

The other word that sums up my experience is “Hmmm.” As in, yes indeed, I’m finally catching on to the true meaning and feel behind some of the things I’ve been studying for years. Guess I’m not a very quick learner :-)) but that’s OK. I’ll take whatever improvement I can get.

I learned the profound difference between knowing something in my head and feeling it in my heart. Not until I FELT these things could I truly know them, if that makes sense. And the FEEL behind these things is oh, so different than the mental knowledge of them. It still shakes me up a bit.

Mark tells a story of an accomplished martial artist who seeks out the greatest martial arts master and goes to learn from him. The student has studied and absorbed and learned so much for so many years that his head and his heart—his cup—are full. When he meets the master, the master tells him he can’t teach him anything else until the student empties some of his cup. I feel that my cup fortunately had a lot of room in it because a lot of realizations came flooding in during the clinic.

Here are just a few.

“Softness”

Oh, yeah. I knew what soft was.

Or so I thought. At the weeklong clinic last year, I thought Eddie and I had found some softness and we were building on it. Now I know that we didn’t have softness at all—we were playing on the edge of softness. I thought up a name for what we’ve been working on the past year: softness. We were softer than we’d ever been, but we hadn’t hit true softness yet. This year, we found the start of it.

For example, for the first time ever, I felt Eddie’s barrel swing during a rein-back. I’d felt the barrel swing at forward gaits but not while backing up. It sounds so elementary, yet it was pretty phenomenal.

I now also have a glimmer of understanding as to how deep softness can go, and I know how far we have to go. In other words, the softness Eddie and I are feeling now must be a tiny percentage of the softness Mark and Kathleen feel with their horses. But rather than feeling overwhelmed or depressed by this, I'm excited by this notion. We can get softer and softer. As Kathleen described it, when your "10" on a scale of pressure gets to be about a 1, you start all over again. How cool is that?

"Braces"

For Eddie and me to find the first feelings of softness, it first had to start with me. I remember writing to Mark a couple years ago something about the clever realization I'd had that I had to let go of the hardness in me before I could expect Eddie to let go of his braces. At the time, I really, truly thought I had let go of hardness and braces, but this clinic showed me with absolute clarity that I had not.

I've had a chronic scapula spasm issue for several years, and I'm often tight in my upper back. There's some scoliosis there and it's likely all related, and my neck muscles get really tight, too. I lived with this daily and it's not debilitation or anything. It just is.

I really, honestly, truly didn't think I had braces. Ahem. Me? Braces? No way. After all, I don't hang or balance on the reins. I have soft hands. I follow Eddie's movement. I just carry around this tightness in my upper back but certainly I don't bring it to Eddie or my riding. Right?

Well, darned if I don't. I think it was Monday afternoon and I was riding with Kathleen. I was feeling Eddie be a little bracey and I explained what I was feeling. She asked me to let him go. I remember actually protesting for just a couple seconds...surely that won't help anything. Guess what? He went soft and relaxed! Dang! My perception of myself was that I did not brace, or pull, or have tension, but Eddie showed me with utmost clarity that indeed I do. Maybe not much, but that doesn't matter. A brace is a brace, no matter how small.

Once I wrapped my brain around the fact that I do brace, it was like I could love my braces, relax them and let them go. That week, for the first time in a long time, I didn't wake up with a sore upper back, and my neck hurt less. Hmmm.

Over the next few days, I was able to recognize sooner when our focus was leaving and could get it back quicker, and ask for softness before a brace had a chance to become full-fledged. I realized that when Eddie is worried or unsure, his answer was to brace, and my response to his unsureness or his brace was to brace. Hmmm.

My words of advice related to this is that if our horses brace or get tight, we must look first for tightness or a brace in ourselves. It very well likely is starting with us, even if—or ESPECIALLY IF—we don't think it is.

"The Power of Intent"

The words we use and the strength with which we believe them are powerful. Mark showed us through daily exercises how vital this is to horsemanship through life.

For example, here are four phrases we might think when we are trying to resist someone attempting to bend our outstretched arm at the elbow:

I can't do the unbendable arm.

I will try to do the unbendable arm.

I will do the unbendable arm.

My arm is unbendable.

There is a hierarchy of power and intent in these, and only with the last one is there true power. I knew how important it was to phrase things in the positive with Eddie but this really made it hit home.

It struck me in the huge difference between "My arm is unbendable" versus "My arm won't bend." The first is positive and powerful, and the second is negative and allows in some question.

Mark's often said how important it is to have a plan with our horses. This underscored to me the importance of also having a statement—phrased in a positive way, and with intent and focus behind it.

For the rest of the week, I kept the following phrase in my head whenever Eddie and I were doing something: "We are soft and together."

Giving my brain something to go back to, like a mantra in meditation, helped me keep my thoughts on task and not drift away from the present of Being With Eddie. Later in the week, I also used the mantra of beats (of each gait) as something to bring my mind to the present.

"Horsemanship Through Life"

The depth of Horsemanship Through Life really took on new, deeper meaning for me. Just like the bracing, I thought that my adorable little quirks and life issues were fully unrelated to my riding. I could separate them really well. Or so I thought.

During the weeklong, I saw the pure folly in this notion, too. Again, I really thought I understood the idea of Horsemanship Through Life: that who we are off the horse is the same as who we are on the horse. We can't flip a switch and be a different person with our horse, physically, mentally, or emotionally. We are who we are. All the time. No matter what we're doing.

After a session on Monday afternoon where Mark helped me with a leading issue (which I thought I'd learned and taken to heart from the year before...), we were talking. Mark said that, well, I was wishy-washy with Eddie and there were a lot of shades of gray. He encouraged me not to quit doing what I was doing as there was good in it, but I needed to firm up and be more direct. Know what I want, and know that it will be OK. "THIS is what I'm looking for, Eddie, not that." Good enough isn't good enough.

Hmmm.

Again, I thought I'd crossed that one off my list last year (very big grin). I was being much more consistent with Eddie in leading and being aware of my boundaries and having the same expectations every day. Well, I was MORE consistent but I still wasn't absolutely consistent, and if I needed to make a correction, I'd only use what I was comfortable with and sometimes not use enough to always make the point I needed to make.

This was quickly apparent when Eddie and I walked into the round pen and his thought and direction went one way while mine went the other. Eddie thought where he was headed was better than where I was headed. To me, it didn't feel like much of a pull. It wasn't like he was dragging me around. But that was enough for Mark to see that I had backslid and ask if I wanted help with this.

Since the clinic, I've been able to step back and see the wishy-washiness in myself in other aspects besides horses. Hmmm. Even leaving the clinic, when I needed to back my truck and trailer out of a tight spot, Kathleen asked if it would help for her to move her truck. Instead of just saying "Yes, that would be great," I said "yeah, well, no, I back up at home when I unhook the trailer and I should be able to back out of here, so no, that's OK, but it might make it easier. No, that's OK." GEES! I think Mark walked away from my truck with a big cartoon balloon over his head that said, "Hmmm, she hasn't quite got that lesson yet!"

After I returned from the clinic, I saw more instances of wishy-washy at work and home. Truly, I thought I was pretty forthright and straightforward in my job. Ha! What was I thinking?! I knew I was wishy-washy in my marriage, and this realization really made me take stock of the habits and roles I've developed. Well, there's no time like the present to start changing this endearing trait.

"Staying in the Moment"

Back to the round pen leading session on Monday.

Mark asked if I wanted help with this and I said yes, please. I handed Mark the lead rope and he asked Eddie to back out of his space. Eddie apparently forgot he had a reverse gear and tried all sorts of other options and got pretty dramatic for about 30 seconds. (The good news is that last year, this lesson took a couple minutes.) Then Eddie backed up and life got a whole lot better. Mark then took it one more step—toward softness. He asked Eddie to back, with softness, and it was only then that I finally, truly, saw the

difference between the inside of the horse and the outside of a horse doing something. Eddie was soft through and through. It was amazing, and lovely.

One of the huge lessons for me last year was the importance of staying in the moment, and really Being With Eddie when I'm with Eddie. It's like Buck taught Mark: fix it and move on. I have progressed a lot with this, and can see the changes for the better comparing this year with last year.

But I have to admit that for about five seconds after Mark took the lead rope, my thoughts flipped to the silly human ego-based notions of "Sheesh, I thought I'd fixed this and I haven't. Mark must think I'm a complete idiot. How could I be so dumb? He helped us so much last year and here we are again with the same issue."

Doing right by Mark is very important to me. I take this work very seriously and try to be the best student I can be. I never want to feel like I've let Mark down. As a student, I don't want to disappoint my teacher or do something stupid. And when I backslide or show I've not fully grasped a lesson, I wonder if he must get frustrated with his students, or whether he appreciates that we are at least trying and doing the best we can at that moment.... But I still can feel like a dolt when this stuff shows up.

So, like I said, for a few seconds I was in danger of flipping back to the "How stupid I am and embarrassed and mortified and angry, and how Mark must be thinking less of me" point where I would be likely to then wallow in self-pity. But I didn't! I gave myself that few seconds of mind chatter and then told myself that that was then, and I was here now and Mark could help me with this, and great! Let's get 'er done!

I was pretty happy that I was able to do that and not allow myself to get sucked into the negativity. I owned it and then moved on, and I know that was something that would have been very hard for me to do a year ago. That felt pretty good.

As a postscript to this lesson on leading and how softness comes from inside me first, after Mark's help we left the round pen and walked around the property. When I let Eddie encroach on my space, I asked him to back himself up. I also asked him to do it softly.

There was one time I remember putting my left hand on his nose and asking him to back, and I realized there was all kinds of hardness and brace in my arm, my back, my heart. Wow. I let that go and softened and Eddie was happy to do the same.

"Making Versus Helping"

Each day of the clinic we have a word to noodle on and contemplate. The word for Monday was "Help." I saw at that instant of softening my request for Eddie to back how important this was—to "help" Eddie soften, not to "make" him soften.

It's impossible to make a horse (or human) do, think, learn, or feel anything. We can be a vessel from which they can take the information if they want it, but we can't make

them do it. And if we do make our horse do something, no matter how gently, he is not doing it from the inside. He may be “light” on the outside and responding nicely to our requests, but he is not soft on the inside.

I think back to learning algebra. My dad would help me with my homework and I would get so frustrated. It just didn't sink into my brain. I would get cranky and plead for him to just give me the answer. Nope, he'd start again and explain things another way. Finally, after months of agony, I remember finally understanding algebra. The light bulb really did go on and I “understood” it. I was no longer just going through the motions of trying to find the right answer. I understood it. During this process, my dad couldn't MAKE me understand algebra, but he was a quiet resource and a vessel from which I could take the knowledge as I was ready for it.

As it relates to horses, I thought I had this firmly in my head of helping rather than making. Actually, I did have it in my head, but I didn't have it in my heart. I thought I was helping Eddie, but in truth there was a small, but hard, element of making him learn something.

Now, the notion of HELP has finally permeated my heart. I consciously think “How can I help Eddie do this” and the difference is pretty profound.

“Energy—Redirecting, Going with, Embracing”

This was another phrase I'd been carrying around in my head and that I thought I knew. Har, har again!

Mark has a black belt in Aikido...the way of harmony. So he brings a lot of Aikido into his horsemanship, and man, is it powerful.

One of the group exercises we did involved touching palms with our partner and finding space or holes in their energy and redirecting it. The outward “goal” of the exercise was to try to touch our partner's nose or head with our hand, and they would try to do the same. I did this exercise with the lone guy in our group, so maybe there was a different feel to this than had I done it with a woman. But that feel really made me realize something.

We put our palms together and we started moving our hands around in the air trying to feel a hole. My partner increased the pressure and I noticed that instead of going with it and redirecting it, my first inclination was to brace against it. Hmmm. This was very subtle but it sure was there. Extra energy = brace for me. Not going with the energy but trying to stop it and go against it.

Hmmm.

We were fortunate to have a few of Mark's cattle at the clinic and we were able to work with them for three mornings. Now, Eddie had never seen cows that close so he was at first pretty worried about them.

Once he figured out they weren't going to hurt him, Eddie turned into the Overachiever Cow Pony. Nothing the cattle did was fast enough or good enough for Eddie. He was quite aggressive with them: ears "pinned" to his head, snaking his neck, even threatening to kick with a hind leg. Talk about energy.

The first day, since this was so new to both of us, I wasn't really sure what to do. I tried to keep Eddie from getting too aggressive with the cattle and not hurt them, and I ended up pulling on him—a lot more than I wanted to. I was trying to stop all this energy. Needless to say, it wasn't working.

The next day, Mark shared how Eddie had made an impression on the cattle and we could work them further away (essentially, Eddie's energy field was pretty big!). That helped, and we had a little quieter work. Overnight, I had also realized that Eddie's energy wasn't going to be stopped or squelched. No way. And actually, I didn't want to do that.

I wanted to embrace what he was offering to me and redirect it, so the next day I tried to help Eddie redirect his energy. Instead of going in a straight line behind or alongside the cattle, we'd sidepass or do alternating turns on the forehand and haunches. By the third day, while we weren't as soft as I'd like, it was way better and I wasn't holding him back or trying to stop the energy but was better at redirecting it.

I also realized that, as with softness, I can't force the redirecting of energy. I can only redirect energy through softness, not through tension, power, or hardness. That only results in a brace. Oh, it is so circular.

Working with the cattle also made me realize that deep, deep down there was a fear of Eddie's energy in me. He is a well-bred Arab. Mostly he's a pretty laid-back sort of fellow, but he does have a throttle and sometimes he uses it—full bore. I had been trying to put the brakes on this throttle instead of redirecting the energy and coasting to slow down. I now feel this change in both of us and it's producing an even bigger feeling of partnership.

"Footfall and Timing and Rhythm"

I'd ordered Mark's footfall and timing DVD during the winter and had watched it the first time in February. I remember it being pretty complex and all the elements of knowing when a particular foot was leaving the ground didn't stick with me.

Knowing this was something I wanted to explore during the weeklong clinic, I watched it a couple more times in May and the final time I took notes. Now, things were sinking in and I played with this whenever I rode. It is my goal to not have to think about footfall but rather build it into my feeling subconscious so I always know what foot is where, much like we automatically know if we are walking, trotting or cantering without thinking about it. Or, feeling which diagonal or lead we are on rather than looking.

We worked on some of this with Mark, and he reinforced that I knew more than I was giving myself credit for. Basically, trust myself that I could figure it out. I appreciated that. It is a symptom I have seen in my horsemanship and my life, and I have the goal of getting beyond this.

Mark, being a musician, has talked a lot about the importance of rhythm in riding. Yeah, I know that. I've got that. I try to ride with a song in my head of a particular rhythm. But I really didn't understand rhythm until this clinic.

Mark mentioned in one of our meetings that horses are very rhythmic creatures, and they probably don't think of walk, trot, canter as we do: words. Instead, they probably feel the tempo and rhythm of a gait. They four-beat along, then pick up the pace and flow into two-beat, and then flow up into three-beat, and back down again. They don't Walk. Trot. Canter.

Hmmm.

He encouraged us to think of this when we are riding and especially in transitions. I started thinking of beats and shifting my body from four beats to two beats when I wanted to transition from walk to trot. Dang, if we didn't have some of the smoothest, softest transitions ever! Transitioning from a four beat to a three beat, and also cueing when Eddie's outside hind leg was coming off the ground, gave us some of the most lovely walk-canter transitions we've ever had. I was smiling big and Eddie was happy at the softness of it all.

A week after the clinic, we went for a drive to the mountains to go hiking. It was a cold and rainy day, and we ended up turning around and driving home. But the outing was not a waste as I was practicing my riding the entire way.

On the drive up and back, we listened to a bunch of Alan Parsons music. He's pretty much a genius in my mind who combines very inventive rhythms with melodies. So in another effort of living my horsemanship while I'm not around Eddie, I used the rhythm of the music to mentally four beat, two beat, and three beat. I'd "post" and change "diagonals" in my head every 5 beats on the upbeat. I'd roll up to a three beat and then do a flying change after 10 beats (even though I've never done a flying change on a horse). and back down. I focused on my circle of energy and center always going up and forward rather than back and down. It was a huge mental workout. After an hour of this, I had to "rest" and just enjoy the scenery.

The cool thing is that now I'm feeling the correct movement in the three beat and I don't have to think so hard about changing the direction of my energy and center.

"Circles of Energy"

Yet another phrase that I thought I understood was Mark's three circles of energy. There's one in the hindquarters, flowing from the feet up forward over the hindquarters and through the horse's middle and back down. There's one in the forequarters, flowing

from the feet to the horse's midsection and forward through the neck and back down. The third circle intersects those two circles and is located where the rider sits. Ideally, all these circles of energy flow together and mesh like cogs to carry the power and energy forward and together.

Yeah, I get it. I do that.

Well, on day two or three of the clinic, we were working on some transitions, esp. happy, soft cantering. Walk and trot were pretty nice and I felt my center and circle of energy was meshing well with Eddie's. At the canter, things didn't feel so cohesive. Kathleen pointed out that my center and energy were going backwards at the canter, not forward like Eddie's.

Hmmm.

She suggested changing my thought and my center from starting backward and down to going up and forward. The way a lot of us have been taught to canter is to scoop our seat in the saddle at the third beat of the canter. I thought I'd fixed that because my dressage trainer had noticed that bad habit and helped me think "lift" at the third beat instead of "sit" or "scoop."

This in itself had helped us a lot with better canters, but now I grasped that my energy and center were still going backward and clashing with Eddie's forward circles of energy.

So, the next time we cantered I tried this. Wow! The instant I changed my center and circle of energy to go forward instead of back, I felt Eddie's back raise and he went softer.

It was more a mind shift rather than a body shift, and I don't imagine it looks different to an onlooker in a big way—except that it looks SO much more together, in time, in synch with the horse.

For more proof that this works, on the last afternoon of the clinic, Eddie and I were tired. Most everyone was tired. But it was very important to me to end on a good note. We'd been working in the arena with Mark on some lateral work—a big example of something we can do on the outside but not yet on the inside with softness. I must get pretty braced at this work because Eddie's neck comes up and gets hard and braced. So we worked on lateral work but I felt us getting less and less soft and more and more braced. Ick. This was NOT how I wanted to end our week.

I have to admit I was getting a little frustrated. The softness we'd found during the week was so cool and I was afraid it was fleeting. I didn't want to lose the feel. So, instead of relaxing and going with what Eddie was giving me, I started to try to force the softness to return. Sheesh, like that was going to work. I now knew better, so it was interesting that I was choosing to drift back to familiar patterns, even though I knew these familiar patterns would take me the wrong direction.

Feeling my anxiety rise, and not wanting to continue down that road, I thought it best to head out to the field and relax. Kathleen was just about to come into the arena so I asked if I might ride with her and Ashcroft out in the field.

Thankfully she agreed and we headed out. I explained how Eddie and I didn't feel very soft and asked if it was harder to be soft when we are tired. She said it was harder. Not impossible, but harder because going softly means engaging the abs and that's more difficult when we're tired.

I said I wanted to get back some of the softness of previous days and try a canter transition both directions, and then call it a day. Eddie and I headed out and started trotting. I felt a brace and let go of tension in me and we both got softer. Things were feeling a whole lot better than they were in the arena. Then I asked for a canter, and as soon as Eddie picked it up I shifted my mind so my center and circle of energy went forward instead of backward.

Immediately, and I'm not exaggerating here, Eddie rounded up, got soft, and we had THE BEST canter we've EVER had in seven years of being together. I was grinning, Eddie was very happy, and just as I thought "this is beautiful; let's end on this great note," Kathleen laughed and called out, "And what's wrong with THAT canter??!!!"

Eddie and I slowed to a walk and went over to Kathleen and Ashcroft. Happy, content, at peace, and very happy with each other.

Thanks, Kathleen. Thanks, Mark. I am so blessed to have you as teachers. Thank you.

"Carrying On"

And now, feeling the things I felt at the clinic and feeling how my understanding has deepened, I pause and have to chuckle. Now I realize that what I think I know today I may not really know.... Or perhaps it's better stated that I know I'm only peeling away the top layers of the onion and I'm a long way from the core. A year from now, I'll likely look back and laugh at how much I thought I understood but really didn't. But at least now I know that I don't understand all I think I do, if that makes any sense.

After last year's clinic, I taped a sticky note to my computer at work and fridge at home with three things:

1. Soft
2. In the Moment
3. Breathe

When I got back home from this year's clinic, I added three more:

1. Center
2. Intent
3. Be Direct

Words of the Week

Help

—it is truly coming from me with good intent? Or is it a homework assignment? And true help is given with zero expectation of anything in return.

Words and Intent

—what do different words look like and feel like? What is the intent behind the words? The difference between feel and intent? We must believe, have great intent and focus, or outside influences will easily and quickly sever the connection we thought we had with our horse and the focus we thought we had in our mind.

Awareness

—be aware of all that's around us

Soft and Centered

—bring this to everything

Fun

—after all, isn't this why we have horses?

Other thoughts of the week

Our horses don't do things "to us". They just do things. For instance, they don't "buck us off." Rather, they buck and we fall off. They're just responding to something in the moment and it's up to us to figure where it's coming from. It's so vital to take the personal nature out of things, take out the ego.

A horse in a round pen who changes tempo and speed is thinking. Mark doesn't look so much for an ear or an eye, rather that the horse is thinking. If the horse falls into a pattern and a constant speed, that is an indication that the horse has checked out.

Many of us get really wrapped up and invested in our horse's issues. We get invested in the notion that our horse is somehow not doing well. Our horse may be pretty much fine, but we stay stuck in the past. Say we have a rescued horse who came to us with physical or mental problems. We've worked to help the horse past those issues, and the horse IS past those issues, but we keep bringing them up as identifiers and stay stuck with a story that reflected the past, not the present. Begin believing that our horse is fine

and continue on into the future. We can put a lot of energy into fixing things that aren't really there. I know I've done this out of what I thought was consideration for Eddie and thought I was protecting him from something, but it turns out I was protecting me from something. A lot of issues that horses have are due to the owner....

Really listen. When having a conversation with another, listen and don't interrupt. Notice how many people do interrupt. Interesting. And don't interrupt our horses, either. There are times when our horse needs to say something but we have such a mental dialogue going on we don't hear them. I find that I'm able to tune into Eddie much better once I stopped talking to him all the time.

Bring awareness to every day. Pick one thing during the day and bring full awareness to it. To open this can of mushrooms, what muscles do I use? What parts of my body get involved? Fingers, wrist, elbow, shoulder, neck? Where is my breathing?

Also strive to take a mental "PAUSE" moment before doing something instead of rushing headlong into the task. Now I find myself pausing before starting a task instead of beginning the chattering dialogue in my head about needing to do this and this and call this person, and find that file, etc.

I see now that I have had doubt that things would go well. I have been worried. I have thought negative thoughts. I didn't think I had these things, but I did! And now I FEEL inside that I've let those doubts and worries go. I don't need them any more. They were a sort of armor against something. Things will work out fine. And if they don't work out as I thought, I'll just pick up from there and carry on.

There's a huge difference between knowing something in my head and having snippets of it in my heart versus truly knowing something to my core. Once it's in my heart and I have felt the difference, I feel the solidness of it. It feels so very different than just having the notion in my head. Before this clinic, I thought I knew some things about this path of horsemanship through life. But I didn't really know them. So how do we know we know? I think through feel. It FEELS a lot different when I really know something and own it than when it's just a notion in my brain.

Trust—that I will figure out what is needed and that it will work. And trust that Eddie is right there trying, too.

Horses can go through the motions of doing something without thinking—and we can (and do) too! Slow down. Think. Make everything relevant and important in the now. I noticed this with brushing and stroking Eddie. I was brushing him but my mind was on something completely unrelated. I recognized that and brought my thought and focus back to the act of brushing—watching the brush slide across the hair, feeling what that felt like, etc. Eddie took a big breath and let it out, glad that I was fully with him.

It's more important for US to have a purpose than our horse. If the work we're doing isn't important to us, it certainly won't be important to our horse. We need a reason to do things so it's relevant. Even arena work can be made relevant. It's up to us to do that.

Chicken and eagle story. A farmer found an egg out in the field one day, so he brought it home and put it under one of his laying hens. The egg hatched a few days later and out came a big, funny looking chicken. The chick learned to hunt and peck and scratch at the ground along with the other chicks. As he grew older, he started getting white feathers on his head and grew much bigger than his chicken siblings. He was an eagle. One day, he saw an eagle soaring overhead, riding the warm updrafts. Wow, he thought. That must be really cool to be able to do that. His mother chicken scoffed at him and told him that he was a chicken. Chickens hunt and peck and scratch at the ground. That's what chickens do. Well, ok, he thought and went back to pecking. He died a few years later, never knowing that he had the ability to soar if he'd just tried. We might be an eagle among chickens. So believe. And try.

I have made mistakes and backslid and have made a less-than-straight arch of improvement. But there has been improvement. I'm human and I will make mistakes. Rather than getting embarrassed by them, own them and learn from them and move on.