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Weaving a Woman's Life: Spiritual Lessons from the Loom

Paula Chaffee Scardamalia
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If one tries hard enough, it's possible to find a metaphor for the human condition in nearly any activity; and while others may don T-shirts proclaiming that "Baseball (or Camping or Golf) Is Life," for the author, it is the craft of weaving that goes far beyond the interplay of yarn and loom. In the warp and weft of threads crossing and recrossing in the deliberate construction of patterns and designs, a creative endeavor can metamorphose into a devotional journey. The life lessons are there, she asserts, if one only knows how and where to look for them.

Scardamalia began looking nearly twenty years ago, about the same time she learned how to weave. After trying everything from feminist ideology to Buddhist theology, Scardamalia found she still yearned for a singular perspective that would satisfy her desire for spiritual enlightenment and guide her to a fully integrated life. The path she needed to follow began right at her fingertips.

As a teacher, writer, editor (*The Crafts Business Magazine* and *Faerie Magazine*), and professional weaver whose works appear in the Smithsonian and private collections worldwide, Scardamalia attributes her successful management of such obliquely different yet equally demanding lifestyles to the lessons she learned as a weaver. Brimming with candid disclosure and zestful anecdotes, all told with alluring conviction, Scardamalia's advice rings clear and true.

Whether experiencing anxiety driving on interstates, anguish trying on clothes, delight in writing her marriage vows, or devastation following her mother's death, Scardamalia approaches life by transferring the rhythm and balance of her art into other realms of daily existence. Such lessons proved invaluable on the hectic morning when her two-year-old son insisted on dressing himself. There was no time to indulge his independence, yet Scardamalia knew she "had to sit on my hands and bite my tongue while he pulled [his shirt] on over his head, then twisted and struggled to get his arms in the sleeves." She consciously chose to ignore the ticking clock, and found that in "acting from a place of clarity, I not only wove a weft of beautiful mothering into my weaving that morning … I added a warp of love and beauty" to her son's.

Accompanied by efficient behavior-modification exercises, Scardamalia's thirteen life lessons illuminate these deft correlations between the art of weaving and the act of living. As wives, mothers, daughters, friends, homemakers, and businesspersons, women are challenged as "super-multitaskers … to give our full attention to just one thing we want to do for ourselves."

For Scardamalia, that "one thing" was weaving, but no matter what activity ignites one's passion—be it running, reading, football, or fishing—the key to fulfillment, acceptance, and enjoyment, she avows, is to learn to recognize the physical, spiritual, and emotional tools that will enable one to weave a life of beauty and serenity. (August 18, 2009)

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