

# The Prepared Mind

Monday, 14 June 2004

Serendipity and chance.  
Conscious choice and opportunity.  
Taken.  
Or missed.

"Serendipity" according to Meriam-Webster means "the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for" and according to Your dictionary.com means the "(1) The faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident.; (2) The fact or occurrence of such discoveries.; (3) An instance of making such a discovery."

Yes, well... I do suppose that is one way of describing things that are found but that couldn't be defined or articulated "beforehand".

But... another way is described by Michael Schrage's in a recent article, Prepared Minds Favor Chance. He wrote...

Mere serendipity? That's the lazy rationale of least resistance. The better explanation simultaneously upgrades and inverts Pasteur's famous aphorism "Chance favors the prepared mind." Indeed it does. But now more than ever, "The prepared mind favors chance."

Oh but yes. Much more satisfying to me as an "explanation". And, I realize this morning, it is exactly this distinction that moves me to struggle and search in my own being around what the best thing to do really is. And I do believe that it was exactly this stirring that brought forth Kiteman. I will explain.

Last week -- on Thursday -- at my son's high school there was a food fight. It started in the cafeteria. It moved to the hallways. And it continued its way outside until it finally stopped there with the arrival of many police. Teachers scooped up the guilty. The others were sent home. The mess was cleaned up presumably by the adults in preparation for "regular" school the next day.

On speaking to my son about this it turns out that the food fight had been planned. The word got around that it would happen. Kids -- like my son -- were prepared and wore more expendible clothing. Teachers were stationed at the various points throughout the cafeteria. The food fight happened. It moved while being pushed out. It ended.

My son said that both "inside" and "outside" he threw food that was thrown at him onwards. He said that he had changed t-shirts in preparation. He said that the caught kids -- he was not one of them -- were suspended for the rest of the year (2 days of classes) and had to write their exams at a different time later in the summer.

I struggled with this. All of this.

The next morning he and I had another huge discussion about not stopping something that was about to happen, about being complicitous by continuing something even if he didn't start it, about the waste of energy and effort and money and

food on so many counts, about letting a few "friends" take the fall for the collective, about my own not knowing how to approach dealing with all of this.

So, last week -- on Friday afternoon -- I received a voice message from the Director of my son's grade level saying that my son had gone to see him at lunch time, that he had admitted that he too had thrown stuff during the fight, that he apologized for this. He then went on to say that after spending half an hour arguing with the school Director, he had no choice but to announce to my son that he too was now suspended for the rest of the school year and would write his exams later on.

Oh.

I then struggled with my own influence in this. Was I right? Was I wrong? What ought I to have done? What ought I to do? And certainly, always, what about my son in all of this?

So I guess I sat down with the images of my mobile -- hanging by a thread, wanting to fly, flying, riding the wind -- and out came "Kiteman".

And, now, this morning, I am still caught in the thinking that what my son did was a complete missed opportunity on the school's part. My son's friends (and my son's father) think that my son was an idiot for his admission. My son knows that I think he did the right thing, that I am proud of his courage, his assumption of himself. But his sleep must not be as peaceful as it could be. And, always, what will his reaction be next time?

I continue to imagine what would have happened had his school recognized the opportunity here. Yes there were the original actions (the food fight) at question but there was also the "what he did with this afterwards" part. And, apparently, the minds preparing our children's minds had no room for dealing with this "chance" in the current system. They could have said something like "Okay. Guilty but courageous and right in the assumption of this. We will make an example of you, rewarding your courage and assumption of this but still make you responsible for the consequences of your original actions as well. You will clean up the lunch room for the next two days." I don't know. Something, anything more appropriate than this extremely shortsighted "clarity". Through their "clear rules" they have mixed everything up and taken away the opportunity for a different kind of "clarity" that most of these 13 and 14 year-olds would certainly have "gotten".

Very too bad.

Yes prepared minds favour chance... in order to ultimately make better and different choices.

Are our schools not in the business of preparing minds?