

The words beneath the words

It's one of those evenings. I'm sitting on my porch listening to the quiet of the night. Suburbia in springtime. There's a light wind in the trees. There's the repetitive sound of an evening bird that hasn't finished its song. It's a perfect spring evening. It's a perfect quiet evening. I make a cup of coffee. I shut the lights in the house and light a candle. I watch it flicker and enjoy the evening as it settles into a peaceful silence, the candle a symbol of all that is calm.

But then I really listen. I listen to the sounds beneath the sounds.

I hear a neighbor's lawn mower, someone probably finishing up in the last vestige of light. I hear a dog bark a few times, then stop. Then start again. I hear a small airplane flying to the east. I hear a man say, "Honey?" I hear the sound of cars moving fast down Highway 5, maybe someone coming home late from work, maybe a pizza delivery or maybe a couple going out to dinner or a date. I hear an air conditioner unit outside my neighbor's house turn on. I hear a back door slam. I hear a garage door opening. I hear the thump of someone shooting hoops.

The night I thought was so quiet is not really so quiet. It's all in how I listen.

It's no different talking to my kids. I think back to some tougher times when my daughter would say things were going great in school. Her grades were pretty good. Even her teachers said in conferences she was doing well, passing her grades across the table so I could see proof. But if I had listened more carefully to my daughter and listened more carefully to the words beneath her words, I would have heard the other story. I would have heard that she felt things were rotten, that she was desperately unhappy, and maybe I could have heard her story sooner. It might have been easier for her sooner.



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prairie
rustlings

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It's no different talking to my own parents. I remember my father talking to me about how I was raising my kids. It was a dozen years ago and I can still remember that it was about the excessive snacks in my pantry that my elementary school-age kids could help themselves to. I rebuffed his words. I told him not to tell me how to parent. I heard the words of criticism but I never heard the real message – and that was that he loved and cared about us. He cared enough to risk saying something that might not be welcome.

I think it can be tough to hear the words beneath the words. Sometimes it's easier to think it's a quiet evening. But it's good to remember that the candle will still flicker in the dark even if it's noisy.

Jody Russell is an Eden Prairie Web designer, photographer and writer. Her columns appear regularly in the *Eden Prairie News*.