

THE BEACON

What Thumper's Mother Told Him

In the Disney movie *Bambi*, little bunny Thumper notices the newborn fawn is a little weak in the knees and says, "Kinda wobbly, isn't he?" His mother rebukes him and coaches him to repeat the maxim:

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

Bet you heard that one more than once. You're probably pretty good at applying it, too, in your interactions with other folks.

We all subscribe, in theory, to the golden rule, which is to treat others the way we want them to treat us. Why don't we treat *ourselves* that way?

In a word, *fear*. We are deeply afraid of not measuring up, of not being good enough, of feeling foolish, helpless, defeated – or worse. We can't tolerate this fear, so we berate ourselves viciously – like smashing your thumb with a hammer to cure your headache. Maybe we think that if we listen to The Lecture enough times, we'll eventually get it, wise up, quit doing stupid things.

Dr. Dan Baker, author of *What Happy People Know* (©2003 Rodale Books) says that we often tell "horror stories" instead of "healthy stories" about our lives. We even manage to cloak the good things in our lives with a helpless, hopeless veneer. Yes, we have a job – but it's precarious. We have children, but they're *teenagers*, for heaven's sake. Everything was better back when . . . sort of like the southern gentlemen whose friend remarked on how beautiful the moon looked that night in 1885. "Ah yes," he says wistfully. "But you should have seen it *before* the War."

Baker says that we need to tell *ourselves* healthy stories about our lives. When my daughter accidentally hit her friend's garage door (what *is* it with us and garage doors?) with her car, she delayed telling us. She was certain we would blow up, ground her, apprentice her to a silversmith – I don't know what all else. She told herself it would be terrible, and her horror story made her defensive. How much better if she'd been able to tell herself that we'd survived catastrophes before and would get through this together, still loving each other! Baker says, "It's especially important to tell yourself healthy stories when a crisis strikes. That's when you're going to feel like telling yourself horror stories, but if you stop yourself, you can face the crisis with a clear head and with the energy you need to get past it."