

Mother's Day, Martin & Me

"If you want to understand any woman you must first ask about her mother and listen carefully. Stories about food show a strong connection. Wistful silences demonstrate unfinished business. The more a daughter knows the details of her mother's life – without flinching or whining – the stronger the daughter." Anita Diamont

Mothering, all parenting – is not a benign undertaking. We give as good as we got. Well mothered children grow up to be parents who can offer the same. For less well-mothered children, even in spite of our best efforts, our woundedness becomes inter-generational, having rendered us less than perfect parents.

English paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott addressed this in outlining the concept of [good enough mother](#). He was writing 50+ years ago, so it's fair to read 'mother' as 'parent'.

[Dr Jennifer Kunst](#) describes Winnicott's 'good enough mother' as:

... sincerely preoccupied with being a mother. She pays attention to her baby. She provides a holding environment. She offers both physical and emotional care. She provides security. When she fails, she tries again. She weathers painful feelings. She makes sacrifices. Winnicott's good enough mother is not so much a goddess; she is a gardener. She tends her baby with love, patience, effort, and care.

And in a TED Talk, [Why good leaders make you feel safe](#), the author Simon Sinek compares good leaders to good parents.

"The closest analogy I can give to what a great leader is, is like being a parent...What makes a great parent? We want to

give our child opportunities, education, discipline them when necessary, all so that they can grow up and achieve more than we could for ourselves.

Great leaders want exactly the same thing. They want to provide their people opportunities, education and discipline when necessary, build their self confidence, give them the opportunity to try and fail, all so that they can achieve more than we could ever imagine for ourselves."

I'd like to pitch the idea of "good enough leadership".

This week's coverage of death of Martin McGuinness – Northern Ireland's former Deputy First Minister, IRA Commander, and one of the main architects of the [Good Friday Agreement](#) – reminded me of the Diamont quote.

Praised by many who knew and empathised with *the details of his life*, vilified by others – his legacy was and will be debated for decades. I'm choosing to see it her way:

"The more a [people] know the details of [a leader's] life – without flinching or whining – the stronger the [people]."

Those who saw him as a great leader, experienced great leadership and benefited. Those who saw him as a good enough leader, also benefited.

And I'd like to believe that the impact of "good enough parenting" and "good enough leadership" is not what it says about us – but rather how it may benefit the next generation.

Because even those who have vilified him – having suffered horribly as a result of his paramilitary leadership, are now experiencing the benefit of a generation of Northern Irish Nationalists reared to be unwilling to take up arms.

Rationalisation? Perhaps – but on this Mothering Sunday, 2017,

I'd like to believe that 'good enough' really is good enough because for all our missteps, we shared a commitment to providing:

*... opportunities, education, discipline... when necessary, **all so that they can grow up and achieve more than we could for ourselves.***