

- THE WHIPPING GIRL -

“Sarah”, I said, “you need to pick up the tempo, you’re too slow!”

She looked at me quizzically, “I’m watching the clock and I’m right on. What am I doing wrong?” We’d been in the exercise room for 30 minutes. She was wringing wet with sweat and was in the middle of her third set of 80 med-ball sit-ups.

We’d been working 45 seconds of work, 15 seconds to change stations and recover. She was killing herself with work.

I smiled at her, and mouthed “later”.

Ten minutes later, “Sarah, get your butt down!” She was in the middle of our crawling exercise, and was letter perfect, straight line from back of head down the spine, with her butt lower than her shoulders as she crawled around the gym outline of the basketball court. She was on her second complete round trip.

After practice, I pulled her aside. A sixteen year old girl, with the maturity of a grown woman, Sarah wanted to understand why I was “on her” when she was doing everything right and knew it. And, she didn’t ask me. I just knew she wanted to know. She does everything I ask of her.

“Sarah, know hwy I’m after you?”

A headshake of “no”.

“Because I am talking to the others through you. If I yelled ‘Brian’ every time he screwed up, he’d be in tears. If I said “Mary, work faster” every time she slowed down, she couldn’t stand it either. None of them can. So I talk to them, through talking to you.”

“It used to be called a “whipping boy” and had a negative connotation.

To me, it’s the highest compliment I can pay you. You know, and I know, that you are doing things very well. On the rare occasions I need to correct you truly, I promise to do it in private. And you know what? Each one of these swimmers also know you are doing everything perfectly. So if I am hollering at you, they realize they are not measuring up to the standard of you, and they can absorb the criticism, without having to take it personally.

They see how hard you work, they respect that, and they respect you and what you do. You’re my designated “criticism taker” so I can talk to all of them through talking to you. And its gong to be that way all through your Senior year, just like it was Daniel the Whipping Boy this year, remember?”

“So, you see, what I mean to say is “Congratulations, you’re the Whipping Girl for the next year! Is that OK with you?”

A big smile came over that lovely, sweating face, and she nodded yes.

Role model. Better than being homecoming queen.

The Whipping Girl.

Cool. She was smiling as she left the exercise room and headed for the pool. 364 days to go.