

On the Other Hand

Julie Hryniewicz-Hache -- Wednesday, December 20, 2006, 8:07AM



Interesting that I would find it so difficult to write this article because I want to say Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Season's Greetings, but I certainly don't want to offend anyone. I too, was very sheltered growing up, and didn't even know that Christmas wasn't universal, until my paternal grandmother became a member of the Jehovah's Witness faith.

The only thing that really changed for me was that my grandfather would buy and bring the presents instead and I saw new magazines around the house. To this day, her church has lovingly supported her through every illness and hardship, long after my sweet grandfather has died, and I am so very grateful for their continuous support.

Despite my attempt to be politically correct in my greetings, I must comment on my appreciation and joy for this time of year. Although I was having a bit of trouble getting into the holiday spirit, I am now in full swing. Christmas concerts, holiday eye candy, and the joy of running into old friends and acquaintances while out and about, make my heart sing. I even sang Christmas classics for at least an hour while driving the sloppy highway.

I guess I have learned to incorporate the holiday spirit all year long and, at times, I can be pathetically annoying. I seem to be quite repulsive to those individuals who enjoy their misery; however, I press on anyways. When you feel joy and peace in your heart, it has no choice but to overflow. This also actually works the other way around. When my energy, spirit, and enthusiasm for life were depleted and drained, the only thing overflowing was tears - and not the happy kind.

Somehow, the holidays now are bitter sweet for me. I am so blessed, grateful, and appreciative for my loved ones, my cozy home, and the opportunity to share food, gifts, hugs, and did I mention - food? On the other hand, I am so sensitive to those individuals who feel lonely, sad, or down in their mind. I want to make them feel happy, I want to bring

them some hope, but I realize that this is not my place.

I can certainly provide inspirational information and education, but I can't make people feel better about their circumstances. Only they can do that for themselves. Only they can decide that they deserve more for their life. Only they can make new choices. Only they can accept that they are worthy of love, comfort, and joy in their lives. But how?

Watching a movie last night, at the theatre, my sister and I balled our eyes out over this huge group of homeless people that would line up, day after day, for the opportunity to sleep in one of the forty available beds each night and participate in an uplifting church service. When the beds were full, the line dissipated in an air of gloom, sadness, and desperation.

I began to ask myself the difference between those people who climb out of their hole of despair and those who don't - how is it that two people with the same set of circumstances could create completely different results? The only thing that is different, is the way they think.

This summer I decided to talk with a homeless man that I would see sleeping, day after day, on a park bench in front of a large church. Bringing him some recycled clothing, two bottles of water, and a self-help book, as a peace offering, I wanted to find out what made him do such a thing. We ended up talking for over an hour before I convinced him to let me take him to the local men's shelter. His story was fascinating...

After suffering a stroke, his life and marriage ended up falling apart. His five hundred and something dollar disability cheque is usually spent on alcohol, he is functionally illiterate, and he has only limited use of one side of his body. His heart aches for his grown son, who he hasn't seen in years and he is too embarrassed, by his situation, to even try to find him. He also indicated that he would be a hypocrite to step inside of the very church where he made his home, for months on end.

This lost soul believed that he was unworthy, didn't care if he died, and figured that no one would care either. His worth was tied into to his ability to provide, and he was no longer able to do this, when he lost his job to disability. Our beliefs then lead to our actions - we do the things that are consistent with how we feel about ourselves. How else could someone make their home on a bench?

I realized that it was going to take much more than one night in a shelter to revamp his belief system, and I was so disappointed that he wouldn't be able to read, "The Power of Positive Thinking" classic that I left in the

backpack for him. His only wish was that one day he would get to see his son again, when he was in a better place in his life. I worried that he wouldn't be able to change until he accepted his own value as a person.

Although I saw him once again on that bench, I have no idea where he lives out his days now. With winter and unbearable elements upon us, I can only hope that he is somewhere safe and warm. Enlisting anyone who could spare a moment or two, this past summer, I believed that if enough people could send him positive thoughts and energy that he would decide to heed some of my encouraging words and utilize the support systems that are available to him. I believe that everyone deserves a warm bed, a full belly, and someone to care about them.

If your holiday season is blanketed with love, food, happiness, warmth, and joy, may you be filled with extreme gratitude for all of your blessings. If you are lonely, struggling, sad, or disheartened by this time of year, may you know that you are not forgotten. You also have the ability within yourself to reach out to someone who may be even lonelier than you, and if nothing else, send your positive thoughts and compassion into the universe.

You are more powerful than you think. You can decide that it is time to live again. You can find that one thing to be grateful for this season and cling to that with all your strength. Your thoughts, your mind, your internal dialogue have the magic to set you on a new course. Close your eyes and imagine your perfect life, in detail - then take action, one step at a time. Listen to your heart, pay attention to the signs, and never, ever give up.

You don't have to have money to give a gift to someone else; you can give of yourself. Give a listening ear. Give a hug. Give a smile. Give a compliment. Give a helping hand. Give of your time. Give a blessing. Give encouragement. Give forgiveness. If you are holding a grudge, let it go. If you are punishing yourself, make a truce. If you haven't spoken to someone in years, say sorry - even if you didn't do anything wrong. If you were to die tomorrow, what do you have left to do? Living from the place of pure gratitude for every minute you have, will move you to miracles. May your life be blessed this beautiful season and always because you deserve it...

"A man's feeling of good-will towards others is the strongest magnet for drawing good-will towards himself." Lord Chesterfield