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A Kindly Word Does Wonders

by  
Tom Holbrook

I hope you folks who read this column regularly will allow me to come at you from a different tack today. I would like to get a little serious about situations around us that bear attention from all of us.

Judy and I were shopping in our local grocery store today and came across an individual in the milk section who impressed me to write this today. I didn't get his name but I gave him my card and encouraged him to contact me with his e-mail so we could stay in touch in the future. My attention was drawn to him because he was in one of those motorized shopping carts with the basket up front. He was half in and half out of his cart trying to get a quart of milk high on the top shelf. He was having difficulty and I asked if I could assist him. He told me what he needed and I effortlessly reached in and retrieved the milk for him. He was grateful for my help and as he was thanking me he began to weep.

Judy immediately put her arms around his shoulders and hugged him to console him. He explained that he had suffered from a stroke and was sorry for his intrusion into our shopping routine. We tried to convince him that it was a pleasure to meet him and to help him in any way we could and asked if there was anything else we could do for him. He said no but he appreciated us stopping and taking the time to talk with him.

He told us he and his wife had lived in The Villages for 5 years and said they had been fortunate to have lived in many places, liking them all. Judy asked him if he was having a more than normal bad day. He nodded and, through his tears, began to tell us how he and his wife, who suffered a stroke several years ago herself, used to bake banana nut bread to present to newcomers who moved into the neighborhood but since their strokes he and his wife couldn't do that anymore and haven't had many of their neighbors drop in to see how they were doing, or ask if there was something with which they could use some help. He feels that he and his wife have been forgotten by those around them.

As I looked into his eyes, now moist with the residue of his tears, I suddenly saw myself sitting in his place and tried to imagine just what I would be feeling in the same situation. Embarrassment at my slurred speech and immobility...Frustration at my inability to complete a simple task such as retrieving a jug of milk from a shelf... Anger at the store for not putting items on lower shelves so that people in my situation could reach them, or anger at myself for having to accept help from strangers to do those things I had done all my life...Futility in knowing my prognosis is that I will

more than likely remain in this hobbled state and have to fight daily battles just to accomplish those things I once took for granted, or Sadness knowing that to the majority of those around me I was no longer a viable person and therefore did not warrant the attention and courtesies normally given to those who walk tall and straight?

I know not in which Village neighborhood this gentle man lives but someone reading this article today might. I encourage everyone to mentally go through your neighborhood and if you find any who are in need of assistance in any way, or whom you haven't been by to visit for awhile... why not drop in on them today. Carry them a home cooked meal... a hot, freshly baked pie... or just a friendly word to let them know you care for them and are there for them if they need you. Many times all they want is someone with which to share their thoughts. Everyone needs a good listener.

Who knows just how much you will change the lives of those around you in a positive way and put hope back into the hearts of those who've given up hope?

"The value of compassion cannot be over-emphasized. Anyone can criticize. It takes a true believer to be compassionate. No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know no one cares or understands."

--Arthur H. Stainback

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