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Disinhibited Thoughts #26

Here's an odd little notion that occurred to me one day – “by God, this disorder BETTER be life-long, or I'm going to be mighty annoyed!” (??!) I think that requires some explanation...

A person is born with certain differences. Because the world expects certain things of certain people at certain stages of development which may not 'jive' well with these differences, in various ways this person is disadvantaged. She eventually learns to rise above the disadvantage – not by actually smiting the differences mind you, but by enlisting them instead. In this way, her chosen self-definition then begins to rely on those very differences – what once plagued her is transformed into the source of her success. I once heard it said that “no one's ever gotten anywhere by building on their weaknesses”. While I would agree, I suppose I would want to temper this thought with an addendum: don't knee-jerk into assuming that a difference is automatically a weakness either.

This notion is hardly original. Dr. Temple Grandin, famed and accomplished animal scientist who also just happens to have autism, stresses this point herself. She advises adults to find each autistic child's individual strength and cultivate it into an occupation. That strength you find and the child's difference may just be one and the same. Dr. Grandin herself is a case in point – it was the very sensory sensitivities borne of her diagnosis that fostered her many brilliant insights into reducing stress and suffering in livestock around the world. Sun Tzu's Art of War tells us, “Keep your friends close, and your enemies even closer”: this applies just as well in the brain as it did on Sun Tzu's battlefield. Even Spiderman describes his superpowers as “my blessing...my curse”.

In my case, akin to the starving artist notion, the angst that my differences provoked has been a valuable commodity. The unrest I felt over my impulsivity in action and emotion, my inflexibility at times, and my unusual movements and noises fostered insights within my chosen field, and in the end opened rather than closed doors for me. It caused me to become preoccupied with things I'd have rather not thought about; the passion in my writings and presentations is borne of that mental wrestling. And so whether I lose my differences, or simply come to comfortable terms with them, the end-result would be the same. I've lost something valuable. Who are you, after 'who you are' is gone? What would happen to a “Disinhibited Thoughts” column if the thoughts suddenly found inhibition? How would you explain battle-scars, hard-won in a battle of differences, when those very differences desert you with no overt trace of why or how you've become the person you are? You'd be expected to pass for normal then – close Pandora's Box and pretend it all never happened. That sounds so invalidating to me – I would want to yell, “HEY! I STRUGGLED! We might look the same now, but we started from very different places – don't judge me!”

Do I want to become adept at running a lemonade stand, only to have my supply of lemons cut off just as I find myself amid ambitious plans to expand the franchise? No thanks. As Captain James T. Kirk once said, “I don't want my pain taken away, I need my pain”! Keep those lemons coming, please.

Until next time, my friends!
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