

New Eyes

Martha Chapter # 7, Midvale

May 14, 2008

We've all heard the phrase – “The only difference between stumbling blocks and stepping stones is the way you use them.” Part of the process of success requires growing new eyes, or in other words, getting a new outlook on life. It means taking a look at the past, letting go, forgiving the hurts or injustices that serve no purpose other than to get in the way of living life to the fullest. “Growing new eyes” means discovering what is really important in life. It means re-framing your goals and seeing them in a different light. Sometimes, a particular event in our life helps us to see the world differently. That event could be an injury, an illness, a death.

I'd like to share two stories that demonstrate how three people started seeing life through new eyes because of very amazing incidents.

I met David, his grandmother and his father – a Rabbi – when I was in high school. The family was from Poland. In his village in Poland, the Rabbi had a habit of taking long walks in the countryside. He was known for being warm, loving and compassionate, and always greeted everyone – Jew and non-Jew alike. There is a Talmudic law that says **you** should always try to greet people first. Every morning the Rabbi would pass Herr Mueller working in his farm fields and he would boom out in a hearty voice “Good Morning Herr Mueller.” At first Herr Mueller didn't respond. Later on, Herr Mueller started tipping his hat, and giving a slight nod. Then he added a smile, and after a couple of years he responded with “Good Morning Herr Rabbi.” Relations between Jews and Gentiles were not particularly good in the village, and friendships were very rare. Neither man expected a friendship to develop, but both were convinced of the others sincerity.

This all stopped when the Nazis came. The Rabbi and his family, along with all the residents of the village, were shipped off and transferred from one concentration camp to another. The Rabbi's family quickly lost contact with each other. When the Rabbi disembarked at Auschwitz, he feared it was his final destination. He was ordered to join the selection line. He could see the Commandant's baton swing left signifying certain death – swing right which brought time, and possible survival. What kind of man was this Commandant who could easily send thousands of people a day to their deaths? When his turn was called, despite his fear, the Rabbi looked up and looked boldly towards the face of the Commandant. At that moment, the Commandant turned to glance at him – and their eyes locked.

The Rabbi approached the Commandant and said quietly, “Good Morning, Herr Mueller!” Herr Mueller's eyes were cold, they twitched for a second. “Good Morning, Herr Rabbi”, he answered quietly. And then he swung his baton forward “Richt!” He shouted – and gave the Rabbi a barely noticeable nod. “Right” – To Life!!!

At the end of the war, all that was left of the entire family of Aunts, Uncles, cousins was the Rabbi's youngest child – my friend David – who had been an infant when the village was evacuated. He survived because he was taken out of the first concentration camp by a cook who had bought bread from the Rabbi's wife. She smuggled David out in a basket of bread, and raised him as her own. After the war she was able to re-unite David with his father. The Grandmother had also survived; however, she had been a medical guinea pig. The scars were evident on her body – she

was confined to a wheelchair. She never spoke. The family emigrated to Hamilton, Ontario where I met them. The Rabbi truly was the gentlest, kindest, most compassionate man I have ever known. He, his life, his responses – taught me to believe that the deed we may choose to do may be bad – but **we** are not bad because we are all made in God’s image. He showed me what forgiveness does to help you – and how to look at something negative with new eyes.

The other story sounds like a classic mystery with all the elements: a grieving widow; a miss identified body; a key that fits the wrong door; and a happy ending as the husband and wife, having each learned the other is dead, vow never again to take each other for granted.

This is also a true story of a couple in Houston – Jose and Herlinda.

About 5 pm one evening, as was Jose’s habit, he left his house to go to a nearby outdoors jogging track. He said goodbye to Herlinda and took off in his 1998 burgundy Chevy truck.

About an hour later, Herlinda was engrossed in a basketball All-Star game when the door bell rang. At the door stood a stone faced constable. The first thought was that something had happened to their son – maybe an auto accident. The constable said, “What is your husband’s name?” and then “Does he have a red truck?”

Herlinda answered both questions. “I’m sorry ma’am, your husband has suffered a heart attack. His condition is grave and he’s been rushed to the hospital.” Herlinda, being Catholic, called her family priest to meet her at the hospital. She then drove like crazy to get to Memorial Hospital, where she was taken into a consultation room and told she was too late – Jose had died.

The constable escorted Herlinda to a small room where she identified the body. Then she signed the death certificate, and returned to the waiting room. She asked the constable to make a few calls to family and friends. With 15 – 20 minutes, family started gathering to console Herlinda. About an hour later, in walked a relative that no one expected: JOSE himself.

Herlinda started screaming “You’re alive, you’re alive!! They told me you were dead....” Jose said, “I’m ok – I was worried about you.”

Jose had rushed to the hospital after someone had told him Herlinda had had a heart attack.

How did all this scome about? Elementary, my dear Watson.

While Jose was jogging, another runner had collapsed with an apparent heart attack. Paramedics and the constable were called – but they could find no ID on the man. The only clue was a set of GM keys which the constable tried in the doors of the GM vehicles in the parking lots. I don’t know what the odds are, but the keys opened the wrong GM vehicle. A license check led the constable to Jose’s house.

And the mis-identified body?

Herlinda was obviously in a frantic state of mind when they told her Jose was dead. When they asked her to identify the body- there was tape on his eyes and mouth. She couldn’t tell if there was a small mustache. He had the same type of jogging shoes, the same color of jogging shorts as her husband. He had a little radio – the same kind of belt. He looked Mexican.

Meanwhile, Jose had returned home to find the house deserted. The phone rang. It was Herlinda’s boss who had received a message from the hospital. She said “Jose – you’re alive! Oh, my God – don’t tell me it was Herlinda — I thought they said Mr. – they must have said Mrs.”

Jose rushed to the hospital thinking Herlinda had had a heart attack. When he rushed in to the emergency room, he asked for Herlinda, and then he, too, was ushered into the small consultation waiting room. He expected the worst.

After the reunion, the constable returned to the jogging track, where he found a woman looking for her husband John. Once again, he had to break the bad news, and take a wife to the hospital to identify a body.

Jose and Herlinda have made some changes. They each thought they'd lost each other. They no longer take each other for granted.

And they also made some practical changes. They always look closely at what the other is wearing – the little details – the color of the trim, etc (not all black jogging shorts are the same). They each have something personal on their key chains, and Jose always has ID when he jogs.

Many of us 'sleep walk' through life. Sometimes we need a 'jolt' to wake us up from apathy. This includes taking the people we love and need in our lives for granted. When such a jolt does occur, we begin to look at every aspect of our lives – and each other – with new eyes.

There are times when we feel powerless to take control of the important aspects in our lives. These are the times when we must use chutzpah to force the growth of new eyes. It takes chutzpah to purposely turn a negative situation in to a positive one, and to take control again. It takes chutzpah to learn from failure.

What are the lessons learned and the gifts received when we've had that life event jolt? When we have the chutzpah to turn a failure into a learning and a giving experience, we are forcing the growth of new eyes.

I'd like to leave you with these

Ten Things to Keep in Mind

Your presence is a present to the world;

Count your blessings, not your troubles;

Decisions are too important to leave to chance;

Nothing wastes more energy than worrying;

Try not to take life too seriously;

Friendship is a wise investment;

Life's treasures are people working together;

Do ordinary things in an extraordinary way;

Make time to reflect and wish upon a star;

Take the days just one at a time.