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A LAW OF LIFE

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Matthew 7:1-2

Ever since I was a little girl I can remember my parents trying to instill values in me which they believed were important. I was too young then to know the importance of what they were doing. However, now I am much older and more experienced and I see the benefits of what they have done. I believe myself to be a much better person, kinder more honest and less judgmental due to their teachings. One law of life, which was instilled into me as a child, was not to judge others.

For as long as I can remember my father exhibited this law of life to a great extent. He was a warden at a minimum security prison. He never judged the inmates. He treated them with respect and kindness. He believed that there was good in everyone and that the inmates had the potential to one day return and become productive citizens in society. In his interactions, he would often turn a negative situation into a positive one. Instead of focusing on the person's faults, he would emphasize their positive attributes and encourage them to set short, attainable goals. In return he received respect from both the inmates and co-workers.

Further evidence of his tendency to follow this law of life occurred when I was a preteen. While in town we happened upon a released inmate who was now on parole in our local community. My father was having, what I thought, the longest conversation with him as I was fidgeting by his side. After the person left, I questioned as to why he would stop and talk to someone who looked so intimidating, with long unkempt hair, lots of muscle, and visible tattoos. This was one of my many teachings on not to judge others. My father took me for a hot chocolate and patiently explained that not everyone was as fortunate as I to be raised in a middle class family with prosocial values and not to be lacking any of life's necessities. Without revealing the specific details of this “scary person”, I will call Tom, he recounted that he was making terrific progress in the community, despite the negative odds of his history and background. Superficially I had judged him because he looked “different”. My father sternly cautioned me to not judge others so hastily. For the first time in his life Tom had a job and was not

stealing or selling drugs to make an easy buck. For the first time in his life Tom had a family he could call his own. For the first time in his life Tom could look a police officer in the eye and not run for his freedom. Despite working for near minimum wage, Tom was proud to collect his paycheck every week and be able to feed his family by honest means. Indeed he had chosen the wrong path earlier in life, but had now made progress towards living a prosocial life and needed positive reinforcement not disparaging comments. My father asked me how I now felt about my judgmental comments. I looked at him sheepishly. I do not think at that time I understood the true impact of his teaching.

At sixteen I witnessed my protector, my father battle a deadly disease. He never displayed self pity or anger. He maintained a brave front for everyone, keeping his fears and worries away from his loved ones. As I witnessed the illness progressing and raging out of control, my carefree life was slipping away. My world became filled with anger and fear. My safe cocoon was ripped away and I was exposed to a world that was foreign to me. I made decisions at that time, for which others may have judged me harshly. Little did they know what raged inside me. When I returned home however, my father welcomed me with tears and open arms. Never did he judge my actions, he accepted, supported and encouraged me. It is said that it is human nature to judge the sins of others harshly while being blind to our own sins. Who are we to judge others not knowing what has taken them to where they are today, be it poverty, violence, misfortune or circumstance.

During my father's funeral I learned so much about the man I am proud to call Dad. An abundance of letters and notes arrived that espoused his wonderful attributes and the deeds he had done unselfishly for others. More importantly, I was astonished by the degree of impact he had on so many lives. Amidst my grief it became apparent that he did not judge others because of their past or what they had done, but gave them the challenge and opportunity to change their lives. I also found out that he took a lot of chances with people that others did not believe in and because of his trust they gave him the respect he certainly deserved.

I would never have expected such a tragedy as the death of a parent to come into my life. Life as I knew it was completely shattered, never to be as it was again. One can never really know how much they have been affected by an individual until he/she is gone, such as it was with my father. There is nothing so final as death. I seek comfort that even my darkest of days he will be with me because I am an extension of him, I am his daughter. His teachings will travel with me on my journey to adulthood. Of significance, he taught me how to interact with others, no matter the social status. Everyone has the potential to be a good person, one just needs to reach out and find it.